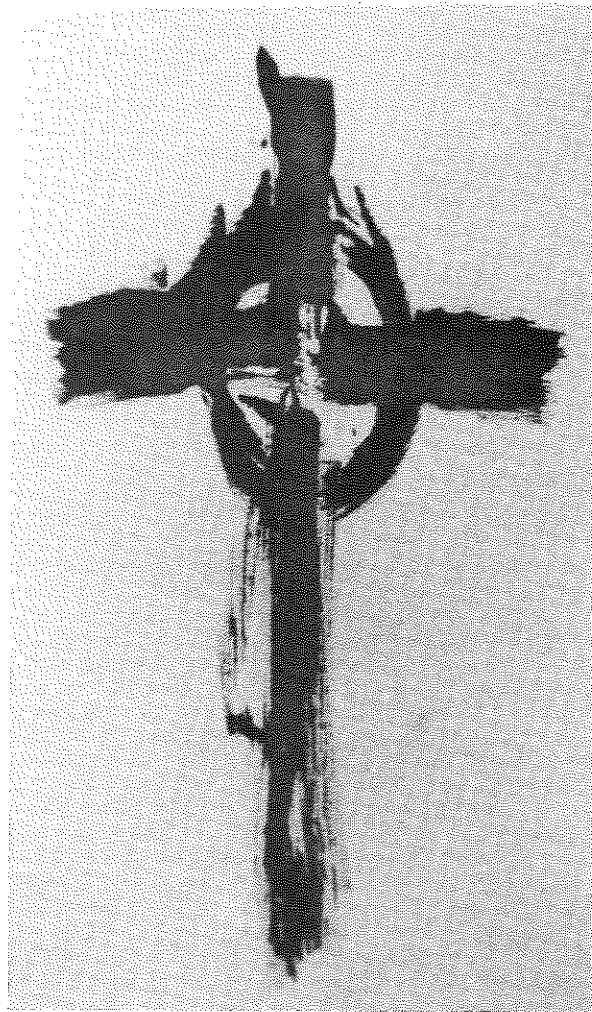


■ ■ KATALLAGETE

er. Bar.
K37



FALL, 1987



The drawings reproduced throughout this issue are by Father Thomas Merton from collections of his friends and from the Thomas Merton Studies Center at Bellarmine College, Kentucky. Explaining them Father Merton wrote: *These abstractions - one might almost call them graffiti rather than calligraphies - are simple signs and ciphers of energy, acts or movements intended to be propitious. Their "meaning" is not to be sought on the level of convention or of concept. These are not conventional signs as are words, numbers, hieroglyphs, or symbols. They could not be assigned a reference by advance agreement because it has been their nature to appear on paper without previous agreement. On the contrary, the only "agreements" which they represent were momentary and unique, free, undetermined and inconclusive. They came to life when they did in the form of reconciliations, as expressions of unique and unconscious harmonies appropriate to their own moment though not confined to it. But they do not register a past and personal experience, nor attempt to indicate playfully the passage of a special kind of artist, like footsteps in the snow. It is not important whether anyone passed here, because these signs are not sufficiently accounted for as records of "events." However, the seeing of them may open up a way to obscure reconciliations and agreements that are not arbitrary - or even*

(Drawings and text © Merton Legacy Trust. Used by Permission.)

to new, intimate histories.

In a world cluttered and programmed with an infinity of practical signs and consequential digits referring to business, law, government and war, one who makes such nondescript marks as these is conscious of a special vocation to be inconsequent, to be outside the sequence and to remain firmly alien to the program. In effect these writings are decidedly hopeful in their own way in so far as they stand outside all processes of production, marketing, consumption and destruction, which does not however mean that they cannot be bought. Nevertheless it is clear that these are not legal marks. Nor are they illegal marks, since as far as law is concerned they are perfectly inconsequent. It is this and this alone which gives them a Christian character (Galatians 5), since they obviously do not fit into any familiar setting of religious symbolism, liturgical or otherwise. But one must perhaps ask himself whether it has not now become timely for a Christian who makes a sign or a mark of some sort to feel free about it, and not consider himself rigidly predetermined to a system of glyphs that have a long cultural standing and are fully consequential, even to the point of seeming entirely relevant in the world of business, law, government and war.



Front Cover: *Gemarker Kirche, Barmen, built 1880-1890, the meeting place of the Synod that passed the theological declaration, May 29-31, 1934. The Church was destroyed in an air raid March 30, 1943.*

Above: *The Church was restored in May 1955.*

Photographs courtesy of Kirchenkreis Archiv, Wuppertal- Barmen.

Page 4 below: *The final draft of the theological declaration was probably typed by Pastor Hans Asmussen, May 29, 1934 and signed by Hans Asmussen, Karl Barth, Joachim Beckmann, Eduard Putz, and Harmannus Obendiek. (Cf. Arthur C. Cochrane, The Churches Confession Under Hitler [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962], p. 178.) The reproduction is courtesy of Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen, Landes-kirchliches Archiv, Bielefeld. The English translation of the Declaration (p. 6 below) is by Professor Cochrane, Ibid., pp. 238-242.*

Fall 1987

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NOTICE

Beginning with Vol. 8, no. 1, *Katallagete* changed to three numbers per volume. Thus, Vol. 8 holds no. 1, no. 2, no. 3; Vol. 9 holds no. 1, no. 2, no. 3. Volume 10 (this issue) because of its length, is a complete volume (nos. 1, 2 and 3). This is another signal to subscribers, libraries, and subscription services that *Katallagete* is an occasional, not a quarterly, publication.

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Handgegriffene Erklärung zur gemeinsamen Synode des St. Michaels
~~Lesung des Vorschlages des theologischen Ausschusses für~~
~~den Kirchenrat der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche~~

Die Deutsche Evangelische Kirche ist nach den Eingangsworten ihrer Verfassung vom 11. Juni 1933 ein Bund der aus der Reformation erwachsenen, gleichberechtigt nebeneinanderstehenden Bekenntniskirchen. Die theologische Voraussetzung der Vereinigung dieser Kirchen ist in Art. 1 und Art. 2, 1 der von der Reichsregierung am 14. Juli 1933 anerkannten Verfassung der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche angegeben:

Art. 1: Die unantastbare Grundlage der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche ist das Evangelium von Jesus Christus, wie es uns in der Heiligen Schrift bezeugt und in den Bekenntnissen der Reformation neu ans Licht getreten ist. Hierdurch werden die Vollmachten, deren die Kirche für ihre Sendung bedarf, bestimmt und begrenzt.

Art. 2, 1: Die Deutsche Evangelische Kirche gliedert sich in Kirchen (Landeskirchen).

Wir, die zur Bekenntnissynode der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche vereinigten Vertreter lutherischer, reformierter und unitarier Kirchen, freier Synoden, Kirchentage und Gemeindekreise erklären, dass wir gemeinsam auf dem Boden der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche als eines Bundes der deutschen Bekenntniskirchen stehen. Uns fügt dabei zusammen das Bekenntnis zu dem einen Herrn der einen, heiligen, allgemeinen, apostolischen Kirche.

Wir erklären vor der Öffentlichkeit aller evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands, dass die Gemeinsamkeit dieses Bekenntnisses und damit auch die Einheit der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche aufs schwerste gefährdet ist. Sie ist bedroht durch die in dem ersten Jahr des Bestehens der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche mehr und mehr sichtbar gewordene Lehr- und Handlungsweise der herrschenden Kirchenpartei der Deutschen Christen und des von ihr getragenen Kirchenregimentes. Diese Bedrohung besteht darin, dass die theologische Voraussetzung, in der die Deutsche Evangelische Kirche vereinigt ist, sowohl seitens der Führer und Sprecher der Deutschen Christen, als auch seitens des Kirchenregimentes dauernd und Grundsätzlich durch fremde Voraussetzungen durchkreuzt und unwirksam gemacht wird. Bei deren Geltung hört die Kirche nach allen bei uns in Kraft stehenden Bekenntnissen auf, Kirche zu sein. Bei deren Geltung wird also auch die Deutsche Evangelische Kirche als Bund der Bekenntniskirchen innerlich unmöglich.

Gemeinsam dürfen und müssen wir als Glieder lutherischer, reformierter und unitarier Kirchen heute in dieser Sache reden. Gerade weil wir unseren verschiedenen Bekenntnissen treu sein und bleiben wollen, dürfen wir nicht schweigen, da wir glauben, dass uns in einer Zeit gemeinsamer Not und Anfechtung ein gemeinsames Wort in den Mund gelegt ist. Wir befehlen es Gott, was dies für das Verhältnis der Bekenntniskirchen untereinander bedeuten mag.

Wir bekennen uns angesichts der die Kirche verwüstenden und damit auch die Einheit der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche sprengenden Irrtümer der Deutschen Christen und der gegenwärtigen Reichskirchenregierung zu folgenden evangelischen Wahrheiten:

- 1) "Ich bin der Weg und die Wahrheit und das Leben; niemand kommt zum Vater denn durch mich." (Joh. 14, 6)
"Wahrlich, wahrlich ich sage euch: Wer nicht zur Tür hineingeht in den Schafstall, sondern steigt anderswo hinein, der ist ein Dieb und ein Mörder. Ich bin die Tür; so jemand durch mich ein-
geht, der wird selig werden." (Joh. 10, 1-9)
Jesus Christus, wie er uns in der heiligen Schrift bezeugt wird, ist das eine Wort Gottes, das wir zu hören, dem wir im Leben und im Sterben zu vertrauen und zu gehorchen haben.
Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als könne und müsse als Quelle ihrer Verkündigung ausser und neben diesem einen Worte Gottes auch noch andere Ereignisse und Mächte, Gestalten und Wahrheiten als Gottes Offenbarung anerkennen.

- 2) "Jesus Christus ist uns gemacht von Gott zur Weisheit und zur Gerechtigkeit und zur Heiligung und zur Erlösung." (1. Kor. 1, 30)
Wie Jesus Christus Gottes Zuspruch der Vorgebung aller unserer Sünden ist, so und mit gleichem Ernst ist er auch Gottes kräftiger Anspruch auf unser ganzes Leben; durch ihn widerfährt uns frohe Befreiung aus den gottlosen Bindungen dieser Welt zu freiem, dankbarem Dienst an seinen Geschöpfen.

Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als gäbe es Bereiche unseres Lebens, in denen wir nicht Jesus Christus, sondern anderen Herren zu eigen wären, in denen wir nicht der Rechtfertigung und Heiligung durch ihn bedürften.

- 3) "Lasset uns aber rechtschaffen sein in der Liebe und wachsen in allen Stücken an dem, der das Haupt ist, Christus, von welchem aus der ganze Leib zusammengefügt ist." (Eph. 4, 15-16)
Die christliche Kirche ist die Gemeinde von Sündern, in der Jesus Christus in Wort und Sakrament durch den Heiligen Geist als der Herr gegenwärtig handelt. Sie hat mit ihrem Glauben wie mit ihrem Gehorsam, mit ihrer Botschaft wie mit ihrer Ordnung mitten in der Welt der Sünde als die Kirche der begnadigten Sünder zu bezeugen. Dass sie allein sein Eigentum ist, allein von seinem Trost und von seiner Weisung in Erwartung seiner Erscheinung lebt und leben möchte.

Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als dürfe die Kirche die Gestalt ihrer Botschaft und ihrer Ordnung ihrem Belieben oder dem Wechsel der jeweils herrschenden weltanschaulichen und politischen Ueberzeugungen überlassen.

- 4) "Ihr wisst, dass die weltlichen Fürsten herrschen und die Oberherren haben Gewalt. So soll es nicht sein unter euch; sondern so jemand will unter euch gewaltig sein, der sei euer Diener." (Matth. 20, 25-26)
Die verschiedenen Ämter in der Kirche begründen keine Herrschaft der einen über die anderen, sondern die Ausübung des der ganzen Gemeinde anvertrauten und befohlenen Dienstes.
Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als könne und dürfe sich die Kirche abseits von diesem Dienst besondere, mit Herrschaftsbefugnissen ausgestattete Führer geben oder geben lassen.

- 5) "Fürchtet Gott, ehret den König." (1. Petr. 2, 17).

Die Schrift sagt uns, daß der Staat nach göttlicher Anordnung die Aufgabe hat, in der noch nicht gelösten Welt, in der auch die Kirche steht, nach dem Maß menschlicher Einsicht und menschlichen Vermögens unter Androhung und Ausübung von Gewalt für Recht und Frieden zu sorgen. Die Kirche anerkennt in Dank und Ehrfurcht gegen Gott die Wohltat dieser seiner Anordnung. Sie erinnert an Gottes Reich, an Gottes Gerechtigkeit und Gerechtigkeits und damit an die Verantwortung der Regierenden und Regierten. Sie vertraut und gehorcht der Kraft des Wortes, durch das Gott alle Dinge trägt.

Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als solle und könne der Staat über seinen besonderen Auftrag hinaus die einzige und totale Ordnung menschlichen Lebens werden und also auch die Bestimmung der Kirche erfüllen.

Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als solle und könne sich die Kirche über ihren besonderen Auftrag hinaus staatliche Art, staatliche Aufgaben und staatliche Würde aneignen und damit selbst zu einem Organ des Staates werden.

- 6.) "Siehe, ich bin bei euch alle Tage, bis an der Welt Ende." (Matth. 28, 20).

"Gottes Wort ist nicht gebunden." (2. Tim. 2, 9).

Der Auftrag der Kirche, in welchem ihre Freiheit gründet, besteht darin, an Christi Statt und also im Dienst seines eigenen Wortes und Werkes durch Predigt und Sakrament die Botschaft von der freien Gnade Gottes auszurichten an alles Volk.

Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als könne die Kirche in menschlicher Selbstherrlichkeit das Wort und Werk des Herrn in den Dienst irgendwelcher eigenmächtig gewählter Wünsche, Zwecke und Pläne stellen.

Die Bekenntnis-Synode der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche erklärt, dass sie in der Anerkennung dieser Wahrheiten und in der Verwerfung dieser Irrtümer die unumgängliche theologische Grundlage der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche als eines Bundes der Bekenntniskirchen sieht. Sie fordert alle, die sich ihrer Erklärung anschließen können, auf, bei ihren kirchenpolitischen Entscheidungen dieser theologischen Erkenntnisse eingedenk zu sein. Sie bittet alle, die es angeht, in der Einheit des Glaubens, der Liebe und der Hoffnung zurückzukehren.

Vorbum Dei manet in aeternum.

Zur St. Michaels Synode

Amunke, Barth, Beckmann, Puh, Obendorf

Theological Declaration Concerning the Present Situation of the German Evangelical Church (Barmen, Gemarker Kirche, May 29-31, 1934)

According to the opening words of its constitution of July 11, 1933, the German Evangelical Church is a federation of Confessional Churches that grew out of the Reformation and that enjoy equal rights. The theological basis for the unification of these Churches is laid down in Article 1 and Article 2(1) of the constitution of the German Evangelical Church that was recognized by the Reich Government on July 14, 1933:

Article 1. The inviolable foundation of the German Evangelical Church is the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it is attested for us in Holy Scripture and brought to light again in the Confessions of the Reformation. The full powers that the Church needs for its mission are hereby determined and limited.

Article 2 (1). The German Evangelical Church is divided into member Churches (*Landeskirchen*).

We, the representatives of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches, of free synods, Church assemblies, and parish organizations united in the Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church, declare that we stand together on the ground of the German Evangelical Church as a federation of German Confessional Churches. We are bound together by the confession of the one Lord of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

We publicly declare before all evangelical Churches in Germany that what they hold in common in this Confession is grievously imperiled, and with it the unity of the German Evangelical Church. It is threatened by the teaching methods and actions of the ruling Church party of the "German Christians" and of the Church administration carried on by them. These have become more and more apparent during the first year of the existence of the German Evangelical Church. This threat consists in the fact that the theological basis, in which the German Evangelical Church is united, has been continually and systematically thwarted and rendered ineffective by alien principles, on the part of the leaders and spokesmen of the "German Christians" as well as on the part of the Church administration. When these principles are held to be valid, then, according to all the Confessions in force among us, the Church ceases to be the Church, and the German Evangelical Church, as a federation of Confessional Churches, becomes intrinsically impossible.

As members of Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches we may and must speak with one voice in this matter today.

Precisely because we want to be and to remain faithful to our various Confessions, we may not keep silent, since we believe that we have been given a common message to utter in a time of common need and temptation. We commend to God what this may mean for the interrelations of the Confessional Churches.

In view of the errors of the "German Christians" of the present Reich Church government which are devastating the Church and are also thereby breaking up the unity of the German Evangelical Church, we confess the following evangelical truths:

1. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." (John 14:6.) "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.... I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved." (John 10:1, 9.)

Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation.

2. "Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption." (I Corinthians 1:30.)

As Jesus Christ is God's assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so in the same way and with the same seriousness he is also God's mighty claim upon our whole life. Through him befalls us a joyful deliverance from the godless fetters of this world for a free, grateful service to his creatures.

We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords — areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.

3. "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body [is] joined and knit together." (Ephesians 4:15-16.)

The Christian Church is the congregation of the brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and sacrament through the Holy Spirit. As the Church of pardoned sinners, it has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely his property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions.

4. "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant." (Matthew 20:25-26.)

The various offices in the Church do not establish a domination of some over the others; on the contrary, they are for the exercise of the ministry entrusted to and enjoined upon the whole congregation.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church, apart from this ministry, could and were permitted to give to itself, or allow to be given to it, special leaders vested with ruling powers.

5. "Fear God. Honor the emperor." (I Peter 2:17.)

Scripture tells us that, in the as yet unredeemed world in which the Church also exists, the State has by divine appointment the task of providing for justice and peace. [It fulfills this task] by means of the threat and exercise of force, according to the measure of human judgment and human ability. The Church acknowledges the benefit of this divine appointment in gratitude and reverence before him. It calls to mind the Kingdom of God, God's commandment and righteousness, and thereby the responsibility both of rulers and of the ruled. It trusts and obeys the power of the Word by which God upholds all things.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the State, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the Church's vocation as well.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church, over and beyond its special commission, should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the State, thus itself becoming an organ of the State.

6. "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:20.)

"The word of God is not fettered." (II Timothy 2:9.)

The Church's commission, upon which its freedom is founded, consists in delivering the message of the free grace of God to all people in Christ's stead, and therefore in the ministry of his own Word and work through sermon and sacrament.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church in human arrogance could place the word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans.

The Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church declares that it sees in the acknowledgment of these truths and in the rejection of these errors the indispensable theological basis of the German Evangelical Church as a federation of Confessional Churches. It invites all who are able to accept its declaration to be mindful of these theological principles in their decisions in Church politics. It entreats all whom it concerns to return to the unity of faith, love, and hope.

Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternum.



About This Issue . . .

Hominum confusione? Dei providentia?

This issue of *Katallagete* took on a life of its own after publication of George Hunsinger's "Barth, Barmen and the Confessing Church Today" (Summer 1985). Throughout Fall 1985 and Spring 1986 Hunsinger and I corresponded about possible contributors for a special issue: whom to contact, whom to contact about contacts. Hunsinger, several members of the Board and I agreed on names covering a spectrum of theological and political viewpoints. Early on, we kept a record of letters and telephone calls. After six months the task overwhelmed us; we estimate more than 300 exchanges.

At this point, I am reminded of Charles Kegley and Robert Bretall's Preface to Volume II, *The Library of Living Theology* (1956), a set of essays about and responses by Reinhold Niebuhr:

... This meeting of minds would have been even richer had certain other leaders of thought in our time found it possible to participate. To critics who . . . point out that this or that person's views would have added greatly to the illumination, the advance reply to be made is that one probably agrees, none the less, that it is kinder to tell you who does engage in the inquiry than to indicate who would not or could not.

And so, KAT Fall 1987: eighteen responses to "Barth, Barmen and the Confessing Church Today," eighteen responses from Hunsinger; the relevant documents and photographs, the equivalent of three issues. This and Hunsinger's original essay provide the materials and a bibliographical gold mine not only for recent literature on the Barmen Declaration and the "Confessing Church Today," but also the American church and what Karl Barth in 1932 called "the broad field of politics," especially the arms race, Central America and U.S. foreign policy.



Citations of gratitude:

George Hunsinger accepted the assignment during an academic move from New Jersey to Maine. He remained relaxed throughout correspondence and conversation; there were times when the editor must have provoked him to rightful anger. We are honored by and grateful to each of the respondents who were patient to a fault in letters, telephone calls, etc. etc. The quality of their essays speak for the authors' judgement that we are seeking to address issues that are critical for Church and theology today. Most were able to read, proof and edit his or her article at least once after it was typeset, a signal of steadfastness.

Lacking Eric Gritsch's determination, patience and charming way with overseas telephone operators and *Arkiv-bürokraten* we would not have our covers and documents. The photographs and the reproduction of the final typescript of the Barmen Declaration are unique to the issue. Gritsch's world-wide reputation for long-suffering was stretched beyond limit.

The Trustees of the Merton Legacy Trust graciously encouraged use of Thomas Merton's "calligraphies, flying signatures, graffiti." Robert Daggy, Curator of the Merton Studies Center at Bellarmine College, Louisville, Kentucky, was characteristically patient and helpful at the photography sessions. With this and more, Brother Patrick Hart, Abbey of Gethsemani, is a cheerful consultant and friend and sets a good picnic.

Thanks to the KAT Editorial Board, especially John Wallhausser and Bill Schafer. Both were deeply involved in academe the past fifteen months; both stole time to work with KAT. Schafer's miracle lead pencil goes through all KAT articles. Schafer, like Julius Lester, has read everything that has ever been written anywhere, by everyone. He is essential. So is Wallhausser. Among other hints of genius, he may be one of the world's greatest theological clarifiers; without his (occasional) pleasant willingness to pitch-in at crucial times, the quality of the issue would have been reduced.



The "interns": Amy Lowe, leader with much overtime, typed, retyped and typeset the entire issue (alas, portions twice over). Patrick Holloway typed and presided over the subscription list before moving to wider fields of service; Enos Slaughter, Jr., continued ongoing research as he went on. Regina Blackburn (no intern, she), my teaching associate for two years, brought proof-reading skills, patience and direction to KAT and our several academic responsibilities. Jodi Gentry, Office Manager, hovered over every slip of paper and several bureaucracies for twenty-five months with a cheer and sense of humor that took care of everyone and everything, including the grumpy editor and two (sometimes three) members of the KAT cadre. *Sine qua non* for this and the Summer 1986 issue is Kathy Bryson. Bryson directed technical work and supported editorial responsibilities the past sixteen months. KAT's move to the computer was her initiative. She instructed interns to use the Macintosh in our business operation, and what is the heart of the operation, to typeset, pagemake and design issues for camera-ready boards to Bob Smith of Marshall & Bruce in Nashville, our patient and light-hearted printer for twenty years. Readers and respondents have Bryson to thank for *footnotes*, rejecting that scourge of scholarship and reason, *endnotes*. She is responsible for all photographic work with Merton's calligraphies. In more than one instance her intervention with respondents succeeded where the editor's string had run out. Mercifully, she takes an assignment in the region, so KAT puts the right label on the bottle: "Assistant to the Editor." KAT/Berea, KAT/Editorial Board, George Hunsinger and contributors make a low bow to Kathy Bryson for gracious and competent efforts.

A regret "about this issue" is, as editor, I would not be a respondent. Hunsinger's original article, the responses to it, his response to the respondents have, perhaps, in Kierkegaard's words, "clarified the concepts"—the principle task of theology today. Words of Karl Barth introducing *Church Dogmatics* in 1932 rang in my ears again and again the past two years:

... where at present is the Evangelical Church which wants any one to take her seriously, to confess her in [this way]? ... Am I not aware that in the realm of modern Protestantism, Church authority has no desire . . . to listen to Church doctrine? Am I not aware that even the doctrinal interest existing in the Church of today is directed to quite other matters than those dealt with in my main positions? Am I not aware of the [need to connect with] what fills the heads and hearts of everyone today and what I seek to expound as stimulating and important? Am I not aware how probable it is, that from large circles of those accustomed to take notice of theological work in general, the cry will arise afresh: stones are being offered here instead of bread?

Yes, I am aware of it all, and it might well discourage me to think upon it. I can only reply that I hold myself forbidden to let myself be discouraged by thinking about it. Because I think [we would all] wait in vain till the day of judgment for an Evangelical Church that took itself seriously, unless in all humility one was willing to risk being such a Church in one's own place and as well as one knew how. . . .

Because I am firmly convinced that we cannot reach the clarifications, especially in the broad field of politics, which are necessary today and to which theology today might have a word to say (as indeed it ought to have a word to say to them!), without having previously reached those comprehensive clarifications, in theology and about theology itself, with which we should be concerned here.

Would it be too much to say these words are "about this issue"?

Dare we conclude *Hominum confusione? Dei providentia?*

JYH



Barth, Barmen and the Confessing Church Today: Summary of the Original Text

George Hunsinger

The essay was essentially a meditation on loyalty. It suggested that we stand in a two-fold crisis—political and theological—and that the crisis is rooted in disordered loyalties. A Confessing Church, as the proposed response to the crisis, would be one which got its theological and political loyalties straight. Despite the crying need for such a Church as described in the essay, little prospect was held out that one would emerge in our midst. The essay nevertheless offered a “thought-experiment” about what a Confessing Church might look like in our time.

The political need for a Confessing Church was developed in terms of an analogy between the German situation fifty years ago and our situation at present. Just as the Church had allowed itself to become an accomplice of the political executioners in Nazi Germany, it was argued, so the Church allows itself to become an accomplice of the political executioners in America today. Then as now the Church allowed itself to be casual, indifferent and callous when faced with crimes against humanity and assaults against peace. Then the crimes involved the slaughter of many millions of Europeans, most especially Jews, as well as the massive, deliberate starvation of civilian populations and prisoners of war. Today the crimes involve the torture, terror-bombing and mass murder of civilian populations, most especially but not exclusively in Central America, as well as the massive, deliberate build-up of nuclear weapons and other indiscriminate weapons of mass destruction. These weapons, it was argued, are intrinsically evil, and therefore forfeit all right to our consent. They cannot be used without violating even the most minimal rules of warfare to which the Church has historically committed itself (the laws of discrimination, noncombatant immunity, etc.) Nuclear weapons were taken to particularly heinous, since they threaten to terminate history itself. The words of Albert Camus were put to the Church: “All I ask,” he wrote, “is that, in the midst of a murderous world, we agree to reflect on murder and to make a choice. After that, we can distinguish those who accept the consequences of being murderers themselves or the accomplices of murderers, and those who refuse to do so with all their force and being.”

The theological need for a Confessing Church today was developed in terms of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's essay “Protestantism Without Reformation.” The results of Bonhoeffer's analysis were then applied to two supposedly divergent positions on our theological scene, those of Richard J. Neuhaus and Harvey Cox. Despite appearances to the contrary, it was argued, the deep structure of their theologies is essentially the same. In his essay Bonhoeffer had concluded that “God has granted American Christianity no Reformation.” For this conclusion he offered five main reasons. In barest outline they are: (1) that in American Christianity the truth claims of confession and creed are discounted, (2) that toleration is stressed to the point of relativism, (3) that the freedom of God's Word is confused with the “freedom of religion” the State permits the Church, (4) that the Church supposes its primary social mission to be the guiding of governmental policy-formation, and finally (5) that doctrinal matters such as the person and work of Jesus Christ are eclipsed by a concern for religious experience and ethical practice. In particular, it is the subservience of doctrine to experience and ethics, Bonhoeffer stressed, that has opened up an “almost incalculably deep opposition” between American Christianity and the continental Reformation.

When this analysis is applied to the theologies of Neuhaus and Cox, what emerges is that they both exemplify Bonhoeffer's Protestantism without Reformation. Although their political views are very different, the logic of their theological argumentation is essentially the same. Above all, they both assign a functional or instrumental value to religion, most notably the Christian religion. Truth claims are discounted, relativism reigns in the guise of tolerance, the freedom of God's Word gets no mention, policy-formation is the overriding goal, and doctrine is important primarily as a means to social ends. From this point of view what matters is not so much the ends—for Neuhaus they are legitimizationist and imperialist, whereas for Cox they are anti-imperialist and revolutionary—as the debased way in which theology is made to support them. Where Jesus Christ is worshipped for reasons of cultural utility, it was argued, he is not worshipped as Lord, and to that extent he is not worshipped at all. No prospect was foreseen for a Confessing Church in America until we can move beyond the crisis of Protestantism without Reformation.

The focus of the essay then shifted from the need for a Confessing Church today to lessons from the Confessing Church of yesterday. Three points in particular were made: (1) that the Church resists by confessing, (2) that confession without resistance is not enough, and (3) that confession is the center and resistance the periphery. Each point will be summarized in turn.

First, the Church resists by confessing. As illustrated by the Barmen Declaration of 1934, written primarily by Karl Barth, circumstances may arise when the Church must formally reaffirm its loyalty to Jesus Christ above all else. The Church thereby strives to disentangle itself from false and disordered loyalties which have insinuated themselves into its common life. The first article of the Barmen Declaration is such an affirmation: “Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.” This affirmation is at once a declaration of loyalty and an act of resistance. Loyalty is declared to Jesus Christ, as attested in Scripture, as the exclusive source of authority for the Church. None other can carry this authority; none other is the living Word of God. Resistance is thereby mounted against all attempts to relativize and domesticate the Gospel by compromising the exclusivity of our loyalty to Jesus Christ. In particular, any loyalty is to be resisted which would turn Jesus Christ into an instrumental value for the achievement of secular ends.

Second, confession without resistance is not enough. What the Church confesses in word must, in a *status confessionis*, be followed by resistance in deed. At this point not only the German Confessing Church, but the Barmen Declaration itself were said to leave something to be desired. These shortcomings were pointed out in full acknowledgement of the great heritage the German Confessing Church has bequeathed to us, but for the sake of the future they could not be overlooked. The German Confessing Church fought for the purity of its proclamation, but remained tragically silent about much, in Barth's words, “against which the Old Testament prophets would certainly have spoken out.” The Confessing Church feared accusations of disloyalty to the nation more than it feared practical apostasy. It could not bear the unthinkable thought that “disloyalty” to the nation might be the cost of the loyalty it confessed to Jesus Christ. This aversion to resistance by deed, this refusal of political “disloyalty,” this compromise with unspeakable crime, was not helped by the vagueness of the Barmen Declaration itself. The spirit of the Declaration, it might be said, did not fully come to expression in the letter. Barth consistently interpreted the Declaration's spirit (rightly so, in my opinion) as a mandate for political resistance, while the Confessing Church sought refuge in the vagueness of the letter. Be that as it may, with reference to the present, the essay concluded that it is hard to see how a State sponsoring crimes against humanity (systematic human rights violations in Third World client states) and assaults against peace (the mindless proliferation of indiscriminate weapons of mass destruction including “first-strike” nuclear weapons) could reasonably be regarded, under a Barthian reading of the Declaration, as not inspiring here and now a similar mandate to resistance.

Third, confession is the center and resistance the periphery. The difference from instrumentalism was here to be made clear. Resistance by deed is based on confession by word. Yet confession by word is not subservient to resistance by deed. Resistance can be an implication of confession. But confession is not instrumentally related to resistance. Confession is always an action to be undertaken for its own sake. In the face of competing loyalties, it is a matter of clarifying the Church's exclusive loyalty to its Lord. It is a matter of rejecting competitors for the overriding loyalty of the Church. Whether or not political resistance might be called for in any particular situation is a “peripheral” matter. It is “peripheral” in the sense that it presupposes confessional clarity at the center of the Church's life. Only when there is confessional clarity at the center, it was argued, can the Church make responsible political decisions at the periphery.

The essay then shifted focus for the last time in order to ask about prospects for a Confessing Church tomorrow. Various possible prototypes and hopeful trends were lifted up in the face of our otherwise less than promising situation. The vitality of the black church in America was remembered, especially because it generally displays a healthier understanding than the white church of how the Gospel and its political implications are related. The base communities and church of martyrs in Latin America today were invoked as a model of spiritual renewal and political witness. The Sanctuary Movement underway in the United States was taken as an uplifting sign that even among us some churches have learned how to make the crucial choice between being an American and being a Christian as one's primary self-identification. Finally, the seeds of spiritually grounded civil disobedience, seeds which could blossom into a movement of immense importance, were honored by pointing to those who are willing to give of their lives that we and our children might be spared a nuclear death. The essay ended on the note of being perplexed but not unto despair, and concluded with a plea for prayer.¹

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¹ Since my original essay, a number of books have appeared about the Barmen Declaration and the Confessing Church: Rolf Ahlers, *The Barmen Theological Declaration of 1934* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986); Shelly Baranowski, *The Confessing Church, Conservative Elite and the Nazi State* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986); *The Barmen Confession: Papers from the Seattle Assembly*, Hubert G. Locke, ed. (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986); *The Church Confronts the Nazis: Barmen Then and Now*, Hubert G. Locke, ed. (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984); Klaus Sholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

Is An American "Confessing Church" Too Close for Comfort?

Daniel Berrigan

Responding to George Hunsinger's essay, I dare offer some appreciative observations and pose some questions. The observations are appreciative, for his article is crucial in informing readers (one-third or more of this essay recounts the lawlessness and criminality of our governments during the past forty years) and in urging us to face political and theological crises.

Hunsinger's writings are important and useful in a time of perplexity and struggle. Many who read his article, including professional theologians and intellectuals, will not know the facts of life he enumerates: the crimes of the United States government beginning with Hiroshima, up to the stockpiling of the latest bomb and Reagan's obsession with Star Wars. Many theologians do not read seriously outside their own narrow discipline. They do not seek out responsible media. In consequence they have a benign ignorance toward their own country. Professionals may disagree with his conclusions, though they can hardly escape his facts. In that sense, *Katallagete*, in publishing the original essay, then the responses, is performing a very important service, acting as an underground press.

Moreover, Hunsinger announces our theological crisis today. He makes important points also adduced by Kierkegaard and Barth in the Protestant community, and by Rahner in the Catholic community. It seems to me a great service to separate theological understanding from East/West frenzies. Barth said that he considered anti-communism a far greater crime than communism, and a far greater betrayal. Hunsinger is close to that view in his statement that freedom from State intervention, (something we're so proud of in America) is by no means essential to the Church. That is a very tough message to try to deliver to Western church people and their theologians. I could not be in more agreement after frequent travels in Eastern Europe. I come home and say absolutely insupportable things. For instance, I speak of my conviction that the Church is flourishing in a deeper sense in Czechoslovakia and Hungary (and I

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presume in Poland) than in America, under our benign so-called "separation of Church and State," and "non-intervention policy."

That the United States government is not intervening in the Church is mythology. Actually it is intervening in ways that are both subtle and corrupting. The State is intervening by granting immunity from the conscription of clerics, and by granting tax exemptions on enormous property investments. The State grants these privileges, only as long as we keep our mouths shut about its crimes. For example, during the Vietnam War the Jesuits were threatened by the government: if people like me continued resisting, the State would take a close look at the tax exemptions of the Order. This is inevitable when church people speak up. I am proud to say that the Order didn't budge, nor did I shut up. The point is intervention. In the Soviet bloc the State intervenes in very brutal ways in the life of the Church. In America, State intervention is like being nibbled to death by ducks, or pelted to death by ping-pong balls.

For Hunsinger, the political and theological crises are not separate. The politics of nuclear war inevitably affects the churches. If we allow ourselves to be normalized in an absolutely abnormal situation (in which the whole world is being prepared for its own demise) we obviously have a political crisis for the Church. The theological crisis follows upon the political acceptance of "nukes" as normal. It is quite clear that in such acceptance we have either degraded or disowned Christ. The crucified Christ, the suffering Christ in the world is thereby distorted beyond all recognition.

Yet, I would not agree that this diagnosis is relevant to the question about a Confessing Church.

I do not understand why Hunsinger questions whether it is possible today to hope for a "remnant church, a resisting church, a resilient church, a repentant church." The qualities he seeks—resisting, resilient, repentant, and remnant—I believe are already present. These communities and congregations are among us and have been for years.

We have had them since the Civil Rights days. The precursors were the black churches whose lessons of resilience and resistance we carried into the anti-Vietnam war movement. After considerable prison time we carried the same lessons into the anti-nuclear movement and the Sanctuary Movement.

Perhaps the question is posed for Hunsinger's audience, the readers of *Katallagete*. They form a cross-section of main-line and side-line church members (side-line in the sense that many of

its readers are involved in the Sanctuary and peace movements): a very interesting cross-section. I suspect it will be apparent from the responses to his essay that Hunsinger has touched, and offended, a quite different group; theologians and church leaders who literally do not know what he is talking about. Their responses will be bewildered. It is as if someone claimed an elephant stood before them, but they saw a briefcase; as if someone claimed there was a crisis, but saw only life as usual. This blindness follows upon routine theology, routine worship, routine income, routine teaching; but no particular interest or passion or outcry about public crime. It is a sorry fact of church life that for many professional theologians, no problem exists either in public policy or in the churches. This is the cultured complacency of main-line advocates, the academic and intellectual wing of the Church. The acculturation is truly appalling. The moral problem of our lifetime which might well write *finis* to our lifetime is simply not a concern. It doesn't exist for them.

The historical parallels between the German situation of the '30s and our nuclear crisis today are crucial to self-understanding. But the parallels pass us by. Often no light is cast on the present by past events. Hunsinger quotes Istvan Deak, a Professor of History at Columbia: "What condemned the German population in my opinion was not that they volunteered to kill, because generally they did not, but that they were indifferent." These words also indict present day theologians. A similar psychic numbness and moral indifference afflicts campuses, seminaries and publications. Hunsinger quotes Orwell, "The nationalists not only do not disapprove of atrocities but have a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them." Orwell believes this ignorance is peculiar to nationalists, but I am not sure. Veiled ignorance is also peculiar to a certain kind of academe, whether Christian or secular. I walk the halls of academe and talk to Christian professors for whom the nuclear question simply doesn't exist. They have never raised objections, and probably never will.

Hunsinger emphasizes that the Barmen Declaration offered only a beginning of understanding the vocation of the Church under a criminal State. Barmen was introverted. In it little or no shame is expressed about crimes against Jews. In other words, the question of Barmen was solely the internal integrity of the Church. Indeed a very important question, but one which left untouched the crime of silence.

We find ourselves in a contradictory position if we define "integrity of the Church" as Barmen did, merely in terms of its own internal well-being (invariably material well-being) without facing the criminality and accountability of society. Yet, in fact, within the German churches, that criminality was underway long before Barmen. The question arises today: what are we to say to those who worship and yet kill? In Germany, a few Christians had a deep understanding that they were responsible and resisted witnesses such as Bonhoeffer and Niehmoeller and Barth and numbers of young people, students, workers, Protestant and

Catholic, whether associated with the Confessing Church or not. It is one of the ironies of God certainly, that a few responded heroically, going their own way, going strongly against the apparently irresistible tide.



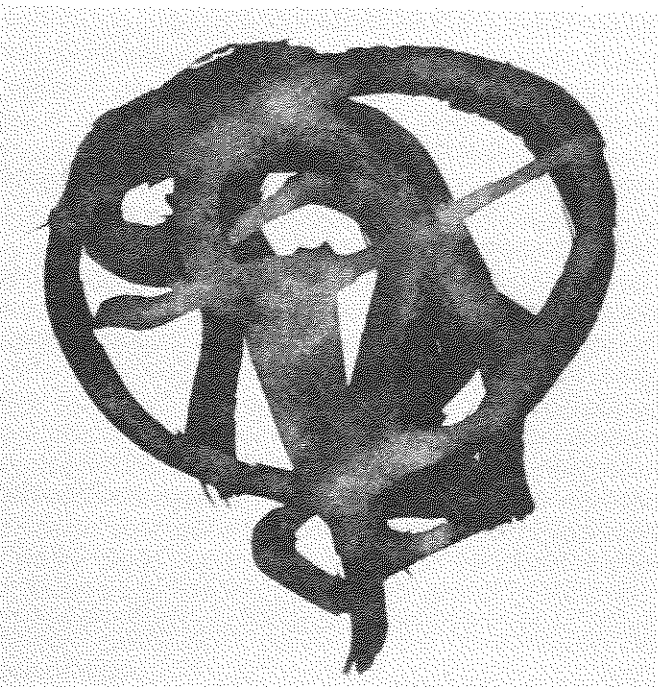
Hunsinger appeals to a second historical touchstone: Nuremberg. The American judges in Nuremberg tried, with great care, to separate the question of war crimes from the question of winning or losing the war. Yamashita, the Japanese general, and the German generals, were not in the dock because they lost the war. They were in the dock because they either committed war crimes or prepared and conspired to do so; (Nuremberg judged that preparation or conspiracy were also war crimes.) The American judges, conscious that they belonged to the winning team, sought, above all, to make clear that they were not after vengeance; they were seeking justice.

However: the nation that forged these Nuremberg principles abandoned them. We have repeatedly committed war crimes; in the creation of weaponry of mass destruction, nuclear or conventional, and its deployment in Vietnam and elsewhere. So a question arises for the Church. What has appalled me is the numbing that afflicts the Church, as well as other structures of society. We too normalize abnormal situations and live a fiction that such crimes are not occurring. Perhaps I am restating Hunsinger's thesis in different terms. Perhaps such history and such memories are helpful. Every structure of our society is "normalized," just as Hitler normalized the structures of his society so that high crime might be rendered unaccountable.

The Confessing Church had to arise, to face the appalling "normalization" in the churches. Hunsinger is correct. We have learned very little from German history. Main-line churches are once again instruments of national policy, very powerful ones, even as their silence places a blessing on crime. I have no argument with Hunsinger's thesis. My caveat rests on his assertion that we ought to be about the creation of a Confessing Church. I am not certain what he wants done, nor am I sure he's sure. Is there in our midst a Confessing Church?

I trust Hunsinger will spell out what he thinks would be a useful course. I submit the task is to strengthen the confessing quality, the depth of faith of the already existing communities. Our effort should be to deepen our confession both in private prayer, in worship and in public witness. Let the main-line churches and society do what they want. The sign of the Church, the sign of the Kingdom is present regardless.

I have a second question. Do we need yet another public declaration? I am very much against it. I doubt the usefulness of declarations or confessions. The quality of our faith comes first. Hunsinger writes that after the Confession at Barmen, no action followed. I think that order of things stands in violation of experience. Theology comes last. This is the pattern in the base communities and liberation movements in Latin America. The Church first undergoes the fires of persecution and disappearance, torment and death. Out of that experience comes a new and vital theology. In one form or another theology arises, and as it is articulated, it may become more scientific. I am not terribly concerned that it do so. I am most concerned that the Confessing Church speak loud and clear of the crimes of government. I am concerned that the Confessing Church end the crime of silence in the churches.



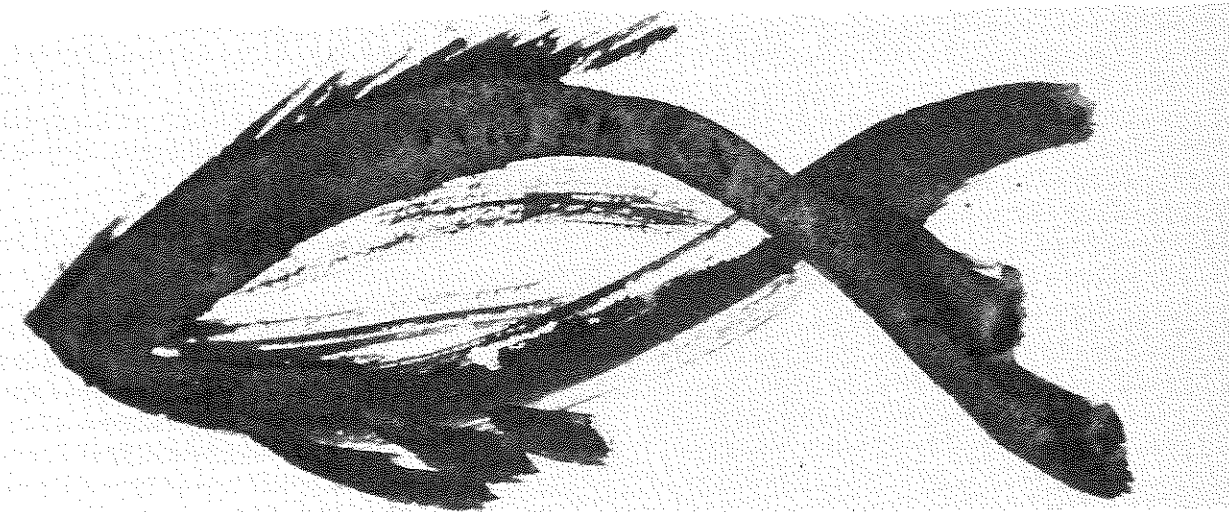
The existing Confessing Church strongly affects the Church. This is my experience of the last decades in the Catholic community. Communities that arose around Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton are exerting pressure upon main-line churches, main-line bishops, main-line Catholics. The Church speaks up on public issues, its worship is living, it shows a new skepticism toward the law. We now have public letters from the bishops showing manifest disagreement with public policy.

Consider the spectacle on Long Island this spring; at the funeral of William Casey, his bishop arose to deplore Casey's support of the Contras during his ten years as Director of the CIA. The State brought in one of its most devoted spokespeople to issue a secular defense of the Director against a statement of church authority. Ten years ago such an event would have been unthinkable. The bishop is by no means outstanding. He is a quiet main-line bishop, but the sisters and priests in his diocese have helped him immeasurably on public issues, especially Central America. Through their example and urging, he visited Nicaragua and El Salvador, saw first hand the suffering of the people. We are justified in hoping that we are no longer dealing with closed systems, either in the communities of resistance or with the main-line church authorities. We are among people who are perplexed and struggling and learning, who are slowly coming to face the facts of life. In such times George Hunsinger's essay is important and useful.

Meantime our moral teaching is caught in great perplexities and ambiguities. Confusion is highlighted, for instance, in the strange anomalies in the Catholic bishops' letter about nuclear war. In it all sorts of strange sentiments are trying to cohere. For instance, deterrence still wins an appalling acceptance. What about "Love your enemies," "Do good to those who persecute you?" Nothing of this. Rather, moral ambiguity, accepting the *threat* of doing evil as not evil at all; as if it is acceptable to develop and deploy such weapons as an ongoing threat.

Another strange aspect of the bishops' letter touches on the practical question of Catholics in armed services and weapons industries. No moral guidance is offered. Christian citizens, when push comes to shove, are left on their own. That is manifestly irresponsible. It seems to me that a scriptural conclusion to the letter would come to this: "You must seriously consider leaving the armed forces and the war industries. We are advising you to do so." When such advice did not follow, I wonder if all that went before was of practical value.

Bonhoeffer wrote that the only thing he could continue to do, being a helpless prisoner, was to say his prayers and tell the truth. He certainly did both. I would translate that today to say we are being pushed back to sources and resources in Scripture. Moral confusion is in the air—from high authorities, bishops and cardinals and pope and leaders of churches. Unless people are scripturally grounded they are bewildered. I continue to believe that with the resources of Book and Cup, we can arrive at clarity in our public understanding.



Hunsinger makes much of Cox and Neuhaus. This is confusing; I am not sure that either is particularly relevant for understanding our situation. Both are interested in shoring up a Church that will appear presentable to public authority. I say public authority is criminal. The effort to make the Church presentable to criminals seems to me to have nothing to do with Christ or the Gospel.

More confusion is found in the distinction drawn between conventional weapons and nuclear weapons. It is a distinction without a difference. For example, in Kentucky one of the most horrid so-called "conventional weapons" pollutes the beautiful landscape and soil: nerve gas. Nerve gas is the poor man's nuclear bomb. It is a cheaper way of wreaking havoc, along with Honeywell cluster bombs, improved napalm, improved phosphorous. We are now using all of these weapons in Central America and in Lebanon. Many are geared toward cheaper ways of killing people. There is no longer a distinction between the number of people that can be killed conventionally and the number of people that can be killed by nuclear weapons. As more sophisticated nuclear weapons are created, so too are conventional weapons developed, as they say, to make them "smarter." The force of our conventional weaponry supplied to us and used by the Israelis in the attack upon Beirut, was the force of the tactical nuclear weapon. That is to say, everyone within range died. And it was all done conventionally.

From the moral point of view, to speak and act against nuclear weapons is a symbolic way of saying *pox* on the whole thing. The visibly criminal part is nuclear weapons. But no aspect of the arms race is acceptable. A neurobiologist wrote recently in *Mother Jones* that, in any use of nerve gas twenty civilians will be killed for every soldier. The gas is absolutely uncontrollable, except through the kind of protection soldiers would have and civilians would not. This is a nightmarish contempt for limitation of civilian or non-combatant death, the traditional king-pin of a "just war" theory. According to "just war" stipulation, weapons were to be directed only at combatants; children, women, the aged, were to be protected. Now we

create weaponry as a method of mass terror against everyone, indiscriminately. Civilians are presumed expendable; they wage war by existing; they should be shoved off the earth.

I am reminded of the story of the teacher who assigned a class to discover the last "just war." I don't know whether the class was unusual or not, but they said they couldn't find the *last* "just war," because they couldn't find the *first* one. They couldn't find the conditions verified from the beginning. The "just war" theory is in fact a construct of the Church, designed to get around the plain language of the Gospel; love your enemies, refuse to kill.

Hunsinger's essay moves us in the direction of clarity in acting and thinking. The Christ of culture at the time of Hitler made such a culture, such conduct permissible. Barth realized he stood at the end of a hundred years of "relativizing" Christ in German theology. No dirtying of hands by filthy deeds! Hitler was slowly drawing on a close-fitting glove, represented by German theology. Barth knew he must rip off the glove. He opened Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome, as though he had never read it. Thus Barth ended a hundred years infection of the universities, seminaries and parishes, an illness of spirit that prepared the Church to welcome the carrier Hitler to the communion table.

Hunsinger knows, as many of us do, that a like situation exists today in a cultural theology, represented by Pastor Neuhaus and others; a Christ of American culture presented as the true Christ. That means, to come down to cases, that Christ and nukes are compatible. No moral problem exists.

Yet bunkers are blessed, the Pentagon welcomes religious language and religious rites, there is no difficulty in welcoming to our communion table those who are planning the extinction of human life. Behold the Christ of culture, demanding worship and, in fact, being worshipped. It is urgent that we raise the outcry of idolatry, topple this idol, and undertake the forgotten task of repentance and reconciliation. □

The Confessing Church: Then and Now

Arthur C. Cochrane

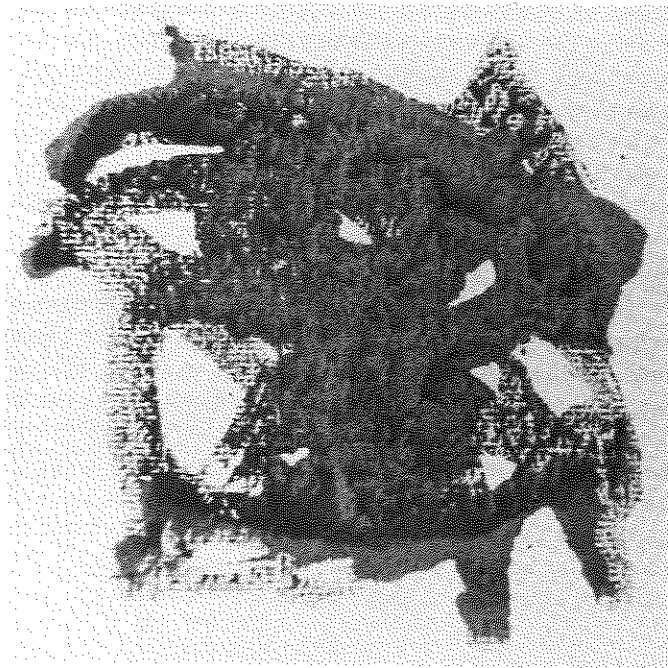
At critical periods in the history of the Church, individuals have been permitted to utter a prophetic, judging and yet comforting word. Such is George Hunsinger's, "Barth, Barmen and the Confessing Church Today." What was his message? Employing a rather unBarthian methodology, he began with a critical analysis of the political situation in Germany in 1934 and in the United States fifty years later. This was followed by an analysis of the theological need in America today, illustrated by two divergent works by Richard Neuhaus and Harvey Cox. Of course, Hunsinger could not have given us these situational analyses had he not been informed by the teaching of the Barmen Declaration and by its leading exponents, namely, Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He concurs with the latter's judgment that "God has granted American Christianity no Reformation." We would add that he has not granted us a suffering Confessing Church. (The experience of the Black Church seems an exception to the rule.)

The second main section of Hunsinger's paper deals with "Lessons from the Confessing Church of Yesterday." We concur with his and Barth's judgment that the Barmen Declaration was "a peculiar mixture of the clear and the vague, of the theologically explicit and the politically all-too implicit." It is true that political implications are found in Articles 1, 2, 3 and 5 of the Barmen Confession. Many were spelled out in the lengthy Memorandum sent to Hitler by the Provisional Board and Council of the Confessing Church, June 4, 1936. Sad to relate, the Lutheran Council and prominent Lutheran bishops dissociated themselves from the action of the Board with the result that a digest of the Memorandum was not read from pulpits in many parts of Germany. However, in Germany today the heirs of Barmen have been outspoken in drawing out its political implications. When Martin Niemöller died, the *New York Times* headlined a story: "Niemöller Defied Hitler." It should have added: "and Konrad Adenauer." Niemöller condemned the division and re-militarization of Germany with atomic weapons and thus indirectly condemned the United States' foreign policy since the end of World War II. It would be a start in the right direction if the superpowers were to declare Europe a nuclear-free zone.

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Back to the Confessing Church of 1934-45: it failed to condemn Hitler's militarism, his belligerent stance against godless Bolshevism, his suppression of freedom of speech and the press, and not least his inhuman persecution of the Jews. So it failed to "call to mind the Kingdom of God, God's commandment and righteousness and thereby the responsibility both of rulers and of the ruled."

Perhaps Hunsinger's most constructive contribution is his explanation of Barth's insistence upon the unity between theology and politics. It is worthwhile to quote in part what Hunsinger writes: "There is a center and a periphery, the Gospel and its political application, and they need to be kept eternally distinct. Yet just as the periphery cannot be had without the center, so the center cannot be had without the periphery. Together the Gospel and political application form one circle, one unitary whole. . . No periphery without the center! . . . To have the periphery without the center, ethics without doctrine, is the impossible modernist dream that sooner or later becomes a nightmare. No center without the periphery! . . . Where Christian doctrine is held while the imperatives of peace and justice are denied, questions arise whether the Gospel has been encountered or understood at all."



What Hunsinger has described has its roots in Barth's teaching concerning the gospel and law and which is imbedded in the Barmen Declaration. I quote from a lecture I delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary, October 31, 1974, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Barmen Theological Declaration.

In the first article we heard 'Jesus Christ . . . is the Word of God which we have to hear.' According to the second article, we have to hear this one word as a twofold word: first as Gospel, and then as Law, but both together — as 'God's verdict of the forgiveness of all our sins' and 'with the same seriousness' as 'God's mighty claim upon our whole life.' These two acquittal and claim, Gospel and Law — are one Word because Jesus Christ himself is God's verdict and claim upon us. It is not a matter of forgiveness as such, or of a demand as such, but Jesus Christ himself! Consistently throughout the six articles, the priority of the Gospel to the Law is set forth and both are presented in an inseparable connection. We have in mind the phrases: 'trust and obey'; 'justification and sanctification'; 'Word and sacrament'; 'with its faith as with its obedience'; 'with its message as with its order'; 'from his comfort and from his direction'; 'the ministry entrusted to and enjoined upon'; 'in gratitude and reverence'; 'trusts and obeys.' One will not find this sequence and unity in either a Lutheran or Reformed Confession. The Reformation 'Law Gospel' sequence is familiar and has its legitimate place in the doctrine as a whole. Barmen, however, had to make it clear that the Law that judges us and drives us to the Gospel is God's gracious Law — the Law of Christ, the Law of faith, the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the commandment which is 'holy, just and good' (cf. Ps. 19) — and not a bare law divorced from Christ, not a law of works and of sin and death. Barmen proclaims the Gospel as the content of the Law and the Law as the form of the Gospel. It is this feature which makes the Barmen Declaration such a joyful and comforting message of the free grace of God to all people.¹

Permit me to give a Scriptural example. To my ears the sweetest words in all of Scripture are "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." I once asked a Lutheran friend whether this is Law or Gospel, to which he replied: "The Gospel." I said: "No, it is a command: 'Come unto me.'" Moreover, it is a command which humanly cannot be fulfilled. It is addressed to "all" — to the blind who cannot see him, the deaf who cannot hear him, the lame who cannot walk to him, to all who are truly heavy laden. It is like Jesus' command to Peter to come to him over the waves of the sea. Moreover, Jesus adds: "Take my yoke (my commandments) upon you, and learn from me . . . and you will find rest for your souls." To become a follower or disciple of Jesus and to suffer for his sake is to find peace. For as Jesus adds, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." On Jesus' lips his commandment to take up the cross and follow him is a liberating command. For he is "gentle and lowly of heart."

¹Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Church's Confession Under Hitler*, Revised Edition (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1976), p. 287ff.

If, as Barmen teaches, the Church is to remind the State of God's kingdom, commandment and righteousness, then it must strive to avoid proclaiming a bare law of works, or to use Hunsinger's language, a politics which is periphery without a center. Barmen also teaches that "the State has by divine appointment the task of providing for justice and peace . . . according to the measure of *human judgment* and *human ability*" (italics added). Human judgment may not be equated with God's Word. No purely human political policy is identical with the divine commandment. When Niemöller condemned the re-militarization of Germany with atomic weapons he was speaking as a servant of Jesus Christ and therefore was proclaiming a commandment whose ground and content is the Gospel. Of course, the State, rulers and ruled, may hear it as politics based on purely human judgment and ability. The State may hear it as a bare law and scold the Church for meddling in politics. The Church cannot prevent that happening. But the Church must strive to speak as a witness to the death and resurrection of Christ for the reconciliation and peace of the world.

Two examples of such witness may suffice. The Black leaders in South Africa, in line with the action taken by the Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches at Ottawa, 1982, have declared that apartheid is a heresy because it contradicts the reconciliation, peace and unity effected and manifested in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For them the Gospel has not only ecclesiastical but social and political implications.² During the Civil Rights struggle in the '60s two courageous ministers, whom I greatly admired, preached Sunday after Sunday a law that the members of their white congregations should get involved in vigils and protest marches. Finally I asked one: "Have you no word of grace to utter? Why do you not proclaim that the dividing wall of hostility between blacks and whites has been broken down in the Cross of Christ? Then we may sing: 'Because *He* has overcome, we shall overcome.'"³

I am persuaded that Hunsinger would agree that whereas the Confessing Church stressed the Gospel without the law, doctrine without politics, the Church in America today stresses the law and politics without the Gospel and doctrine. So I wrote a book, *The Mystery of Peace* (The Brethren Press, 1986). I had misgivings about the current emphasis in the peace-making movement, that is, upon our peace-making works rather than upon "the grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Much of the movement has sounded too much like the Social Gospel and the ethical pacifism preached when I began my theological studies in the '30s. We were going to bring the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of peace and justice on earth by education and legislation. As John Yoder has written in the foreword: "Western

²*Apartheid is a Heresy*, John W. De Gruchy and Charles Villavicencio, eds. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983).

³Arthur C. Cochrane, "Peace Between Jews and Gentiles," *The Mystery of Peace* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1986).

social ethics. . . assuming that believers are in positions of social power, tends to merge the concepts of duty and virtue with manageable projections of social benefit; reasonable cost/benefit calculations can determine what choices are right or wrong. War is wrong because it does more harm than good, cannot be responsibly controlled." I also wondered whether the Christian peace movement has been inspired more by fear of the bomb than by a fear of the Lord. Will the peace-making movement be seen as just another special issue which, like the youth peace activism of the '60s, soon burns itself out? Thus I consider my book as a whole, and in particular the chapters on "The Christian's Warfare Against the Enemies of Peace" (the principalities and powers), "Barmen: The Church Between Temptation and Grace," "Confessing the Peace of Christ," and an appendix, "Theology and Political Science: A Conversation With Jonathon Schell," as more adequate responses to Hunsinger's particular arguments than can be given here.

In the third and final section of his paper, Hunsinger explores the prospects for a Confessing Church tomorrow. There are seeds of such a church in "the vitality of the black Church," in the spiritually renewed and suffering churches of Latin America (he might have included South Africa), in the Sanctuary Movement among churches in the United States in defiance of what our government interprets as the law, and finally in spiritually grounded civil disobedience among Roman Catholic and Protestant groups such as Pax Christi and World Peacemakers. Hunsinger is to be commended for stressing discipleship as an indispensable form of confessing. I have done likewise by appealing to Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer and to the example of the peace churches. It may be, as Hunsinger suggests, that "perhaps a Confessing Church tomorrow will find it has been granted not to produce a new confession of its own but to be gathered and sustained by one it has already received," namely, the Barmen Theological Declaration. But must we not hold ourselves open for the possibility of an ecumenically and theologically responsible formulated Confession — a creed that would banish the doubt, confusion, and disunity abroad concerning who and what Jesus Christ is? It would address a specific situation of a "common need and temptation." It would combat an error, perhaps long entrenched in the churches, which has now ripened and come to a head, an error which grievously imperils what the churches hold in common, an error which stabs at the very heart of the Church's calling to bear witness to Jesus Christ as the reconciliation and peace of the world.

I am not sure that I agree with Hunsinger that "our traditional American activism . . . could still be an asset." Certainly not without intensive and strenuous theological and ethical reflection. Peace is not a self-evident truth. We think we can know and can make peace. I discovered "a strange new world" in the Bible in which peace is a mystery "which passes all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). Fortunately Hunsinger's article reflects the disciplined study which is required of those called to teach and preach in the Church and all of us are indebted to him. He is not alone. But "the laborers are few."

Finally, there is yet another important lesson to be learned from the Confessing Church in Germany which Hunsinger did not mention and which, I am ashamed to admit, is not discussed in my book on *The Mystery of Peace*. The Confessing Church consisted of committed confessing congregations. After the Synod had adopted the Barmen Declaration, it adopted various declarations and resolutions. One concerned "the Practical Work of the Confessional Synod" and consisted of three parts: 1. Ministering to the Spiritual Renewal of Ministers; 2. Edification of the Confessing Congregation; 3. The Mission of a Confessing Congregation.⁴ Not only were ministers and elders, but also voluntary societies (home missions, foreign missions, young people's societies, associations for men and women) and their office-bearers were "required to take a definite stand in favor of the Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church. Only if they make such a decision will they be entitled to have a part in the building of a confessing congregation." The congregations supported their pastors and their families not only financially but by prayers of intercession. In many congregations it was the custom at the Sunday service to read a list of pastors forbidden to preach or confined to prisons and concentration camps.

Charles Villa-Vicencio, one of the two editors of *Apartheid Is a Heresy*, informs us that English-speaking churches in South Africa, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, "have adopted numerous resolutions condemning racism since the early days of apartheid Yet this opposition . . . has not always been enthusiastically and unanimously supported within the English-speaking churches It is in their general practice that the English-speaking churches are found wanting They need to confess to their heresy of practice in a solidarity of guilt with the Afrikaners Reformed churches and to seek to translate their many principles of non-racism into a society built on political guarantees of non-discrimination and liberation from oppression."

Is the situation in our churches in the United States so different to the issue of nuclear militarism by the government in Washington? Many churches have issued commendable statements on peace-making and their agencies have distributed educational materials to the congregations. Yet congregations remain uncommitted. The Presbyterian church (U.S.A.) adopted the Barmen Declaration in its Book of Confessions (1967). But what percentage of the membership has ever heard of Barmen, or draws on its political implications when they vote?

Truly, "the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few; pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Luke 10:2). With a call to prayer Hunsinger rightly concluded his article. □

⁴For the complete text, see *The Church's Confession Under Hitler*, pp. 242-247.

Reflections on the Possibility of a Confessing Church Tomorrow

Audrey Conard

While I have neither the theological nor the political expertise to "probe our twofold crises to the end," I agree with George Hunsinger that it should be done. Thanks to his article, "Barth, Barmen and the Confessing Church Today," I have spent time "pondering what it might mean were some analogue to the German Confessing Church to emerge on the American scene," what it might mean not only in terms of remedying the inhumanities of our world, but also how it might bring about the Reformation which Bonhoeffer suggested had never occurred in the American Church. My viewpoint is that of a person in the pew, and although my observations are general in nature, they come from that particular place where reform will come, if at all.

The active nature of the word "confess" (to make known, to declare faith in or adherence to) presumes not just nominal or theoretical agreement but a living-out of doctrine. To followers of Christ confession means to make Him known, rather than a philosophical digest of His messages, and involves the whole person, not simply mind or lips. This is as true of a Church body as of individuals: we are to be the "Light of the World."

Most simply stated, what all Christians confess is that the essence of God has been revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, whom we are called to resemble. We are commanded to love the Lord, our God, with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, our neighbor as ourselves; love our enemies; do good to those that hate us. We are commanded to remember him in eucharistic fellowship and live in love and service to others.

As George Hunsinger suggests, some prospects for a Confessing Church tomorrow are being lived out now—in the spiritual renewal evident in the Latin American Church, in the Sanctuary Movement, in instances of spiritually grounded civil disobedience, etc. These are the leaven in the loaf, signs of hope, and witness to a Confessing Church already in existence. These individuals take seriously the reality that "Jesus is Lord," and their actions incarnate certain beliefs: any individual is of greater worth than any system; the community of all people is of greater worth than any nation; we have a responsibility for each other and to the created world. They imply the Barmen Declaration's interpretation of the two kingdoms doctrine: "...times may come when obedience to God requires political disobedience and resistance to the State."

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A Confessing Church tomorrow could be envisioned as being loosely constituted of already active, committed individuals and communities—an organization resembling in cooperation and interconnectedness the many not-specifically-Christian peace and nuclear disarmament organizations—their numbers increased and purpose affirmed by a Declaration as at Barmen.

However, to ask "Is it time for a Confessing Church?" is to admit that the Church-as-it-is, the Church as a whole, is not now confessing, is in fact not living out fully—as a body, or as large numbers of individual Christians within that body—what it declares, at least not in the special senses we speak of. The Confessing Church we look for places its doctrines critically counter to the culture, requires the challenging of national policies which contribute to lovelessness and inhumanity, and requires an expanded definition of "my neighbor." The Church-as-it-is is not doing that. If one could answer the question "Why not?" and act on the answers, we might envision another form for a Confessing Church tomorrow: the Church-as-it-is, confessing.

I speak of the Church-as-it-is as if it were one entity, realizing the sweep of that generalization. Yet, while liturgies, emphases, and practices differ denominationally, Christians unite in including within their beliefs such unequivocal statements as those mentioned earlier—love God, your neighbor as yourself, and your enemies. There is sufficient common core to mean by "the Church" those mainstream organizations and congregations most of us know best. Even allowing for denominational differences, one can envision a Confessing Church as the committed body of Christians in worshipping community, clear on the central doctrines of love and sacrifice and their applicability to world events, made up of congregational members supportive of one another and supported by their hierarchical or organizational bodies, who, either by direct mass actions or resistances, would be in a position to refuse to be accomplices in national acts counter to their faith. One thing a Declaration such as Karl Barth's at Barmen might accomplish, besides putting forward the idea of "the emperor to be honored, God alone feared," would be the stating of the essential Christian beliefs we do already hold in common.

We aren't expecting heaven on earth, perfection, or even the New Jerusalem. It is perhaps necessary for Christians to always be a remnant in the world. But confessing Christians a remnant in the Church? (I don't recall whose question it is, but it delivers a powerful jolt: "If we were accused of being Christians, would there be enough evidence to convict us?") Even while noting the actions and efforts of the few, while applauding the directions beginning in the whole Church body, I still cry out "Where are we?"

I know congregations are "confessing" in their immediate communities—caring for the sick, running food kitchens, staffing half-way houses, incarnating for one another the practical compassion of Jesus. The Church, with personnel and funds, works around the world as well as in city missions. Certainly in their ways these efforts are political. But if we speak of saying No to national policies, of taking action as congregations, as synods, against atrocities/wastages/injustices committed in our names, there is absence and silence. Human-rights groups may number many Christians among their members, but churches, in the name of Christ, do not act, or if in the name of Christ, not with a sense of congregational commitment behind them. Which is why, perhaps, a Pope's call for peace or a statement on disarmament by Archbishops is given press coverage, liberals are pleased that something has been done, conservatives are irritated that the Church meddles where she has no business to, and business goes on as usual. The sense of many bodies on the line is not behind those statements.

Well, why not? I confessed my inability to probe these matters, but I suspect if we are not confessing it is because we are not probing. We leave matters to governments or to God, abdicating our responsibilities. That our Churches in the past have encouraged a no-questions-to-be-asked paternalism has facilitated our ability to abdicate. The historical separation of Church matters and world-political matters, of which Mr. Hunsinger's article speaks, has allowed not only individual Christians, but Churches, to live and let live, so much so that institutions of the Church and institutions of governments support one another almost unthinkingly, having more in common as institutions than either has with individuals who make up the institutions. And like institutions, individuals desire stability, desire peace in that sense, want *comfort* in that sense rather than in the sense of "being strengthened." We want to be cozy yet follow a leader who was not a cozy fellow but always stirring up, provoking change. Ironically, given the official separation of Church and State, in behavior the two aren't always that separate, at least not sufficiently so for effective criticism.

The tolerance Bonhoeffer noted in American churches has become a stumbling block to evaluation and criticism. In striving to eliminate "discrimination" against minority groups, we seem to have eliminated discrimination as a mental process. In "judging not" (in an ultimate sense) persons, we seem hesitant to judge anything at all, merely "prefer" or "select" as when buying something.

Rather than being critical of national policies, many Christians hold the rather Old Testament notion of "God on our side" which limits our perception of "the other side" as being God's children. (Even if we perceive the other side as our enemies we seem to waive the command to love them.)

Because this is in a general way a "fundamentalist" position, I digress to mention what seems mistaken about fundamentalist "confessing." These bodies witness, they have vitality, they involve themselves in politics in the name of God, but they do so with narrow and restrictive interpretations of doctrine; they lack compassion and generate fervor from an "us against them"

perspective. To dismiss the current fundamentalist trend is to miss the opportunity to learn something, even negatively, about what a Confessing Church could, or should not, be. It is likely something wiser than fastidiousness that causes mainstream members to shrink from what they feel to be fundamentalist language or postures, and it is wise to note that in general parlance "confessing" seems to the mainstream more to mean "fundamentalist" then it means "to behave like Helen Woodson, Guatemala peace witnesses, and historic martyrs to the faith."



If the Church and the majority of its members are not confessing in this latter sense we can blame human frailty. All of us fear change, failure, loss of security. We fear the consequences of taking action. We even fear losing church members. Perhaps we also lack energy—our lives aren't simple, our systems for daily living are often complicated and wear us out. And then, of course, there is sin: laziness, unselfishness, egoism, and willful ignorance.

We are not ignorant of what is going on in the world—television, newspapers, the free press in general, inform us of atrocities, afflictions, suffering and starvation. Although we may not follow the intricacies of government involvements, or agree on the causes of these things, it gets harder and harder not to know who is implicated in at least some "bad news." We cannot say, as did the Germans, that we didn't know what was happening. We can only say we chose not to know or we opted to acquiesce because the government knows best or because really we don't mind sacrificing others for ourselves.

More sympathetically, maybe if we are not confessing, it is because we don't know how to in this new way. We're not sure what to do, or if we are the ones to do it. There is a peculiar difficulty for those of us in comfortable, safe, grey areas, those with boils but not bleeding. That there is spiritual renewal in Latin America is not surprising. Persecution concentrates the issues. Even if action/solutions are not clear-cut, when problems/dangers are, action must be taken. It is harder to act when problems are not clearly defined, or admissible of personal solution. And it takes faith, persistence and energy of another order to try to express one's Christian faith through committees, slow persuasions, through democratic procedures, as all of us know who have gone that route. Much action comes from comfortable people with the leisure, funds and energy to make an effort: letter-writing, voting, contributing should be seen as "confessing" individual acts, especially when "dramatic" actions seem in some ways "easier." While no one would wish more widespread crisis areas or unconsidered dramatic actions one can understand those who feel blocked by the complexity and seeming fruitlessness of more distant efforts.

Mixed with our frailties and lacks are good will, generosity and a real hunger to do something real for others, to mean something. Even if the urge to act is not fully realized or articulated, it seems present. A standard psychological answer to the lack of fulfillment felt by many in our "full" culture would be that it is due to the inability to satisfy that urge. Superficial soothing may come from communal belonging or "helping," but there is a deeper hunger, a thwarted integrity tired of being soothed, pacified, sold-to, put off and deceived. Consideration of the outpouring of support for victims of natural disasters, the way people rally to a personal crisis among friends, makes one think there is a huge resource waiting to be tapped and directed. During a recent food drive in Toronto, thousands of people took canned and packaged goods by hand to food depots and stayed to unpack and prepare it for distribution, when mailing in ten dollars would have been more efficient. I remember being impressed at how important it seemed to people to touch the actual food, to get out and do the work. And I recall an outburst on my part after watching a newscast a few years ago about the starving children of Ethiopia. Images of suffering may have been necessary to prod a jaded world into helping, but the images themselves toyed with and jaded the emotions they prodded. It is a peculiar torture to be exposed to pictures of suffering you cannot personally and immediately alleviate; after a while, you can't look. Between the beauty of Christ's simple "follow me" and our seeming powerlessness in the face of systems which both hold us up in the technological world and let us down as humans, a kind of hopelessness breeds, which could lead to the very "casual, callous indifference" we seek to avoid. As has been shown in studies of violence on television, images inure us to reality. Exposure to the reality of suffering, however—no matter how horrific, fatiguing or difficult it is—has an opposite effect: taking action, offering one's presence, enlivens not only the sufferer, but the helper.

That it should be so seems essentially Christian to me. It also seems to be essentially what is happening in the actions of what we would call the Confessing Church already in existence. The presence of God/Jesus/Love in us, shared with present others, is what we as Christians are about. The single most effective way, I think, to transform "ordinary" Christians into confessing Christians is to bring them into direct contact with problems. I can think of no one who would eat a picnic lunch in front of a starving child or pour flame on a passing stranger. I can think of no one who would not feel solidarity with another if they both were being shot at, no matter how different they were in other respects. We have been very timid about "going places." We think we need to be trained; we think we might offend the poor with our charity; we think we need to be experts to comfort the dying, to lecture a Congressman. We are afraid of ruining the party if we question the engineer about why he builds missiles. One of the many reasons we admire Mother Teresa is that she illustrates what is possible for the "ordinary" individual. To say "Oh, but she's holy" is to bypass the point—it is to such holiness that we are all called and of which we are all capable. That point sticks us, and it should.

The Church has a doctrine which teaches real presence, and it has a population already well-versed in that doctrine, by rote if not by heart. What is needed is to implement ways of confronting the issues with our physical presences, moving doctrine out of the pews and into the world.



One of the many changes in the Church since my childhood is the understanding that the Church is us, fellow Christians. The gap between the laity and the clergy is narrowing. We are no longer a classroom of children instructed by a teacher holier than we; we are an orchestra playing under the baton of somebody who has been to conducting school. This understanding is not universal, is not everywhere welcomed, but it is coming, and with it the responsibilities it implies. It is easy, as well as necessary, to criticize the Church, past and present, but in so doing we need to remember that we are convicting ourselves.

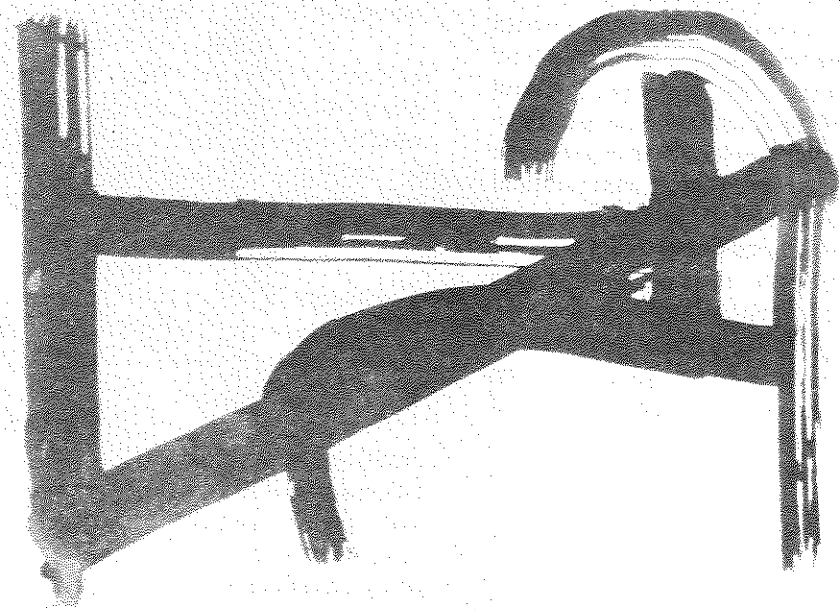
That said, the clergy have the pulpits and the national churches have the leadership. They have the most visible prophetic role and are the most likely channel to explicate or develop new understandings of the Christian life, of prayer, of confessing. Transmission of new theological interpretations is in most places already happening—and, goodness knows, problematically, as pew-holders are shaken out of old comforts and into new definitions—a painful difficulty when one of the old comforts was that God did not change. (It is interesting that should have stuck, when the notion, also central to Christianity, that persons *should and must change*, did not.)

After making all these generalizations which so easily skim along, perhaps it is appropriate to say that what we need to become a Confessing Church is specifics. For instance, a specific reiteration of doctrine, specifically ranking God's will above national policies. A Declaration issued by major theologians and political experts might perform this prophetic task. Such a Declaration circulated throughout all Church bodies and debated at congregational level would bring about specific discussion of the current situations. Wrestled with personally and in community, a Declaration could be both the bronzed serpent lifted up in

the wilderness and a sword causing divisions. I don't think we should be afraid of turmoil. Creativity and compassion come from it, not from apathy. We should welcome the challenge, even if some go sadly away as did the rich young ruler when confronted with demands he chose not to fulfill.

It would be helpful to hear more specifics from our pulpits, neither "vote this way" or "join this march," nor vague suggestions that "peace begins in our heart." That is so, but to get it out of our hearts and further along, we need to have clearly pointed out which national actions or situations are at variance with the creeds we purport to follow. Yes, we can find this in the newspapers, but not the news that it is our business.

George Hunsinger, quoting George Orwell on the vagueness and euphemisms of political speech, says: "Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them." That's also a description of much religious language, and it is legitimate, for instance, when speaking of God the Creator, when dealing with subjects which are timeless and universally applicable, or when speaking to numbers of persons in differing circumstances to whom you grant both the freedom and the ability to make the connections between, say, a parable and their own lives. One doesn't want to trade a conservative authoritarianism for a liberal one. However, to specify situations and look at them in the light of doctrine, or at least to suggest that one should look in that light, would be useful, especially since the connections between the two are not being acted upon. It would also be helpful to be reminded that growth in Christian life is not a matter of personal comfort, but personal sacrifice; that true comfort comes from doing God's will, and to do that in an imperfect world involves not ease, but effort.



Then there is the matter of specific guilt. Hunsinger says, when commenting upon the Stuttgart Confession of Guilt in 1945: "The Church in America today might consider beginning with its own confession of guilt." There are and have been those churches which operate by making their parishioners feel guilty simply for being human, or for falling short of a rigid code. There are other churches which attempt to free people from crippling guilt by assuring them that they are all right with God. Liturgies include corporate confession and absolution, but where is the specificity in corporate confession, as there is in private confession? In private confession is it not the detailing of our failings that forms the basis not only for forgiveness, but for practical changes?

Of course we in the West feel guilty when confronted with doctrine! Guilty of having far more than enough, of doing too little (we are very busy, but about whose business?), of being implicated in our nation's often questionable actions, of not following our instincts of charity through the mesh of difficulties to their ends, of not living up to the call "Follow me." It seems to me healthy that we feel guilt. If we can be aided to know what specifically we are guilty (or not guilty) of, then we can repent, then we can expect from our clergy or devise for ourselves, guidance in how to "go and sin no more." Shall we sell the second car? Shall we change our jobs? Shall we live more simply? Shall we refuse to pay military taxes, witness, march on Washington, adopt an orphan or figure out something even newer and more radical? If we do any of these, can we expect practical help from our congregation family?

We also, as congregations, once we have the will to act, need specific models—like the Society of Friends, who long have been involved in political action and peacemaking; like religious orders who, although (as far as I know) they do not take political stands as orders any more than does the larger Church, have much to teach us about community life, discipline and the practice of being a Christian. (Would that we did that practicing with the daily persistence my daughter devotes to her piano or the vigor my neighbor the jogger puts into his routine. What about spiritual fitness?—there are workouts for that, too.) We need information about what others have tried as "confessors." We need the commitment to experiment with such things as living communally, sharing if not facilities, then finances.

It is encouraging to know that many of these possibilities are in some places realities. A Confessing Church would enlarge our sense of the size of our community and those to whom we are responsible; it would make it mandatory that we find new ways of responding. I suspect that community will be the key to changes within the Church that could make it a true Confessing



Church. We don't live in first century Palestine. We need not resemble the early Church in all its particulars. Indeed, we should not. But since it has been, in part, a wrong sort of individualism that has prohibited the understandings a Confessing Church is built upon (wrong in mine, me-first, lack of concern for others unless they are getting more than you are, etc.), perhaps if congregations knew each other in the family senses of the early Church, not just in Sunday sociability, we might agree, disagree, hurt and forgive freely. We might also dare to risk because we had each other to count upon, and create among us a presence we could take into the world.

Hunsinger suggested that the first steps to a truly Confessing Church would probably begin in prayer, and that action without prayer is blind, just as prayer without action is empty. Especially in the midst of urging ourselves to confessing action it is important not to get so carried away that we forget we are but co-creators. If we forget that "God reigns" our social justice may be worthy but pride-riddled. Of the many balances we seek one is to be responsible without being solely responsible; not to "leave it to God" nor to presume we act alone. A praying community allows us correction of our personal balance, teaches us humility, gives us strength.

Prayer relates us to God and opens us to His love, and as we strive to listen to Him, loving actions will be suggested to us. If that sounds too mystical, consider how often opportunities to serve present themselves once one is prepared to look for them. The primary thing needed for the Confessing Church to be a reality is the personally experienced knowledge that all begins and ends in Him, in the private prayer relationship. The end may lie in the beginning, in the request "Teach us to pray." □

What Does a Confessing Church Confess?

Harvey Cox

Do we need a Confessing Church in the United States today? When I answer this question in the affirmative, I want to be careful not to be misunderstood. I believe we do, but not for the reasons some other people do.

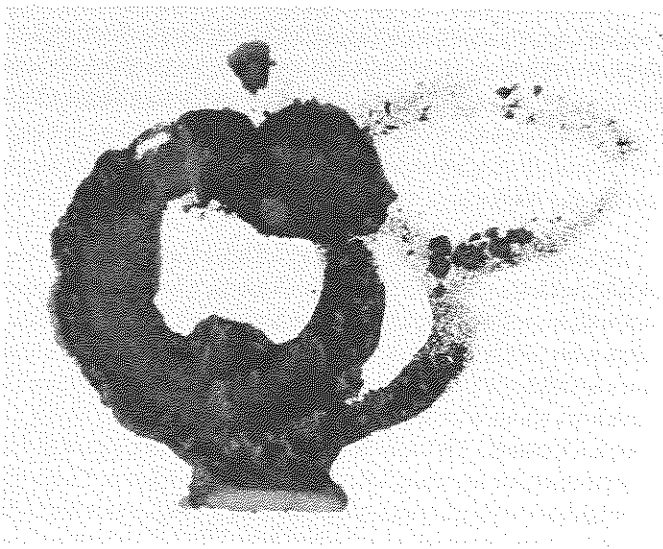
My answer comes out of my own experience of "confessing" churches in various situations. During the critical years of 1962-63 I worked for a year in Berlin as an Ecumenical Fraternal Worker. At the foot of that ugly wall we "Mitarbeiter" came to know personally some of the brave men and women who had actually organized the German Confessing Church during the Nazi tyranny thirty years before. In Berlin we lived in a city where religion was misused for cold war purposes on both sides of the barrier and where the constant memory of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and of "July 20th Movement" hovered over us. This made us aware that being a Confessing Church exacts a very heavy price.

In the middle '60s I returned to the United States and worked for five years in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with Martin Luther King, Jr. It was the time in recent American history in which we have come closest to having a Confessing Church in our midst. Under the leadership of the black churches and of Dr. King, thousands of Christians were moved into a stance of active opposition and resistance. Even those who went to jails and prisons rarely suffered the prolonged agonies of the Germans of the Confessing Church of the '30s and '40s. (At least those of us who are white did not.) However, we did learn that a Confessing Church, even in America, costs something.

Once again in the late '60s and '70s, during the period of growing opposition to the war in Vietnam, many of us again learned what it means to be part of a Church in opposition. Once again we sometimes looked through bars from the inside out. Like the Christians in the Germany of the '30s or in the American South of the '60s, we also found out that a Confessing Church brings people together across denominational lines. It tears down old barriers and creates new expressions of the life of the believing community. I remember well the day I was incarcerated at an Air Force Base along with six young novices of the Sisters of Loretto and a Jewish layman. Our crime was handing out copies of St. Francis at Assisi's "Prayer for Peace." We must bear this interfaith dimension in mind as we ask ourselves seriously whether we need a Confessing Church in America today.

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We do need such a Church today. But then again, we always do. In one sense, every Church should be a Confessing Church. There is no such thing as an authentic Christian Church which does not confess the Gospel of the Kingdom, regardless of whether such confession is supported, repressed or ignored by the powers among whom the Church lives. The hour we live in is plainly evil, and we obviously need a Confessing Church. We need such a Church however, not primarily because of the unrighteous hour, but because of the nature of the Gospel itself. The hour is always to some extent evil, and the shape of the sin evokes the particular emphasis on our confession. Still, it is first of all the Gospel itself which requires us to confess. The more basic question to ask ourselves is: what should a Confessing Church in the United States of America today confess?



Christian confession is always particular, never abstract, general or timeless. I have said that the particular evil of the day should shape the style of our confession, a bit, perhaps, like the heresies of the day influenced the emphases of the historic creeds. Otherwise, even the boldest confession can be ignored. The day in which we live is certainly an evil one but what is the particularity of that evil? Our country is engaged in a merciless war by hired mercenaries against a hapless and long-suffering people in Nicaragua. The contras we support with hundreds of millions of American dollars have been called by our President "the moral

equivalent of our Founding Fathers." However, every report suggests that our taxes, cynically diverted from illegal arms sales elsewhere, hires marauders, who are too cowardly to take on the Nicaraguan army itself but expend their efforts in burning down clinics, destroying farmhouses, murdering and torturing civilians, especially medical personnel, and kidnapping peasants as they try to plant or harvest crops. This awful travesty should call forth its particular form of confession, repentance and witness.

But there is more. This brutal operation is led by a jocular American President who despite his smiling countenance deceives our people with unparalleled mendacity. If the Nazis talked about use of the "Big Lie," Ronald Reagan has become the master of stringing together hundreds of little lies. He tells us in a serious tone that the Pope has assured him that he "supports our program in Central America." The following day, the Vatican issues an official disavowal. In the same speech he says that the Nicaraguans threaten to subvert Brazil. Brazil publicly announces that it knows of no such subversion. He accuses the leaders of Nicaragua of trafficking in drugs. Our own Federal Narcotics Administration announces that it has no knowledge of any such business but, on the contrary, suspects the contras we support are involved in cocaine business. The President tells us first that American aid is to interdict the flow of arms from Nicaragua to El Salvador. Then he says it is to force the government of Nicaragua to the conference table. Then he admits after two years of such circumlocution that the real purpose of the war is to overthrow the Nicaraguan government.

Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." The first task of a Confessing Church is to speak truth to power. We desperately need simple truth. Our capacity for making decisions about Nicaragua was subverted for years by little lies and, more recently, has been shored up by a huge and complex lie. Things had reached the point where the majority of the public did not take the President's pronouncements seriously and greeted his latest whopper with a condescending chuckle. As this is written, however (December, 1986) the president's credibility seems to have run out. Walter Lippman once observed that a nation cannot long remain a democracy if its populace is not given the facts on which to make decisions of national life. It is not just the President's nearly pathological disregard for truth which creates the evil hour in which we live, it is the horrendous fact that vast numbers of our people had come to accept this bizarre situation as normal. The main victim of all of this is simply truth.

A second aspect of the evil hour which calls for a Confessing Church today is the persecution and misuse of religion. While our war against peasants and health workers of Nicaragua and the Church workers of Guatemala continues, at home our government has cracked down ruthlessly on ministers, priests, nuns and lay people trying to help the victims of other wars we support in Guatemala and El Salvador to escape death squads and find safety here. The President warns us that if we do not support the Nicaragua "freedom fighters" there will be a stream of refugees flowing across our border soon — one we will not be able to stem.

Putting aside for the moment the implied racism of this remark (the brown peril now having supplanted the yellow peril), the fact is that we already have a stream of refugees. They come, however, not from Nicaragua, but from the countries in which the United States is supporting and arming terrorist governments. On my desk is a report from Guatemala which documents the most recent murder of Catholic layworkers and catechists by armed forces of that country. This information, however, will not appear in the public press, since the established media are too busy with other preoccupations. Even some religious journals express their admiration and approval of Cardinal Obando Bravo, archbishop of Managua, hardly considering that he has made himself the principal internal political voice of the contras. Indeed, the Cardinal made it a point to stop in Miami on his way back from Rome (after receiving his red hat) to preside at a Mass for the contras and their supporters, before returning to his own Diocese. The parallel would be as though Cardinal Sin of Manila continued to support the factions in the Philippines that advocate the return of Marcos and stopped in Hawaii to lead them in a celebratory Mass on his way back from the Eternal City. The second condition which created the Confessing Church of Germany in the '30s is with us today — namely, the demonic misuse of faith.

The manipulation of religion and of theological and spiritual symbols finally evoked the convocation of Dahlem which created the Confessing Church. Have we reached the same point? Today one serious presidential candidate is organizing his campaign on the basis of his television evangelism empire, and he equates Ronald Reagan's policies with the requirements of religious faith. Let us not be too shocked at this, since the President himself has warmly encouraged that trend. It should be recalled that when he gave his famous "evil empire" speech to the National Association of Evangelicals in Florida, Ronald Reagan also told that audience that "the Lord Jesus himself summons us to fight against this evil with all our strength." Thus we witness an astonishing picture: an ex-movie star who never goes to church, a sworn enemy of porn whose son is an editor of *Playboy*, has become not just the political but the spiritual leader of the political right. In short we face today in the United States virtually all the conditions which produced the Confessing Church in Germany in the '30s.

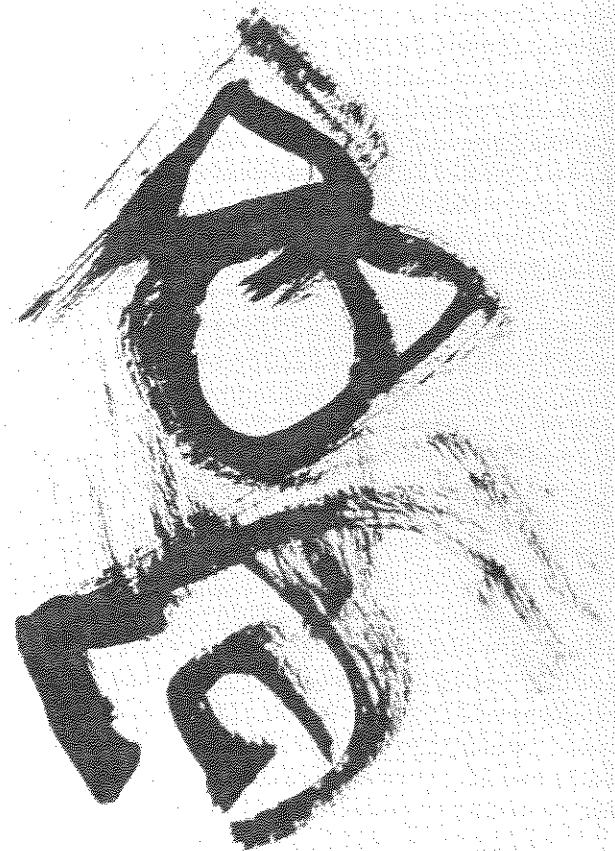
Can we learn from their experience? I think we can, but we must recognize that the memory of that Church comes to us through a hazy mixture of fact and fiction. It is a story with elements of myth as well as of reality. The people who lived and worked in that Church point out its limitations and warn against them. We cannot and should not emulate the Confessing Church of Nazi Germany. Reagan is not Hitler. Pat Buchanan is not Goebbels. America is not Nazi Germany. The differences mean that what we confess today, though it springs from the same Gospel they confessed, must assume a different focus.

The Confessing Church of the '30s was a curious brew of different people who came together at first mainly to keep the new German government out of Church affairs. When I lived in Berlin, an original founder of the Confessing Church told me when he attended one of the first gatherings in Dahlem, he noticed that some pastors there were wearing Nazi party buttons. Many who organized the Confessing Church had high hopes for the leadership of Adolf Hitler and for the *Deutsche Stundes*, the program of reform and renewal they thought Hitler and his Party brought to Germany. Their objection was not to the Nazis *per se* but to the way that Party and the government it controlled were dealing with the Church.

We should also remember that at first the Confessing Church did not object to the racist Nuremberg laws. They objected only to their application in the Church. Why did it take what in hindsight appears to have been a painfully long time for Christians in Germany to see that organized anti-Semitism and the Nazis programs were morally wrong even when they did not touch baptized Jews? This vexing question has led one sympathetic Jewish observer to ask why the Church mainly objects to murder when it is murder in the cathedral. I think the answer to both questions can be found in part in the theology of the Confessing Church.

At the theological level the Confessing Church voiced its opposition to any mediator of God other than Jesus Christ himself. They put it this way to challenge the notion that the Volk or the *Fuehrer* could be mediators of God's grace. The slogan was *Sola Christus*. This seemed a sound theological position at the time, even though veterans of the Church struggle such as Eberhard Bethge admit in retrospect that the slogan made it virtually impossible for Christians to find common theological ground with Jews in their efforts. The difficulty with this utter rejection of any historical mediator of grace is that it leads to an oppositional stance which, though it is understandable in a tyranny, does not encourage any positive alternative. It allows one to say a resounding *Nein!* to Hitler, but it does not allow for anything more than a timid *Ja* to any historical alternative.

The later years of Dietrich Bonhoeffer provide a parable of how opposition must find its way into something positive or it becomes merely despair and posturing. Bonhoeffer at first resisted joining any movements trying to displace Hitler in order to put another government into power. Only slowly and step-by-step did he see that in the political realm in which we all must live, opposition becomes vacant and formal unless it leads us to support of an alternative, even though the alternative will never be perfect. Like some other members of the Confessing Church he hesitated to endorse any political movement lest it appear that he shrank from the strictly *Sola Christus* theological basis of the Confessing Church. The problem of the German Confessing Church of the '30s was that it was able to say No, but had a hard time saying Yes. This is not a cheap criticism made from the outside at a safe distance. It is the thesis of many, including Bethge, who devoted themselves sacrificially to that Church.



To say No in God's name is much more than nothing. It is valuable and right. And it can cost a lot. However, it is not enough. A Confessing Church must not only condemn, it must prophesy. It must not only expose the false idols of the ruler, it must also take the risk of celebrating where and how God is moving, as God always has, to liberate the oppressed and the captives from their tormentors. The Confessing Church must nurture and support those who take its word seriously. How can a Confessing Church in the United States today move from merely saying No to saying Yes?

I believe the most legitimate heir of the Confessing Church of the '30s and the Freedom Movement of the '60s can be found today in the Christian-based communities and Liberation Theology movements of the Third World. Recall that toward the end of his life, Bonhoeffer wrote from his prison cell that in years to come the Church would have to learn to hear the Gospel "from the point of view of those who are tyrannized and oppressed, from the perspective of the outsiders and the marginalized." Bonhoeffer was more prescient than he knew. Even as he sat in his concentration camp cell, the seeds of this next important theological stage were being sown. Within a few miles of Bonhoeffer's prison, in the wretched factories to which French and Polish workers had been transported, Catholic priests began to work alongside these labor slaves. Out of their experience came the *Mission de France*, the worker-priest movement of the

post-war period. Cardinal Suhard of Paris expressed most poignantly the pain which eventually resulted in the worker-priest experiment. On December 5, 1948 he wrote:

Do you understand the anguish I suffer? It haunts me. It is an obsession that will not leave me. When I go through the suburbs with their gloomy factories or the brightly lit streets of central Paris, I find the sight of the crowds, now elegant and now wretched, so heart-rending that it hurts me. I do not have to look far for a theme for my meditation. It is always the same — the wall dividing the Church from the masses — a wall that must at any cost be battered down in order to bring back to Christ the multitudes that have lost Him. That is why we were glad to entrust our mission to Paris to certain of our priests, pioneers of the advanced guard.

Later, another leader of the worker-priest movement, Monseigneur Chappoulie said: "Priests must go to meet the factory workers on their own ground, in order to share their work and their troubles, to become like unto them even as the Son of God by His incarnation made himself like unto men, His brethren."

The Papal Nuncio in Paris at the time of the worker-priest experiment was none other than Angelo Roncalli, who became Pope John XXIII. During Roncalli's pontificate, the Second Vatican Council took place. During this Council, the bishops of the Third World received the inspiration they carried back to their own countries. In Latin America these bishops first met at Medellin and later at Puebla and announced to the world that the Church could no longer be neutral or merely oppositional. It now would take a "preferential option for the poor." It had to say not only No to the oppressor but Yes to the oppressed.



I believe that Liberation Theology and the base communities' movements from which it has arisen are genuine heirs of the Confessing Church. Neither the theology nor the base communities are infallible. They are vigorous and rambunctious, and they make mistakes. Nonetheless, they represent a movement that takes Bonhoeffer literally and examines the Gospel from the point of view of the excluded and disinherited. The main contribution of base communities and of Liberation Theology is to allow Christians to say an emphatic Yes, and not just No. It allows us to recognize that God does continue to mediate signs and portents of a reign of peace and justice which is to come. It allows us to savor and celebrate the first fruits of that for which we pray and labor even while the Lord continues to tarry.

Obviously to say both Yes and No, a Confessing Church must take risks. The misuse of religion, for example, requires us to go beyond merely advocating the presence of "religion" in the public square and to ask what that "religion" should be saying and doing. In many cases we will have to oppose what some religious spokesmen are saying both in the public square and elsewhere. This means saying No. But we must also support these movements, religious or secular, which bring the good news of the Kingdom to the disinherited. This means saying Yes, and that is always a risky business. George Hunsinger criticized me in the pages of this journal for unduly identifying the Gospel with a political program. Of course anyone who, as a Christian, advocates a political alternative in the secular realm places himself or herself in grave danger of being misunderstood. What is important is that we are confessing. We are not declaring an infallible and eternal truth. We are giving testimony with our voices and with our lives to what we believe God is doing and what we believe the Gospel requires and promises us in our day.

I believe it is a mistake for Hunsinger to identify my effort with Richard John Neuhaus' suggestion that religion should have its place in the public square. I believe in religious freedom, and I vigorously support the rights of all religious groups to speak. But those of us who were reared on the theology of Karl Barth recognize that religion as much as irreligion can be a dangerous and devilish enterprise. Satan himself we know can quote Scripture eloquently. As servants of the gospel, we are often called to criticize and oppose both "religion" and anti-religious movements as vigorously as we support others. Our era has churned up a large number of new religious movements and reawakened slumbering movements of the past. We cannot simply advocate that all of them (regardless of what they teach) should be listened to simply because they are, or claim to be, "religious." The Aryan church which has sprung up in the Midwest, the T.V. evangelists, Scientology — claim to be religious movements. The Ku Klux Klan claims to champion Christianity and the white race. Jesus Christ, however, was no champion of religion. Nor can we simply settle for defending religion. We must take another step and ask the content that religion is advocating. So our confession must have a content.

What should a Confessing Church be confessing in the United States today? An answer to this question would require a second article. May I suggest, however, that a rereading of the Gospels, aided by the light cast on them by the experience of those who are poor and excluded will help us formulate an answer. Jesus was not a politician, nor a revolutionary in the sense of Che Guevara. But he did not hesitate to identify himself with the crowds who were viewed as politically subversive by those who watched them uneasily out of the windows of the Roman barracks and the Temple. Jesus was willing to allow himself to be understood, or misunderstood, as a political figure to make the point that the Kingdom he was introducing and embodying encompasses not only the spiritual but also the secular realm. He exhibited a "preferential option for the poor," especially for debt prisoners, prostitutes, the sick and outcasts. He taught them and us to pray for a Kingdom that would come not in some other dimension but "on earth as it is in heaven." He was executed in a manner reserved for subversives, between two bandits, by an imperial authority who obviously judged him as a threat to *pax Romana*. If those of us who move in the direction being suggested by Liberation Theology are accused, as we often are, of "politicizing the Gospel," then a previous question is, how did the Gospel ever get so de-politicized?

Theologically, the underlying problem of the Confessing Church of Germany was that it did not put a sufficient emphasis on the Jesus of the Gospels. Its theology, drawn from Karl Barth and the fresh new thinking of the dialectical movement, was predominantly Pauline. There was little emphasis in the Confessing Church of the '30s on discipleship. The leaders rarely preached about following Jesus. It produced heroic figures and left us a worthy legacy. However, merely to emulate the Confessing Church of the '30s would betray its spirit. We cannot allow theologians of fifty years ago to do our work. We cannot allow the situation of the '30s to overshadow the reality we cope with today.

There is another important difference between today and the '30s. The pastors and theologians of the Confessing Church at first were largely speaking in defense of others. They became advocates of the voiceless and powerless of Hitler's Third Reich. Today by the providence and mercy of God we are not in that situation. In our time those who are set upon by the tyrants are no longer voiceless. Like the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, those who are tracked down by hired mercenaries of the Pentagon and the CIA are fighting back themselves. Men and women and children of the hundreds of thousands of Christian base communities in Latin America whose major enemies today are hunger and disease as well as governmental oppression need our prayers and support. But they are not powerless or voiceless. They are able and willing to cry out and fight back themselves. Can we learn to be a Confessing Church in this new situation?

Fortunately for many of us, the Freedom Movement of the '60s provided a valuable transition from the Confessing Church into the Liberation Movement. During the '60s we who were white had to learn, sometimes painfully, that black people are able to speak and act for themselves. We had to learn to be servants and not leaders, to be allies and not advocates. We had to learn to think through our own well-formulated theologies from what at first appeared to be the primitive and unlettered rhetoric coming from black pulpits and welling out of the hearts of black church choirs across the tracks all over America, a hard lesson, but many of us learned it. The lesson was that we were being asked to say Yes to a movement in which Christ was present and God was moving in our midst. Merely to oppose racism and segregation in the early '60s was not enough. Merely to say No was insufficient. Thank God Martin Luther King among others taught us how to say Yes.

Do we need a Confessing Church in America today? Yes. We need it because the Gospel always requires us to confess our faith. It requires us to follow Him who calls us to bear His cross, to face the Pilates and the Sanhedrins of our time, to stand up not just against evil, but for God's reign. We need a Confessing Church today which can say Yes to what God is doing in our day.



Karl Barth and the Church Struggle in South Africa

John W. De Gruchy

By way of introduction allow me the liberty of sharing two memories. The first is the memory of an editorial in a South African denominational magazine, *The Congregationalist*, written in the early '50s. The editor was bemoaning the fact that so many Dutch Reformed ministers in South Africa supported apartheid. No wonder, he argued, because if you visited their studies you would see that their bookshelves are lined with Calvinist volumes including many by Karl Barth! The second is the memory of hearing Professor B. B. Keet deliver a lecture on the occasion of the centenary of the Dutch Reformed theological

seminary at Stellenbosch in 1959. He chose as his theme the development of Dutch Reformed theology during the past hundred years.¹ In the course of the lecture he dealt extensively with the influence of Karl Barth, expressing the hope that in spite of some points of relatively minor disagreement, the Dutch Reformed church would respond positively to his challenge.

It is worth pondering these two reactions to Karl Barth. The first by an English-speaking minister in the liberal tradition who failed to distinguish Barth either from Calvinist theologians of the past, or, more seriously, from those neo-Calvinist theologians who provided theological legitimization for apartheid. The second reaction to Barth, by a distinguished Dutch Reformed theologian, by then already well-known for his strong critique of apartheid, demonstrated that he was aware of Barth's significance for the revitalising of Reformed theology and the witness of the Church against racism in South Africa.² The Church struggle in South Africa has since shown that Keet's perception was correct.

Barth's theology, however, cannot be regurgitated in our context as though it provides us with a ready made theology that simply needs to be repeated. Such Barthianism is unhelpful, and contradicts Barth's own understanding of theology as a task that has to be undertaken afresh in every new situation. Indeed, the very nature of Barth's theology, its polemical beginnings, and its development in fresh directions over a long period of time, should make us wary of regurgitation. We need, rather, to keep firmly in mind Eberhard Jungel's dictum that "theology can only honour Karl Barth by steadfastly 'doing its thing.'"³ Our task is to listen carefully to the Word of God as this Word speaks to us today, and in so far as Barth's theology enables us to do this better, his insights need to be integrated into what we have to do.

¹B. B. Keet, "Honderd Jaar van Teologie in Voelvlug," *Ned. Geref. Theologiese Tydskrif*, Vol. 2 No. 11 (March 1960).

²B. B. Keet, *Whither South Africa?* (Stellenbosch: University Publishers, 1955). See J. J. F. Durand, "Afrikaner Piety and Dissent," *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naudé*, Charles Villa-Vicencio and John W. de Gruchy, eds. (Cape Town: David Philip; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 45ff.

³Eberhard Jungel, "Karl Barth zu Ehren," *Karl Barth — 1886-1968*, quoted by Paul Lehmann, "Karl Barth, Theologian of Permanent Revolution," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol. 28 (1972), p. 81.



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My own conviction is that Barth must be appropriated in South Africa in two ways. Firstly, by taking seriously the radicality of his Christology demonstrated, for example, in his unequivocal rejection of Nazism at Barmen. And, secondly, by being in discussion with the way in which that Christology is developed, especially in the doctrine of Reconciliation, in the *Church Dogmatics*. On the one hand, Barth provides us with resources for radically challenging those theologies which legitimate injustice and oppression; on the other hand, he provides us with an alternative theology for the Church and its public responsibility. With this in mind, I have chosen to explore three themes: (1) Racism and the Confession of Jesus Christ, (2) Reconciliation and the Liberation of the Oppressed, (3) Resistance and the Prayer of the Church.

Racism and the Confession of Jesus Christ

By the early '30's Barth, along with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, recognized that the time had definitely come when the Church could no longer remain silent, especially in Germany. A *status confessionis* had arrived which required that the Church declare anew and unequivocally that Jesus Christ is Lord in the most concrete possible way. For Barth as for Bonhoeffer, this meant the rejection of National Socialism and its Aryan programme as anti-Christian.

There can be no doubt that the Barmen Declaration and the story of the confessing Church struggle in Germany, and especially the witness of Barth and Bonhoeffer have decisively influenced the Church struggle in South Africa during the past twenty-five years.⁴ It is doubtful whether we in South Africa would ever have come to the realization that a *status confessionis* exists in our situation, and that apartheid must be rejected as a heresy, unless we had had before us their testimony and were able to learn from their theological insight. Of course, this has not meant that we simply have had the task of reaffirming the Barmen Declaration. Rather, as Barth himself taught, we have had the task of confessing Jesus Christ concretely in terms which relate directly to our situation. This is the significance, firstly of *The Message to the People of South Africa*, (1968); secondly, of the *Belhar Draft Confession of Faith*, (1982) of the Dutch Reformed Mission church; and, thirdly, of the latest and most radical of all theological attacks upon apartheid, *The Kairos Document*, (1985).⁵

⁴See my essay, "Towards a Confessing Church: the Implications of a Heresy," *Apartheid is a Heresy*, John W. de Gruchy and Charles Villavicencio, eds. (Cape Town: David Philip; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

⁵Ben J. Marais, *Colour: Unsolved Problem of the West* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1952), pp. 301ff.

While there are surprisingly few references in Barth's *Church Dogmatics* to the phenomenon and problem of racism as such, from beginning to end his theology stands in contradiction to it. Indeed, whether we consider his understanding of the Covenant or Creation, his Christology, anthropology, or his ecclesiology, we soon discover that they all bear witness to God's reconciliation of all men and women and of their responsibility for each other. Human beings, according to Barth, are only human in this relationship to each other under God.⁶

In 1928, five years before he began to challenge the anti-Semitic racism of National Socialism, and long before Europeans in general in post-Second World War Europe even became aware of their relationship to colonial racism, Barth showed an existential awareness of the problem in his lectures on *Ethics*. In examining the issues involved in the human need to appropriate things for the sake of "the will to live," he wrote:

When members of the white race all enjoy every possible intellectual and material advantage on the basis of the superiority of one race and the subjection of many other races, and of the use that for centuries our race has made of both, I myself may not have harmed a single hair on the heads of Africans or Indians. I may be friendly toward them. I may be a supporter of missions. Yet I am still a member of the white race which, as a whole, has obviously used very radically the possibility of appropriation in relation to them. My share in the sin against Africa or Asia for the last hundred or fifty years may be very remote or indirect, but would Europe be what it is, and would I be what I am, if that expansion had never happened?⁷

This is a very revealing comment. It shows Barth's awareness that racism is far more than simply a matter of bad education and social-psychology; it is inseparable from human greed, not only at the micro-economic level of a particular country but also at the macro-level of international trade. Barth's long-standing commitment to democratic socialism confirms that for him the problem of racism and economic injustice or poverty cannot be separated.

⁶See especially Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), Para. 45.

⁷Karl Barth, *Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), p. 164.

Reconciliation and the Liberation of the Oppressed

The Kairos Document rejects the way in which "reconciliation" is misused in what it calls "Church Theology".

In our situation in South Africa today it would be totally un-Christian to plead for reconciliation and peace before the present injustices have been removed. Any such plea plays into the hands of the oppressor by trying to persuade those of us who are oppressed to accept our oppression and to become reconciled to the intolerable crimes that are committed against us. That is not Christian reconciliation, it is sin. It is asking us to become accomplices in our own oppression, to become servants of the devil.⁸

Barth's doctrine of reconciliation was firmly grounded in his Christology, and it is precisely his Christology which enables him to distinguish and yet affirm an intrinsic relationship between reconciliation with God and socio-political liberation. Just as for Barth there is a very close connection between reconciliation and justification, and between justification and social justice, so Barth dialectically related the Gospel of God's reconciliation to the establishment of a just peace in the world.

While ultimately, or eschatologically, reconciliation and a just social peace are the same, penultimately, that is, "in between the times," they cannot be equated. Hence Barth's eschatological reservation which prevents him, and rightly so, from equating socio-political solutions with the coming kingdom of God. At best such solutions can only partially point to what is yet to come. Nevertheless, that they can do this is of fundamental importance, because what is at stake here is the provisional approximation to the coming kingdom, the present though incomplete realization of God's reconciliation in Christ in the midst of the world.

For Barth, God's reconciliation of the world to himself has taken place in and through the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is an objective "given." For Barth, this act of reconciliation, in a profound sense, precedes rather than comes after the creation and fall of humanity as in more traditional dogmatics. For Barth, the Christian community or church is the "provisional representation" of the sanctification of all humanity, and therefore of God's reconciliation of the world to himself.

The goal in the direction of which the true Church proceeds and moves is the revelation of the sanctification of all humanity and human life as it has already taken place *de iure* in Jesus Christ. In the exaltation of the one Jesus, who as the Son of God became a servant in order as such to become the Lord of all men, there has been accomplished already in powerful archetype, not only the cancellation of the sins and therefore the justification, but also the elevation and establishment of all humanity and human life and therefore its sanctification.⁹

⁸"The Kairos Document," Article 3.1, *The Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, Vol. 53 (December 1985); and *The Kairos Document* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

⁹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2, p. 620.

The fundamental difference between the Church and the world is that the former recognizes, acknowledges, confesses and seeks to express God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ in its life, whereas the world fails to recognize and acknowledge what God has in fact done. The task of the Church is, therefore, to enable the world to discover the reality of God's reconciliation in Christ, and to express it, however inadequately, here and now in society.¹⁰ The Church is thus a sign of the new humanity which God is creating in Christ, having broken down the walls which divide the human race into warring factions.

How then, is the Church to proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation so that it enables rather than hinders the process of just social transformation and liberation? Barth would undoubtedly respond that the task of the Church in this regard is simply to be the Church, that is, to demonstrate in the world the power of the Gospel.¹¹ But for Barth this was not understood as the Church being neutral in the political struggle for justice and liberation. Barth makes it very clear time and again that the Church has to take sides, another affinity he shares with *The Kairos Document*. Barth wrote in his letter to the French Protestants in December 1939:

Precisely because the Church knows about justification which we men cannot attain by any means for ourselves, she cannot remain indifferent. She cannot remain "neutral" in things great and small where justice is at stake, where the attempt is being made to establish a poor feeble human justice over against overwhelming, flagrant injustice.¹²

Resistance and the Prayer of the Church

The relationship between the State and those churches in South Africa which have opposed apartheid since 1948 has become increasingly strained and problematic. The almost built-in tension between so-called English-speaking churches and an Afrikaner Nationalist government, derived from a long history of cultural and political conflict between the Afrikaner and the English in South Africa, has been exacerbated by, *inter alia*, the World Council of Churches Programme to Combat Racism, the "radicalization" of the South African Council of Churches and its member churches, support for those engaged in certain forms of civil disobedience and for the day of prayer to end unjust rule, and most recently by the Harare Declaration of the South African member churches of the WCC.

¹⁰Jan Lochman, *Reconciliation and Liberation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), written from the perspective of Barth's theology.

¹¹See, for example, Barth, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community," *Against the Stream* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1954), pp. 19, 22ff.

¹²Contained in an Appendix written by Barth in October 1940 in A Letter to Great Britain from Switzerland (London: The Sheldon Press, 1941), p. 34.

The so-called English-speaking churches are, of course, politically divided and polarized within themselves, so their stand against apartheid is often ambiguous and reluctant, and their theology, as *The Kairos Document* maintains, may even serve the interests of the status quo. At the same time, it is true that as black majority churches, at least officially as institutions, they are supportive of those who are struggling to bring about just social transformation. Inevitably this stance on the side of those struggling for liberation, and sometimes direct involvement in the struggle, means confrontation and sometimes stormy conflict between Church and State, even though it may be interspersed by lulls and attempts to relate more positively. Clearly the State security apparatus regards such churches as a threat to the security of State, and much is done to discredit their work and ministry.

In the situation of the South African churches it becomes crucial that the Church continually assess its role in society and, more specifically, its responsibility towards the State. Barth's understanding of the relationship between Church and State is of considerable help in clarifying the issues. I refer especially to his essays "Gospel and Law" (1935), "Church and State" or better, "Rechtfertigung und Recht" (1938), and "Christian Community and Civil Community" (1946).

In "Rechtfertigung und Recht," written against the background of the situation in Nazi Germany, Barth's concern is the relationship between the Reformation teaching on "justification by faith" and the political responsibility of the Church in the struggle for social justice. For Barth, the Reformers implied a connection, and demonstrated that the two are not in conflict with each other. However, they failed to make the connection clearly and draw out its practical implications. Indeed, when they began to talk about the political responsibility and task of the Church they appealed more to the Law than to the Gospel. A serious consequence of this separation of the Law and Gospel, and the development of political ethics on the basis of Law rather than Gospel, has been the pietistic withdrawal of vast sections of the Church from any political responsibility of involvement in the struggle for justice. This has been particularly true in South Africa, especially amongst white Christians. Justification before God has been separated from the pursuit of God's justice in the world. Thus, Barth asks, "is there an actual, and therefore inward and vital, connection between the two realms?"¹³ In a situation where pseudo-piety both within the Church and the State has kept these two realms strictly apart, this question is of fundamental importance.

¹³Karl Barth, "Church and State," *Community, Church and State* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 106.

Barth speaks to the problem by examining Romans 13:1-7, which, as *The Kairos Document* points out, has been so misused in South Africa in support of the status quo and against those churches and Christians who are critical of the State. Contrary to such abuse, Barth maintains that "the last thing this instruction implies is that the Christian community and the Christian should offer the blindest possible obedience to the civil community and its officials." He continues:

What is meant is (Rom. 13.6f.) that Christians should carry out what is required of them for the establishment, preservation and maintenance of the civil community and for the execution of its task, because, although they are Christians and, as such, have their home elsewhere, they also live in this outer circle. Jesus Christ is still its centre: they too are responsible for its stability.¹⁴

It is important to note Barth's final comment that Christians are responsible for the stability of society and that this is said within the context of refusing to give to civil authority any blind unqualified allegiance. Barth did not believe that social democracy could ever be equated with the coming Kingdom of God. He did believe that it was more on line with it than other forms of government.



¹⁴Barth, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community," *Against the Stream*, p. 24.

The Church is always a stranger on earth because it is anticipating that which is to come. In proclaiming the Kingdom of God, God's righteousness and justification, the Church is not claiming to be the new order, nor is it denying the right of the State to exist and exercise its authority; rather, the Church is proclaiming its hope, it is witnessing to the transient character of the present order, it is expressing its qualified and critical rather than unconditional obedience to the State. Therefore, the more the State claims to be absolute the more the Church is in conflict with it. The Church cannot claim to be the State, but neither can the State claim to be the Church and in the name of God legitimate its policies.

Barth accepts the need, then, for the Christian to pay taxes as he also does the need to participate in the military and defend the State when it is unjustly threatened. But he categorically rejects any right which the State may claim to demand of its citizens and therefore the Church a particular *Weltanschauung*, imposed from without (i.e. by the State).

When the State begins to claim "love," it is in the process of becoming a Church, the Church of a false God, and thus an unjust State. The just State requires, not love, but a simple, resolute, and responsible attitude on the part of its citizens.¹⁵

It is noteworthy, especially in relation to the "End Conscription" debate in South Africa today, that in his 1928 lectures on *Ethics* Barth said:

Ethically, the most dangerous form of participation in war is not, then, that of service in the infantry, the artillery, or even the poison-gas corps, but undoubtedly that of the chaplains' service, because this is the place where it is so uncannily easy to betray the cause of ethics publicly and to promote that evil ideology instead of ethical reflection.¹⁶

It is within this context alone that we can understand Barth's insistence upon the service of the Church towards the State as resistance and prayer, and to see that these two are not poles apart but belong together. As Barth put it in the final fragment of his *Church Dogmatics*, in the Church's struggle for human righteousness it has to "revolt against disorder."¹⁷

Barth regards intercession for the State as the primary task of the Church in relation to the State. This means praying for the welfare of those in authority, and that they will be enabled to exercise their authority justly. But it is also a reminder that their authority is derived from God and not themselves. Prayer for the State is a reminder of the limits to its authority. This task of intercession becomes more urgent and necessary the more the State becomes unjust, opposes the preaching of God's righteousness and justification, and thereby destroys and annuls itself.¹⁸

¹⁷Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/4, p. 205ff.

¹⁸Barth, *Against the Stream*, p. 17.

¹⁵Barth, *Community, Church and State*, p. 143.

¹⁶Barth, *Ethics*, p. 153.



Indeed, the Church's opposition to an unjust State is not an action against the State, it is service rendered on behalf of the State. In this way the Church's witness preserves the State, "it defends the State against the State," even though political control of the State may change. It is in this sense that the call by the SACC in 1985 to pray for a change of government in South Africa must be understood. Such prayer is on behalf of the State, not against it, because it is prayer that God's kingdom "will come on earth as in heaven." And, as Barth wrote to the French Protestants in 1940, such "prayer will not lead us away from political thought and action of a modest but definite kind, but will rather lead us directly into purposeful conflict."¹⁹

The Church has, therefore, the awesome responsibility of discerning the character of the State, and thereby determining what its response should be in each historical circumstance. The response always arises out of its witness to the Gospel and therefore its calling to be the Church, but what that prayer and action may be will depend upon the face which the State adopts. Christian perceptions of the State in South Africa vary a great deal depending on the social location of the people. For some the State is presently governed by a Christian government, for others, it is a tyrant (*Kairos Document*), and there are various positions in between. If, as many of us believe, apartheid and all that goes with it is essentially destructive of human life, and therefore a form of disorder no order, lawlessness not law, then it becomes the duty of the Church to resist it and through prayer and action work towards the transformation of society along lines which lead towards the coming kingdom of God even if that must always be beyond our human endeavours. □

Two Consciences: An Afro-American Reflection On "Barth, Barmen and The Confessing Church Today"

Riggins R. Earl, Jr.

There cannot be two consciences, one in civil and another in political life.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

George Hunsinger's "Barth, Barmen and The Confessing Church Today" forced me to reflect on life for Afro-Americans since the Barmen Confession fifty years ago. A half-century ago, my father, fifteen years old, lived on a farm in the northwestern section of South Carolina. Three years later he hoboed a freight-train to the nation's capital in search of the promised land. Every black American of his day longed for a place where job opportunities would flourish and white persecution cease. That Afro-American generation, primarily of rural origin, went to the urban cities by faith: Detroit, Chicago, New York, the District of Columbia. But the color of their skin was a daily reminder, as in the rural south, that they were not in the American inheritance. That generation and their white counterparts were reared on a Sunday School morality of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The variable of racism, however, required that Afro-Americans adjust this moral imperative to their white counterparts. Social customs of a racist society dictated a morality that Afro-Americans "do unto your white neighbors with total disregard of their treatment of you." Violators, white or black, were subject to physical brutalizations and death. In the civil life, white racism required the creation of what Martin Luther King called two consciences, one white and the other black.

World War II demanded a different response to the traditional problem of America's racism. Thousands of Afro-Americans, including my father, answered Caesar's call to defend our nation's honor and "save the world for democracy." Little, perhaps nothing, in their understanding of Christianity equipped them to deal theologically and ethically with war. They had been reared to the beats of "Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to

war" and "I am gonna lay down my burden, down by the riverside, to study war no more." World War II was defined as a Christian nation's crusade against demonic powers graphically described by the Apocalypse of St. John. The calamitous event of the war, however, deepened the split conscience of Afro-American soldiers. They were haunted on battlefields abroad and on the streets at home. How can we defend ourselves and our nation against the enemies abroad and ignore the attacks of white racists at home? Do Caesar and God require us to defend the nation and Christianity abroad and remain helpless at home?

The film and play, *A Soldier's Story*, dramatized Martin King's "two consciences" confronting the American military in World War II. Captain Davenport, a graduate of a predominately black law school, worked methodically to solve the murder of Drill Sergeant Waters in an all-black Army camp in the south. Davenport, after identifying the culprits, two black soldiers charged with killing the black drill sergeant, weeps alone. As Davenport presents his evidence, suspicion grows that Sergeant Waters had been killed by two white officers. Davenport, representing military justice, knows that the American society used different moral and legal standards for evaluating the sacredness of a white man's life in relationship to a black man's life.

In civilian courts blacks traditionally receive lesser sentences for killing other blacks than for killing whites. As black Captain Davenport weeps because he had identified a problem greater than the crime at the Army base, a booming noise erupts. Black soldiers leap for joy. In their moments of hoopla, one black soldier says gleefully, "World War II has been officially declared and blacks will be allowed to fight." Another says, "Look out, Hitler, the niggers are coming to get your ass." For the first time in its history the nation willingly armed its Afro-Americans "to make the world safe for democracy."

The experience of World War II served as a rite of passage for a new generation of Afro-Americans. Caesar made legal the killing of white enemies. Military chaplains, representing the Christian Church, blessed their bravery. Afro-Americans, for one time in history, received the praises of Caesar and God, State and Church.

The experience of that war initiated a process of radical demythologization of Caesar and God. The theatre of war created a stage on which that generation of Afro-Americans proved their capacities to act with courage. The cold realism of disenfranchisement and disinheritance in the land of their birth did not preclude Afro-American soldiers from making the ultimate sacrifice to the cause of the free world. Consciences seared by the branding iron of battle, the surviving sons of war returned to America and reared a new generation of Afro-Americans.

We who answered the call to protest for social justice in the early '60s were the sons, daughters, nieces and nephews of Afro-American World War II veterans. We listened to their torn consciences. In their moments of rage, provoked by the intoxicating drink of cynicism from the cup of war, these dark warriors said war was the only solution to the nation's race problem. This new breed of cynics would no longer be placated by that brand of black religion that taught "you can have this world but give me Jesus," or, "I am gonna lay down my burdens, down by the riverside, to study war no more."

"Once a warrior, always a warrior," they said.

From World War II to the present "the two consciences" problem, Martin King describes, "one civil and another in political life," occurs in significant and organized movements: first, the civil rights movement; second, the black power/black theology movement. Neither has resolved the issue of "two consciences, one in civil and another in political life." Martin King, however, identified the danger and warned of its consequences. He did this in spite of the public abuse that prominent Afro-American civil rights leaders levelled against him following his speech at Riverside Church in New York City in 1967, describing the connection between the civil rights struggle and the Vietnam War.



The problem continues to haunt us. Was King's notion about moral consistency (in both civil and political realms) too idealistic for Afro-Americans who want a piece of the American dream by owning "a piece of Prudential's Rock?" A brief response to these questions and the two movements will be made below.

First: Martin King's Civil Rights Movement. The genesis was the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. His focus was the immoral nature of American social life, particularly in the southeastern United States. White supremacy justified uncivilized behavior against Afro-Americans. King responded by combining Gandhi's method of nonviolence with Jesus' teaching of redemptive suffering. The result was pragmatic. Martin King overcame white supremacy in the Montgomery bus boycott. The details are on record. He became the spokesman to record with his life "there are not two consciences, one in civil and another in political life." The Afro-American college generation of the early '60s, I one of them, embraced King's effort and, in doing so, undermined the foundation of southern segregation. King believed this way would save the soul of the nation (the loved) and the Afro-American (the lover):

For the salvation of our nation and the salvation of mankind, we must follow another way. This does not mean that we abandon our righteous efforts. With every ounce of our energy we must continue to rid this nation of the incubus of segregation. But we shall not in the process relinquish our privilege and our obligation to love. While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the beloved community. (*Strength to Love*, p. 40)

He believed this would empower Afro-Americans to win the double moral victory. He would practice sacrificial love unconditionally in his quest for the beloved community:

To our most bitter opponents we say: We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws, because noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is co-operation with good. Throw us in jail, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be assured that we shall wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win our freedom but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory. (*Ibid.*, p. 40)

His objective, incomprehensible to upwardly aspiring Afro-Americans today, was not "to integrate the Negro into all the existing values of American society." It was to radically restructure "the architecture of American society." Martin King called us to examine old presuppositions and release ourselves from what for centuries has been assumed: "the evils of racism,

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poverty and militarism." The role of the Afro-Americans, he admonished, is that of creative dissenters. Martin wrote to them:

Let us be those creative dissenters who will call our beloved nation to a higher destiny, to a new plateau of compassion, to a noble expression of humaneness. (*Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* p. 133)

This invocation provoked King to remind Afro-American leadership, critical of his position on the Vietnam War, that:

The whole gamut of man's activities today constitutes an indivisible whole. You cannot divide life, social, economic, political, and purely religious, into water tight compartments. . . . Some friends have told me that truth and nonviolence have no place in politics and worldly affairs. I do not agree. ("Address at Howard University," unpublished p.6)

The failure of Afro-American Church leaders to make a public, collective opposition to tyrannical leadership in black Third World countries (e.g. "Baby Doc" of Haiti; Tolbert, the slain president of Liberia) ought to alarm anyone who listened to Martin King. This failure inflicts upon these Afro-American Church leaders, who represent a God who champions the cause of the poor and oppressed, a moral wound. The main-line black denominations (African Methodist Episcopal, Christian Methodist Episcopal, the National Baptist) have had mission stations in these repressive states for decades. They require leaders to make regular visits to the mission sites. Haunting questions: what kept the visiting leadership of the Afro-American churches from witnessing against the blatant sins of exploitation against these people? Why has not one voice from the Church leaders publicly asked for United States' intervention in Haiti, or wherever they have visited? Did the allurements of the ruling elite's decadent wealth blind them to those leader's sins? Have Afro-American Church leaders committed the same sin of ignoring evil that white Church leaders commit when passing through Afro-American ghettos? Afro-American Church leaders have individually condemned tyrannical black leadership. But this is totally inadequate in a society where the collective statement has far greater weight in public opinion than that of any single individual.

Second: *the Black Power/Black Theology Movement*. The Black Power/Black Theology Movement was an inevitable consequence of the Civil Rights Movement. It can be argued that Black Theology should have been the harbinger of the Civil Rights Movement. Martin King, before the "Statement by the National Committee of Negro Churchmen" (July 31, 1966), warned that this society's racist system made for a gross imbalance of power and conscience between black and white Americans. He wrote that the consequence of such gross imbalance of power and conscience was that "conscienceless power encounters powerless conscience, threatening the very foundation of our nation". The statement of "The National Committee of Negro Churchmen" said "black power is rooted in a gross

imbalance of power and conscience between Negroes and white Americans." Consequently:

The power of white men and the conscience of black men have both been corrupted. The power of the white men is corrupted because it meets little meaningful resistance from Negroes to temper it and keep white men from aping God. The conscience of black men is corrupted because, having no power to implement the demands of conscience, the concern for justice is transmuted into a distorted form of love, which, in the absence of justice, becomes chaotic self-surrender. Powerlessness breeds a race of beggars. We are faced now with a situation where conscienceless power meets powerless conscience, threatening the very foundations of our nation. (Quoted in Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone, *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, Orbis Books, 1979)

Black Theology was born in the academic community, where the phenomenon of religion is the subject of rational inquiry. James Cone and J. DeOtis Roberts each claims to be the father. For this and other reasons, the two most significant spokespersons of Black Theology have been at loggerheads. Would the notion of Black Theology have been perceived differently had its earliest advocates allowed internal debate in the Afro-American community? The collection *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, edited by Wilmore and Cone, shows how once-radical language can become sterile and tame when all contributors agree on the rhetoric. No contribution by J. DeOtis Roberts or William Jones is in the collection. The editors' rationale for the exclusion of Roberts and Jones fails because the omission weakens their case for Black Theology as liberation theology for black people. (They write: "This book is primarily about the movement aspect of Black Theology. For this reason it focuses on the documents and shorter writings that gave shape to the effort made by many people, within and outside the churches, to advance the witness of black religion in the arena of political and social action. The longer contributions of writers such as J. DeOtis Roberts, William R. Jones, Joseph R. Washington, Jr., Major J. Jones, Cecil W. Cone and Joseph A. Johnson, Jr., belong to the more academic side of the movement where professional theologians argue with one another over the biblical and theological basis of the confrontation with White Theology." (*Black Theology: A Documentary History*, p. 11.) If Black Theology cannot embrace the black community's major contributors to its evolutionary self-conscious development in theology, how can it liberate black people from their white oppressors? Can the advocates of Black Theology avoid the sin of killing off its competitors in Black Theology? These issues involve the survival of Black Theology as liberation theology in the academic community and in the Church.

Black Theology, to be more than an academic exercise as White Theology often is, must resolve the radical disparity between those who think for the Church (academicians) and those who act and speak for the Church (practitioners). Black Theology will be short-lived in the academies of white America unless it is rooted in the Afro-American Church community. Black Theology in the academies of white America with no roots in

black American communities will be a willing handmaiden of the very white theologies it prophesies against. Theologies (Church or academy) reflect some socio-political gathering. More often than not, these theologies are self-serving.

Theology, by whatever name, *liberates*, when God stands against, rather than serves self-interest. The problem that Black Theology (indeed all theology) faces, was made clear four years ago when I joined the faculty of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta. This was a different challenge. I came to Atlanta having taught "religion" for eight years at a major southern state university. I sought the impact Black Theology was having on this new generation of Afro-Americans preparing for ministry. I was stricken. That students were looking for economic security was less unsettling than the means some were using to acquire it. Many were enrolling in the chaplaincy program of the armed services. I asked how they could adjust the call to preach the Gospel of a Crucified and Risen Lord with the militaristic expectations of a sovereign state?

Their explanation was economic security. Many of their black denominations could not guarantee this. Financial security was more important to the youngsters than a conflict of loyalties. I know well the opposition that seminary-trained black clergy, especially female, face from black church leaders, who are in place and without seminary training. But, I am convinced this does not sanction trained seminarians to seek refuge in the armed forces. What is missing in the theological education of the oppressed

when black students, like their white middle-class counterparts, value job security over the call to prophetic ministry? What have their New Testament teachers done with Paul's vocation of tent-maker and witness? I would be arrogant and stupid to ignore my tentative assurance of economic security. Any theology of liberation, if it is grounded on biblical teachings, assumes no permanent security for dwellers in houses of dust and blood.

George Hunsinger's "Barth, Barmen and the Confessing Church Today" reminds me again that the issue of two consciences set by Martin King — "there cannot be two consciences, one in civil and one in political life" — is not easy to resolve. It may well mean that the more Afro-Americans are socialized into middle-class America, the more difficult it will be for them to have a "problem of two consciences, one in civil and another in political life." The material reward of this socialization often makes moral decisions very difficult for the good of the universal, as opposed to the tribal, other.

I was guest speaker at a silk stocking black Church. A young radical stood and announced that Afro-Americans ought not buy anything made out of gold until blacks are freed in South Africa. It was as though he had spoken to a deaf and mute audience. As Afro-Americans face the future, their inheritance and their present is inextricably tied to whatever it means to be American. They must struggle with Martin King's two-consciences problem, "one in civil and another in political life." □



A Response to George Hunsinger

Jacques Ellul

To begin: I want to emphasize my agreement with Professor Hunsinger, first about the necessity of rediscovering the way of a Confessing Church and, second, rejecting "Protestantism Without Reformation." I agree that it is necessary to adopt political and social positions on theological foundations, and that biblical theology carries political/social consequences. But at the same time, the essay raises many questions for me. I shall raise only a few.

First, there is a fundamental difference today between the American churches and the Federation of French Protestants. In general French Protestants follow the orientation of the World Council of Churches (WCC): Come to political decisions; issue statements and proclamations! Official statements from French Protestants support the left, socialism, and (under the guise of defending the poor) all revolutionary movements in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. On the questions of nuclear and conventional weapons, but also artificial procreation, homosexuality, abortion . . . the French Protestant church is perfectly conformed to the majority of our population and brings absolutely nothing specifically *Christian* to the situation. The Federation of French Protestants has no theological thought whatsoever (certainly no more than the World Council of Churches on political problems and intervenes in the most irresponsible way in socio/political matters.¹) What shocks me is that the Federation proclaims what is "good" without having to do "good" and without itself having to take any risks. What would our French pastors do if they suddenly became Ministers of State? I am sure they would do the same things our current ministers do. The Federation's attitude to socio/political issues is totally unrealistic, *not* Christian but "idealistic" in the worst sense of the word. It is one thing to pronounce all sorts of condemnations against the State's politics, stage demonstrations; it is another to take risks. The Federation takes no risks, and this is contrary to the situation of the members of the Synod of Barmen in 1934.

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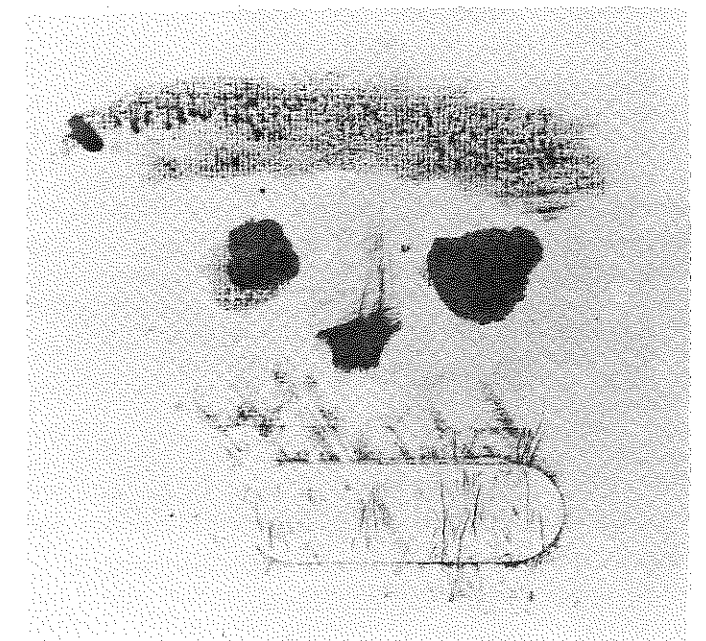
Second, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the vast difference between the United States today and Nazi Germany in the '30s. It is true that the United States is responsible for Hiroshima, the arms build-up and the horrors of the Vietnam War, etc. But there is a difference: the United States has a morality that *officially* condemns these horrors. They have a religion which is *officially* a religion of love and peace. They have signed the Declaration of Human Rights. So, it is possible for Americans to turn against their State when it is wrong and to say, "This is your religion, your morals, your ethics, what you are doing is a horrible violation of your principles." In the Nazi or Communist regimes, it is not the same: Hitler clearly announced his determination to exterminate the Jews and his determination to dominate the world with his theory of the salvation of man through war. When Hitler acted, he simply applied his morals and theories to the situation. The Communists do the same thing. They clearly announce that they seek to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat (in fact, of the Communist party) and consequently annihilate a part of their population. What is there to criticize when the Nazis and the Communists act according to what they have announced? They are justified by their own doctrines. The atrocities perpetrated by the Communists in Vietnam and in Cambodia are worse than the Americans' (and this does not in any way justify the Americans!). Remember: condemnations of guilty officers are possible in the United States, but nothing can be said or done against officers of the Nazi and communistic regimes.

Third: "The End and the Means." I am in complete agreement with Professor Hunsinger about the importance he gives to criticism and understanding of "the means." I have often written that *technique* is precisely the proliferation of "the means." "The means" must be considered before everything else. "Bad means corrupt the best ends." But . . . can abominable "ends" be accepted? In fact, it is unusual to find situations as clear as German Nazism in 1932. Communism may give the illusion of supporting the poor, the oppressed, the colonized, etc. . . . But one must read their theoreticians to appreciate their announced objectives: class war, dictatorship of the proletariat, physical elimination of the "bourgeoisie."

¹ See the World Council of Churches Conference at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1979 on "technique," *Faith and Science in an Unjust World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

Consequently I do not hesitate to say that the American "cause" of the Vietnam War was "just." To fight communism is essential. Wherever communism has spread, there are dictatorships, concentration camps, etc. Communist dictatorship in Vietnam has brought on a million victims, and in Cambodia, two and a half million—many more victims than in the whole Vietnam war. And I would say that the brave people who fought against the Vietnam war, as led by the American government, were right with regard to the atrocious acts connected with this war. However, they are *totally* responsible for these three and a half million victims. I know what I am writing here is going to scandalize the readers of *Katallagete*. But I immediately add this: the United States' enormous error has always been (as their policy in China in the '40s and '50s) the conviction that a communist movement can be suppressed with arms, war, etc. Whatever the strength and the atrocity of the military means, a communist movement will never be destroyed either by war or police force or repression. Any communist movement or government possesses extraordinary tactics and legitimates itself (false, to be sure, yet generally believed) by defending the oppressed. The means used by the United States in Vietnam were not only horrible but also stupid. (American policy in Vietnam was exactly like the McCarthyism of the '50s.) What is the source of this horror and stupidity? For the last twenty years I have had sixty or so American graduate students in my courses. I found them totally ignorant of Marxist-Leninist texts and other major communist authors. Even those who had "taken a course" on Marx in the States had enormous difficulty entering into the reasoning of Marxist epistemology. I fear that the entire American *intellectual training* and *cultural milieu* make it almost impossible for students to understand seriously Marxism-Leninism and the great "strategy-tactics" perfected by the well-known Marxists. And if the students and scholars don't understand, one should not be surprised that their governments can only react to communism with violence. Today we have the same problem with Nicaragua. In other words, a Confessing Church (and I am in total agreement with Professor Hunsinger about "the center" and "the periphery") must now also be *clear-sighted*, *lucid*, and know exactly *what it is talking about*. It was easy with Nazism, it is much more difficult with Communism. The Confessing Church can no longer make simple and obvious commitments ("we are for the poor, the oppressed, against the dictatorships, for human rights," etc). Castro's movement was very appealing before he took power, exactly like the Sandinistas. We ought to have examined their writings and intentions. The "theology of liberation" *may be* (but not necessarily) a wonderful instrument in the hands of the Marxists. In Nicaragua, José Cardenal rejects his priesthood and is ready to persecute the Church for the sake of a communist dictatorship. But (I will repeat it one more time) it is not with the Contras that the Sandinista government will be prevented from becoming communist. If the Contras win, this will simply end with a dictatorship of the right instead of a dictatorship of the left. The poor and the Indians (Meskitos) will have gained nothing.

Finally, I would like to make this observation: the Confessing Church issue raised by Professor Hunsinger focuses on the conflict between the Church and political power, that is, it's better to obey God than men. Now, if this problem remains a real one, I believe that in the present world we cannot limit the conflicts to the themes held by Professor Hunsinger: the policy of the United States toward the Third World, and the development of the means of exterminating entire populations. I must emphasize two urgent dangers. The striking expansion of fundamentalist Islam: the Shi'ites' fanaticism, the proclamation of Jihad and, as a matter of fact, the wars undertaken by Moslems everywhere they are in sufficient numbers. This ought to make us think about the problems of the Third World: for instance, no one speaks of the massacre of the Christian populations in the south Sudan by the Sudan Moslem government. The other danger is the expansion of *techniques* seemingly benign. One example: we are threatened by the "holes" that are produced in the ozone layer by the space rockets and by the wild expansion of the use of neutral gas, freon (for all the aerosols) which is an agent destroying the ozone. If our ozone shield is shattered all mankind will be "grilled," a danger much less visible but more serious than hydrogen rockets. In other words, a Confessing Church must be well-informed on the real problems of society, science, and technique. The affirmation of Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Savior, must not be expressed simply through political opposition to a dictatorship here and there but through a condemnation of all *hybris*: the money, arms and armies, ideology, science—that is, any "religion" presenting another Savior of the World and another Truth. □



Barth, Barmen and America: Lessons of Hindsight

Eric W. Gritsch

God is always prospecting for a Confessing Church, such as the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*) poised against the cultural or German Christians (*Deutsche Christen*). Karl Barth had a sagacity for recognizing this conflict between the Gospel of Jesus Christ and religion, as manifested in the German church struggle (*Kirchenkampf*) of the '30s. He contended that the conflict between Gospel and religion is as old as Christianity: it began with the conflict between the Jewish Christians, led by Peter, and the missionaries to the Gentiles, led by Paul. Acts 15:1-35 describes how the first church convention dealt with this enduring problem. Barth wrote:

We may well say that all conflict in the Church arises because people in the Church fight against grace and therefore, however pious or clever their intentions, cut themselves loose from the commands of the apostles... The Church would be dead if a fight did not flare up within her against all enemies of free grace.¹

George Hunsinger's call for a Confessing Church today, especially in the United States, needs to be seen in the context of Barth's historical vision, which focuses on unconditional loyalty to Jesus Christ. Hunsinger rightly calls this vision "the great lesson from the Confessing Church of yesterday" in his "prospects for a Confessing Church of tomorrow."² This Christocentric focus may not be the issue in the debate Hunsinger has generated, but its application to various Christian situations in history has always caused conflict, be it in the Germany of the '30s or the America of the '80s.

Critical hindsight has always provided realistic clues for prophetic visions, and the following observations may be clues for what may, in light of the German Church struggle under Hitler, be done about Christocentric renewal today.

First, the history of the conflict between the German Christians obedient to Hitler and the Confessing Church refusing its allegiance to him, as well as between the Confessing Church and the Nazi regime, clearly discloses the theological leadership of Karl Barth rather than of others. Even those who, like Hans Asmussen, took somewhat different positions did not attempt to challenge Barth's leadership and, at least during the most critical phase of the Church struggle, remained his comrade.³ It was Barth who orchestrated the theological opposition to Hitler in the Barmen Declaration of 1934 and who attracted a large following in Germany, even though he resided in Switzerland after his dismissal from the University of Bonn in 1935. The Council of

¹Karl Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, P.T.A. Parker, trans., *Ecumenical Studies in History 1* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1965), pp. 13, 14.

²George Hunsinger, "Barth, Barmen and the Confessing Church Today," *Katallagete* (Summer 1985), p. 26.

³Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, John Bowden, trans., German ed., 1975 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 241.

Brethren of the Old Prussian Union, representing the Confessing Church, honored Barth as the principal theological voice opposing Hitler. As they put it in their communication to all member churches, "The cause which he has represented must never again be forsaken by those of us who are in the German Evangelical church."⁴

Second, the Barmen Declaration served as a doctrinal platform for resistance against Nazism, even though it did not create an effective ecclesiastical organization. Those who tried to create organizational structures of resistance were immediately neutralized, if not immobilized, by the well-organized Nazi network after 1936. The Confessing Church asked Dietrich Bonhoeffer to create ecclesiastical resistance organizations like underground seminaries; but he quickly discovered that such resistance could succeed only with the help of members of Germany's social elite. Therefore Bonhoeffer, an ordained member of the Confessing Church, decided to participate in an army plot to assassinate Hitler. He did so with all the caution required of a member of Canaris' counterespionage (*Abwehr*) group.

Leaders of the Confessing Church disapproved of an action that linked Barmen to tyrannicide, and Bonhoeffer made no attempts to persuade others to share his views. But he contended that "costly grace" required the forceful removal of Hitler. "If we claim to be Christians, there is no room for expediency. Hitler is the Antichrist. Therefore we must go on with our work and eliminate him, whether he be successful or not."⁵ It was Bonhoeffer who, in absolute loyalty to Jesus Christ, truly taught and lived out the Barthian distinction between Gospel and religion.

Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ living and incarnate... Costly grace is the sanctuary of God; it has to be protected from the world, and not thrown to the dogs... Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus...⁶

The Confessing Church was no match for Nazism and was quickly neutralized. Bonhoeffer failed to eliminate Hitler. That is why the 1945 Stuttgart Confession of Guilt referred to Barmen and confessed that Christian resistance had been too vague and too hesitant in transforming doctrine into political action. Lu-

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁵Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Man of Vision, Man of Courage*, Eric Mosbacher, Peter and Betty Ross, Frank Clarke, William Glen-Doepel, trans., Edwin Robertson, ed., German ed. 1965 (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 626-27.

⁶Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 2nd. ed., R.H. Fuller, trans., German ed. 1937 (New York: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 47, 48.

⁷John S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 86.

theran quietism had prevailed, misinterpreting Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms to signify a mandate against disloyalty to the State.⁷

Third, the German church struggle had only a limited impact on German Christians after 1945. For a while, the Confessing Church provided excellent leaders like Bishop Otto Dibelius, drawn from the surviving old-men-network, the Council of Brethren (*Bruderrat*). Some survivors, like Martin Niemöller, deplored the fact that the German Evangelical church had once again become a bureaucratic church (*Behördenkirche*), just as it had been in the '30s when it became an easy victim of Nazi tyranny.⁸ Barth was still advocating joyful loyalty to Christ alone, calling for a third Christian position between Western capitalism and Eastern communism and indeed for loyalty to the East German government as long as loyal opposition was possible.⁹ His position aroused mixed reactions on all sides. A member of the Confessing Church living in East Germany told him, "Once again you seem to have chosen to sit on the fence and to sing a song that the roaring lions in the East and the West cannot hear."¹⁰

Part of the historical Christian experience is that a Confessing Church does not endure in its loyalty to Christ but succumbs to the lure of the culture surrounding it, especially if this culture nurtures a religion of warmth and comfort. Barth admitted that he had become unpopular in many quarters of the Church, including the German church, because of his refusal to ally himself with popular causes. Like Luther, he could call himself a court jester who spoke divine truth but was not able to have it accepted as political advice.

Oh, I already anticipate reading the necrology in which people will one day summarily say of me that I earned certain merits in relation to the renewal of theology and to the German church conflict, but that in political respects I was a doubtful will-o-the-wisp.¹¹

Such wit contains serious Christian witness, because it affirms the penultimate, eschatological character of earthly Christian existence. Barth identified himself with concrete political causes, indeed with military causes such as the defense of Switzerland during World War II, but no earthly cause was ever identical, for him, with the divine will in Jesus Christ.

⁸Karl Barth, *Die evangelische Kirche in Deutschland nach dem Zusammenbruch des Dritten Reiches* (Wipkinger Tagung 1945; Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1945), p. 64.

⁹Karl Barth and Johannes Hamel, *How to Serve God in a Marxist Land*, Thomas Wieser, trans., German ed., 1958 (New York: Association Press, 1959), p. 68.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹¹Karl Barth, *How I Changed My Mind*, John D. Godsey, trans. (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966), p. 66. Barth's report about the years 1948-58.

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The German Evangelical church today seems unaffected by the Church struggle of the '30s, and makes little attempt, if any, to create a Confessing Church. To this extent, the Confessing Church was the product of the particularity of Nazi tyranny. East German Marxism has accommodated Christianity and permits Christians to "do their own thing" without much interference, and Christians seem to have adjusted to the situation.

Fourth, hindsight suggests that a restitution of the German Confessing Church is no longer possible. Most efforts at restitution, whether of early or later patterns of Christian life, tend to create merely a frozen people, such as the Amish Mennonites who identify with a specific culture of the past to avoid the pitfalls of modernity. Any attempt to restore the German Confessing Church would result in a similar anachronism.

But this is not Hunsinger's intention. He, like Bonhoeffer, calls for a Confessing Church that would be loyal to Jesus Christ and would therefore resist the politics of nuclear annihilation and reject the assumption (made by Richard John Neuhaus and Harvey Cox) "that religion and culture are related in mutual immanence." Hunsinger declares that such an assumption worships Christ "for reasons of utility."¹² He contends that God might instead prospect for a Confessing Church in the United States which fights racism and injustice, offers sanctuary to political refugees, and opposes the arms race by committing symbolic acts like pouring blood on the floor of the White House. Such a Church would be grounded in prayer, which would lead it into conflict.¹³

The Confessing Church in Germany is dead. Long live the Confessing Church in America? An intriguing question, considering the state of American church affairs. Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the most perceptive analysts of religion in the United States, spoke of the "ironic element in the American situation": a naive, indeed an innocent nation caught in the turmoil of global power politics.

Our situation of historical frustration becomes doubly ironic through the fact that the power of recalcitrance against our fondest hopes is furnished by a demonic religio-political creed which had even simpler notions than we of finding an escape from the ambiguity of man's strength and weakness.¹⁴

To Niebuhr, American culture is in a frustrating dilemma: the naive optimism inherited from the enlightened founding fathers is faced with the cruel reality of modern evil, communism's tyranny or capitalism's pitfalls. This culture, grounded in Enlightenment ideals, is also united with "all schools of modern culture, whatever their differences, in rejection of the Christian doctrine of original sin."¹⁵ Since original sin is, in its most primitive expression, the desire "to be like God"

¹²Hunsinger, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁴Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 3.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 17.

(Gen.3:5)—a desire evident in all lives including that of Christians; it is also "a pretentious denial of human limits." The God of Israel and Father of Jesus Christ warns the people of God "that its confidence in the security of its power will be refuted by history."¹⁶

Barth thought American Christians needed to develop a theology of freedom to become a truly Confessing church. Such a theology would liberate American Christians from their inferiority complex with respect to Europe as well as from a superiority complex with respect to Africa and Asia. During his visit to the United States in 1962, he declared, "Freedom for which you would stand would be the freedom for — I like to say a single word — humanity... A theology of freedom to which the Son frees us, and which, as His gift, is the one real human freedom."¹⁷

The Confessing Church in the United States that Hunsinger advocates needs to be linked to development of a theology of freedom that would provide a basis for taking a critical stand against the Babylonian captivity of denominationalism. The ideology of denominationalism has proscribed the freedom of the Gospel and domesticated it to make it palatable to our narcissistic culture, "American life in an age of diminishing expectations."¹⁸ Any Confessing Church focussing on loyalty to Christ alone will have to battle the admirers of a cultural Christianity that seeks a convenient compromise between the pluriformity of American civil religion and the cruciformity of life with Christ.

Hunsinger's call for a Confessing Church in America, today or tomorrow, must be linked to a realistic analysis of American Christianity which may have to discern the exact spots where God's free grace in Jesus Christ is under pressure. In the German church struggle, it was obvious where grace was under pressure. In the United States, denominationally domesticated Christians may need to be taught what Barth called the ABCs of the faith to discern "the signs of the times." Given the long tradition of weak, if not perverted, Christian formation in worship and education, the task of spiritual rehabilitation appears a gigantic enterprise. Moreover, there is no consensus on whether or how to tackle this task.

It almost seems as though God has moved his attention to the Southern half of the globe, to Latin America, Africa, and Asia, leaving North American and European Christians rearguard actions that hardly resemble the activities of a truly Confessing Church. Some have gone where the action is, and those who have remained may endure much spiritual frustration. Under these circumstances, the call for a Confessing Church may go unheeded.

Perhaps it is divine common sense not to impose on the badly-trained the conflicts that accompanied the German Confessing Church. Nevertheless, "the main thing is the knowledge that God makes no mistakes, and that *Proteus mirabilis* has no chance against him."¹⁹

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 159.

¹⁷Barth, *How I Changed My Mind*, p. 79.

¹⁸Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Warner Books, 1979).

¹⁹Barth, *How I Changed My Mind*, p. 86. Letter of January 25, 1966, to John D. Godsey.

On Learning Simplicity in an Ambiguous Age

Stanley Hauerwas

Responding to Hunsinger's article, "Barth, Barmen and the Confessing Church Today," is no easy matter. I am sympathetic with his basic argument, so I do not feel I have much to add. I share his commitment to the Christological perspective embodied in Barmen (and Barth) as well as the correlative political implications. Like Hunsinger, I have used Barmen as a test case for my thinking about Christian social ethics. For example, I have long thought the crucial question facing any theological position is whether it provides us with the skill to discern (as well as respond faithfully to) the challenge of Hitler.

Having gone on record in basic agreement with Hunsinger's article, I will raise worries about our common commitment to the Barmen confession. Some worries I had before I read Hunsinger's article, but it helped me get a clearer hold on them. All my worries are aspects of the general question, "If Hunsinger is right, what in the world should I (or we) do?"

My first worry is whether using Barmen and Barth as paradigms may cause a misreading of our situation. In an odd way Barth's theology was made for the rise of totalitarianism; there is an "all-or-nothing" quality about Barth's position. Put differently, if Hitler had not come along, Barth would have had to invent him. Of course I do not mean that Barth would have wished a Hitler to exist to confirm Barth's theological perspective, but rather that he was ready to confront a Hitler because of the dramatic character of the recovery of God's Otherness in Christ's humanity.

So I worry that we may try to make our situation "totalitarian" to maintain the power of Barth's no. With Hunsinger I agree that what has been done and is being done to others in the name of the interest of the United States (e.g. the support of "anti-communist" regimes that use torture as State policy) is horrendous. I remain unconvinced that our United States foreign (or domestic) policy is analogous to the one that prevailed at the time of Barmen in Germany in 1934. For example, I am certain the nuclear strategy of the United States cannot be morally justified. But I am not sure if the Barmen Confession's withdrawal of support from Hitler's Reich is a paradigm for us to confront the reality of American nuclear policy.

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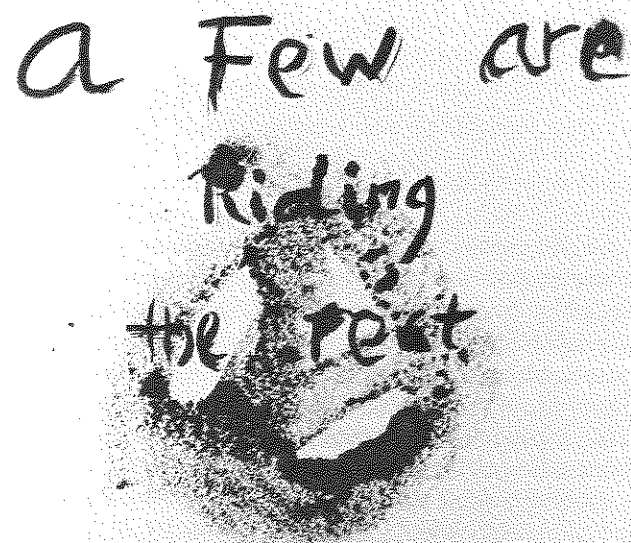
Hunsinger notes that our political situation today is more ambiguous than that faced in Germany, because we are surrounded by "trappings of democracy," but I wonder if he has really taken into account the significance of the "ambiguity." Just as Barth suggested, we should not respond to the State as if we live "in a night in which all cats are grey,"¹ so we should not see our situation as worse than it is to recapture the heroism of Barth's witness. The crucial issue is how we develop discriminating categories from our Christological commitments that will allow us to read the ambiguities of living in America.

Our social order often masks its coercive nature, as well as idealizes our imperial ambitions as a world power; nonetheless I value the "trappings" we have, believing our society morally more viable than that, for example, of East Germany. The question is on what basis I need to make such relative judgments and what theological significance, if any, such judgments have.

Another way to put these worries is to note that Barth and Barmen are notoriously vague about how discriminating judgments are to be made on social and political affairs. Barth's personal ethics and politics may have been at times both better and worse than his theological method would allow. His method of "analogy," developed in "The Christian Community and the Civil Community," is notorious for its inability to control the analogies. To take just one example, Barth suggests, "The Church sees itself established and nourished by the free Word of God—the Word which proves its freedom in the Holy Scriptures at all times. And in its own sphere the Church believes that the human word is capable of being the free voice of this free Word of God. By analogy, it has to risk attributing a positive and constructive meaning to the free human word in the political sphere. If it trusts the word of man in one sphere, it cannot mistrust it on principle in the other."² This may sound right in the abstract, but does that mean Barth would side with the American Civil Liberties Union to permit Nazis to march in Skokie, Illinois? Apart from such concrete questions, we must ask, on the basis of Barth's "process of analogy," whether one can make contradictory social and political institutions and policies legitimate.

¹Karl Barth, *Community, Church, and State* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1960), p. 119.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 176-177.

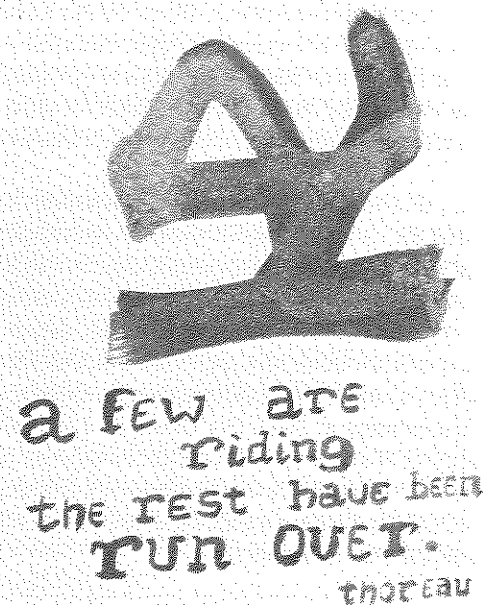


In this respect I think Hunsinger's criticism of Neuhaus needs to take into account the latter's claim that the decisive political challenge of our age is totalitarianism. Neuhaus' judgments about America, which I often find too sanguine, are at least partly based on his sense of the decisive challenge of totalitarian regimes (of the left and right) to our more ambiguous social orders. I think we will make little headway on such issues if we try to argue that the USSR or Chile is really as bad as it seems. Christians must find the means of supporting one another across, and in spite of, the societies in which we find ourselves. This is a vague recommendation, but to try to speak with greater certainty seems to falsify the situation of Christians caught between two imperialistic powers bent on mutual destruction.

Therefore, I believe the Barmen Confession represents for many of us both a resource and a temptation. As a resource, it helps us guard against the constant temptation to accept the terror of the everyday. But we are tempted to make our situation worse than it is in the interest of recapturing a false integrity. Like Hunsinger, I am deeply troubled by the compromised character of American Christianity. Our only hope of a reformed Church in America is one receiving its substance from Jesus of Nazareth, who gives the means to have integrity, even in an ambitious society. (I am less sure than Hunsinger that the "black church" provides a model for the Confessing Church. The habits developed by defending oneself from discrimination can be as destructive as healing.)

My second worry is closely related to the first. It has to do with the issue Hunsinger raises concerning the status of State authority. I think Hunsinger is right to note that there is some authority. I think he is right to note that there is some tension between Article Five of Barmen and Article One. Article One clearly rejects as "false doctrine" that the Church acknowledge any authority apart from the Word of God that might take the form of event, powers, figures and truths. Yet Article Five acknowledges that the "State has by divine appointment the task by means of the threat and exercise of force, according to the measure of human judgment and human ability."³ "Threat and exercise of force" sound much like authorities outside the Word of God as found in Jesus Christ.

My worry in this respect is a bit different than Hunsinger's concern that Article Five not exclude the traditional assumption that "within its own sphere of competence (the State) must be obeyed unconditionally." Rather, my concern is whether Barth's Christological interpretation of the State within the order of redemption may not collapse the necessary eschatological tension between the Kingdom and this world. As a result, Barth's largely implicit theology of the State results in a false utopianism that fails to provide the concrete guidance Christians need to deal with the actual states they confront. By holding up Barmen as the paradigm for us, Hunsinger may give the impression that the challenge for us to be a Confessing Church is specific to our time and circumstance rather than the challenge that always faces the Church in this time between times.



³I am using the text reprinted in Arthur Cochrane, *The Church's Confession Under Hitler* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 241.

Robert Hood, in *Contemporary Political Orders and Christ: Karl Barth's Christology and Political Praxis*, criticizes Barth in a similar fashion. Hood points out that despite Barth's criticism of Western democratic states and their economic systems, he nonetheless maintains that the nearest model which allows the Church the kind of freedom envisioned in the New Testament is the democratic State. To be sure, Barth insists that in the redeemed society the historical capitalist component of the democratic State will be diminished, yet that very claim makes one ask whether "Barth undeliberately may have a kind of Utopian Socialist idea of the same view. By failing to do so some of the critical historical and political analysis of the concept of the State, might not the charge be brought that Barth is also a product of his time in this area or that he is struggling to provide a theological justification for an existing political model."⁴ Barth's failure to provide a realistic and historical account of the modern liberal-pluralistic State made him blind to how those states, "have tried to impose a particular tribal set of values associated with a national economic history."⁵

Hood suggests that Barth's failure to think through the theological status of the State is best seen in his dismissal of anarchy as an alternative to the democratic capitalistic State. Certainly in *The Epistle to the Romans*, Barth at least left open the possibility of the viability of anarchy, but he draws back from the suggestion that disorder may in fact be vehicle for a new order.⁶ In Hunsinger's defense of Barth's view that the State has a limited sphere of competency, which is certainly preferable to the Lutheran two kingdom doctrine, he may fail to see that Barth

⁴Robert Hood, *Contemporary Political Orders and Christ: Karl Barth's Christology and Political Praxis* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1985), p. 186.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 186. In particular Hood notes that Barth underwrote the sacred language of the democratic state — freedom, equality, brotherhood or fraternity — without attending to their historical character. As he says, "The question is whether these, even with a theological interpretation, can be invigorated with a new kind of political substance in a practical way. Might it not be that the political and historical baggage which these terms in the democratic state bring with them are so identified with their administration and practice that when considering the democratic state they cannot be liberated in any radical way, only reformed or expanded" (p. 186). For example Hood points out that "when the middle-classes were establishing the modern democratic nation-state that the concept of freedom was understood as a personal freedom, political freedom, and freedom of assembly for those classes as they sought to compete with the gentry and propertied classes. It (the concept of freedom) was not intended to cover personal freedoms for the poor and proletariat, even in the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen,' as novel as it was at the time," p. 187.

⁶Hood, p. 188.



remained caught by the Constantinian assumption that Christians need to provide a theory of legitimate State authority. A more realistic view, one more in accordance with the New Testament, is that the State simply exists. Our task as Christians is not to justify its existence but to be the kind of community that demands that State to face its limits.

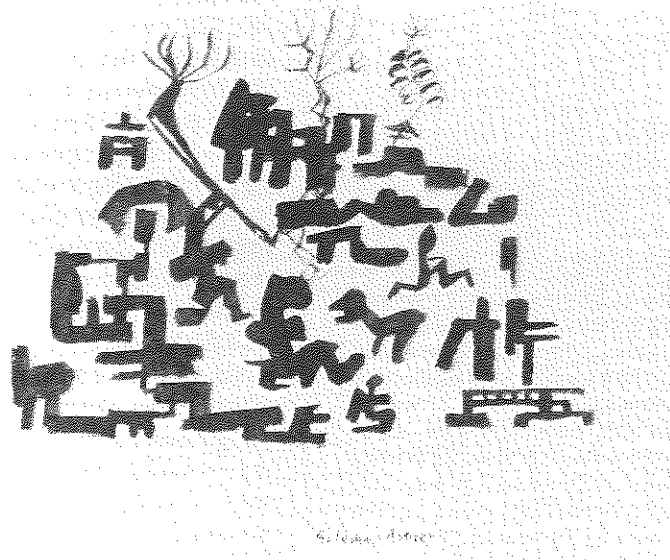
Barth was right when he maintained that the decisive test for any social order was whether it allowed the free preaching of the Gospel. Yet for that test to have power, the concrete ecclesiological implication must be spelled out. For it is not just that the State allows the Church to preach but that the State must allow the Church to be an institution formed by habits that make it possible for people to hear the preached word and live by it. I suspect that something like that is behind Barth's "analogies," but those analogies are not shaped by a real Church capable of challenging a real concrete State. As John Yoder has pointed out, to say the order of the fathered community must be derived from Christology is a free-church move, but Barth simply lacked any empirical models that would give him a sense of what such a Church would look like.⁷ As a result, his theology of the State — that is, his assumption that we need to provide a theological legitimization of the State — remained decidedly Constantinian in spite of powerful counter-directions in other aspects of his theology. Put differently, Barth's Christological justification of the State is so abstract that concrete application always tends to ideological distortions.

⁷John Howard Yoder, "The Basis of Barth's Social Ethics." A paper delivered to Midwestern Section of the Karl Barth Society at Elmhurst, Illinois (September, 1978), p. 8. Yoder suggests, "Barth is a free churchman because of his doctrine of revelation, which demands that he recognize that belief can unite in community only those who respond to the word."

Yet these worries are minor aspects of the deeper worry of trying to understand the implications for my life if Hunsinger is largely right (as I believe him to be). The issue is raised by a remarkable woman, Helen Woodson, whom Hunsinger quotes at the end of his article. Here is a woman who is already doing much through her claiming mentally handicapped children as her own yet who goes to jail protesting our nuclear policy. Most of us feel that goes far beyond the line of duty. Indeed, we may even feel a bit judgmental, thinking she has not considered her responsibility to her children. That kind of "out" seems necessary to us—otherwise, how do we avoid the implication that we should be doing what she is doing? Yet I do not want to do what she has done. I want to continue to be paid to teach, so I will have the time to write responses to articles like Hunsinger's.

I do not pretend there is an easy answer. Any "in principle" answer we try to give just as easily leads to self-deception as faithfulness. I would like to say things about diversity of gifts and so on, about which I think there is truth; but in doing so I am perhaps too quick to identify my gift as one that requires no risks. In a poem printed in "American Academy of Mental Deficiency Religion Division Newsletter" (Summer, 1986), Helen Woodson provides help toward a response.⁸

The poem is called "Peacemaking" and it begins: "Simple people grasp profound matters quite simply." Moreover, she notes that those who "live and work with the retarded have less excuse/than others for complicating the obvious." The obvious are "Don't judge," "Feed the hungry," "Love your neighbor," "Serve God, not Caesar." "Seen in these terms," she notes,



"Resurrection is nothing more than the demonstration simple people need/that love and truth never die." She sees that in one of her sons, who she feared might begin to hate her jailers. Yet upon leaving prison after a visit, he asked a guard to make sure his mommy didn't get lost, since he was returning the next day. The guard assured him they would make sure she stayed where she was, so Dan gave him a big hug and said, "Thank you."

The retarded can easily understand
that bombs and bullets and fighting are bad,
but they need not be afraid.
They can see, not because we tell them,
but because we show them,
that people care enough to resist and disarm.
And they themselves,
through attendance at vigils and demonstrations,
trips to silos and jails can feel very much a part of the process.

So, let the children teach us the simplicity of the Gospel,
And let us show them, by our actions that we understand.

Few of us will be Helen Woodson, but we can be communities
that support and honor her and her children. □

A Confessing Church in America?

Monika K. Hellwig

The call for a Confessing Church in the United States is timely and fraught with complications. There are many separate and diffuse initiatives towards such a stance. To be effective they must be allied on important issues of national and international import. As George Hunsinger points out, that brings us up against three major obstacles: the widespread American resistance to clearcut confessional stances; the bewildering multiplicity of denominational groupings, with their separate institutional loyalties; the contemporary polarization within denominational groupings over precisely the issues which concern a Confessing Church movement—respect for human life in all situations, concern for human dignity of the poor and powerless, action in favor of social justice, work for nuclear disarmament and permanent peace, the banning of pornography, efforts to preserve the sacredness and privacy of sexual relationships, and so forth. Within denominations, there is sharp, even bitter polarization about these issues.

Perhaps the first and greatest problem today is that, in spite of confusion and vagueness in the statements of the Confessing Church in Germany, we have greater disparities in belief and commitment. If a Confessing Church movement depends upon confessional agreement, it cannot be very widespread in contemporary America. If, on the other hand, we look for a Christian counter-cultural stance promoting gospel values, and committed to a radical critique of society, then there are prospects for widespread and effective mass movements. These ideas, however, often cross denominational boundaries, at the expense of denominational unity. Whether this is good or bad depends on one's point of view.

As Hunsinger notes, there are already many movements of this latter type. There are church-related peace movements supported not only by the traditional peace churches, but by such numerically powerful groups as the Catholic church, the Reform church and the Presbyterian church. There is substantial agreement between positions taken by major church groupings, as shown by the recent statement of the Catholic-Reform/Presbyterian Bilateral Consultation. Likewise, as Hunsinger notes, there is a gathering momentum in the Sanctuary Movement and in church-related resistance to United States military intervention and aid in Central America. This offers an opportunity for linking forces with Third World churches and the liberation theology movements.

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This, in turn, raises some important theological questions. Movements are broader than churches. They include many deeply committed atheist humanists; they include many who do not take their commitment to Christian faith and church membership as seriously as their commitment to helping the unfortunate or the unjustly treated. The question then arises whether a Confessing Church movement ought to take a confessionally-based stance (that is, enrolling the faithful) or discern where in society the gospel of Jesus Christ demands our vigorous resistance and who the allies are in such resistance. Given the pluralistic character of our society, only the second of these is a live option.

Nevertheless, it is important to lay out for believers the theological foundations for participation and for discerning movements in which it is appropriate to participate. This one, however, tries to hew close to the explicit teachings of the New Testament, is bound to be tied to particular church confessions. In my response I set out theological foundations in the Catholic tradition, where perhaps the most critical is the understanding that we live simultaneously in the orders of creation, sin and redemption. Inasmuch as we live in the order of creation (in which whatever is, is God's good creation), we must realize that order in society is necessary; order necessitates some authority, and therefore necessitates respect and obedience towards authority. If we lived in paradise this would be no issue. However, we live in a history distorted and confused by sin; we can never obey any authority uncritically. Every human authority is exercised within that same history distorted by the cumulative consequences of sinful, destructive deeds.

Many church people fail to understand that the Creation and our loss of paradise through sin are not quaint stories from the misty beginnings of history but accounts of the present and how we are placed in it. Creation is the acknowledgement of our moment-by-moment dependence upon God, the source of all being, for existence, sustenance, and the constant renewal of the earth. The doctrine of original sin is the recognition that each of us and the whole of human society are not in the pristine condition of God's creating; our being, as well as the historical context of our being, is also shaped by the evil done by others before we began to exist. All of us and all structures of society are in some measure distorted by this. None is exempt. Therefore, as we come into the critical use of our own reason, and as we assimilate the meaning of the gospel progressively, we have to strike a balance between a docility that acknowledges our own sinful imperfection, and a prophetic stance that assesses social structures and authorities about us by the standards of the gospel. This seldom allows a Christian total acquiescence to political authority.

⁸This is a rather informal publication put out by The Reverend Bill Gaventa, Monroe Developmental Center of Rochester, New York. Mrs. Woodson's poem is two pages long so I cannot quote all of it. Her address is Helen Woodson, c/o C. Davis, 622 Water, Ashland, WI 54806. She is imprisoned at Shakopee Woman's Prison in Minnesota.

If the matter stood there we could not do right under any circumstance. We live not only in the order of creation and the order of sin but simultaneously in the order of redemption: the order of the grace of the risen Christ irradiating all human history and society. This is no magic wand waved over a confused history, instantly setting all things straight. It is a redeeming grace that makes the struggle possible — the struggle to restore all things to God's order in Christ. It is a grace that illuminates and empowers human freedom, not one that substitutes for it. It is a grace, moreover, through which those open to it recognize their own distortions, evasions and confusions. It does not simply eliminate all consequences of sin.

Realizing the simultaneity of the orders of creation, sin, and redemption should make it possible to strive constantly for a clearer discernment while at the same time admitting with humility that one can be badly deceived. It should make it possible to progress beyond one's own prejudices without denying that such prejudices are there. It should make it possible to act prophetically without rashly condemning all who do not see the matter in exactly the same light. However, not to condemn others is very different from acquiescing uncritically in situations revealed as unjust and oppressive. In the order of redemption, one who sees clearly that the gospel calls for action, must engage in that action after prayer and careful inquiry, even though it may eventually be shown to have been premature or inappropriate. We are not given perfect certainty in social and historical situations. This is a reason for making judgments in an attitude of humility. However, it is not a reason for refraining from judgment or action.

Perhaps the most important issue in shaping a Confessing Church movement is the attitude to authority. Most Christians suppose it is morally safer to go along with whatever authority is in possession of power than to challenge it. The only exception that most Christians readily grant to this rule is in the case of authority wielded by declared atheists or persecutors of Christian churches. This accounts for the one-sided attitude to foreign governments and international bodies. Too many Christians in America are content to consider any government or organization the enemy if there is evidence of Communist association or Marxist ideology (or even of a more general inclination towards socialism). Some people tend to generalize, from certain historical connections, a broad and sweeping condemnation of all these. Similarly, any government or organization that opposes Communist, Marxist or Socialist ideas is considered beyond question or criticism. This attitude, as much as anything, accounted for the complicity of certain German Bishops and other church people with Hitler and the Nazi movement. Insofar as the Nazis opposed the communist power, their authority was accepted uncritically.

Clearly, we do not live in Nazi Germany. But people may identify our government and its allies as representatives of the God-ordained order of things because they oppose Communism and Third World movements and governments that seem in any way related to Communism, no matter how tenuous the connection. The consequences are an uncritical and unChristian acquiescence towards policies and actions that are cruel, unjust, oppressive and sinful—as in the case of the war in Vietnam. It is necessary to raise the issues of uncritical obedience and the uncritical identification of good with capitalism and evil with communism within the context of our prior duty to the gospel.

In this context, I believe George Hunsinger has correctly identified the categories for critical reflection. We must question the ends of any policy proposed by our government; we must evaluate critically the means to the ends. It makes no sense to point to failings or iniquities of governments seen as hostile, because we are unable to influence them directly. We are able to influence our own government and those of our allies.

While the most important issue seems the attitude toward authority, a second issue is of almost equal urgency for Christians—the question of what constitutes security. Present United States policy is based on the unquestioned assumption that security is constituted by the ability to destroy. Our spiraling arms arsenal, as well as our oppressive and violent intervention in many Third World countries, arises out of this assumption. American Christians do not generally dispute this assumption. Yet the Christian teaching on this matter is hardly a question for debate. Security comes from following the divinely appointed order of justice, charity and compassion. Security is based in the community of the whole human race. It is built by establishing bonds of friendship, mutual aid and support. It is maintained by observing a common rule of just law, by treating others as we would be treated ourselves. Moreover, security ultimately comes from God, not from human precaution and labor; it is to be had on God's terms or not at all.

This serious question must be raised in our churches: Do we believe that our security rests in divinely appointed harmony, or do we believe in the political and strategic realm where God does not reign and has lost control of creation? Is the motto, "In God we trust," outdated? Is it better to seize the fruit at the center of the garden, to be like God, independent of God, and to build anew the Tower of Babel from which we assert our rule and try to impose our will and interest on the rest of the world? We must ask whether we are determined that God shall not reign because it is not in the interest of our security. We must ask what kind of security this is and how long it is likely to last.

These are reflections raised by George Hunsinger's careful study and apt comparison, from the viewpoint of contemporary Catholic faith and practice. □

Faithfulness, Responsibility and Justice

Paul Lehmann

The Integrity of Faith and Political Responsibility

In a society and culture which have co-opted the churches and their proclamation and practice of "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) without calling into question the prevailing achievements, values, patterns and structures of possibility, power and policy, the prospect of a Confessing Church today seems remote. In a culture which holds de-construction the frontier of language, technology the frontier of sense, survival, convenience, comfort and polytheistic pluralism the frontier of a neo-animistic re-appropriation of gnostic amalgams of mystery and spirituality, the prospect of hearing what the 1934 Barmen Confession is saying to the churches and to the "principalities and powers" is slender. Hunsinger's probing of "our two-fold crisis—political and theological—all the more remarkable for going largely undiagnosed"¹ is welcome and reassuring as a sign of promise that God has not left the Church without a witness and the world without redemptive perspectives and resources. In John Calvin's memorable assessment of his Church and society, "amidst the melancholy desolation of these days, it has pleased God mercifully to preserve his Church as it were in hiding places (*quasi in latebris*)."² It happened then. In Hunsinger's work, it is happening again.

Barmen and the Deepening Theological and Political Crisis in the United States

Commemorative occasions—whether in churches, societies, institutions or on birthdays—provide a second look as the precursor of a second chance. This is an authentic warrant and significance. They make room and take time and thought for seeing again what happened before, discerning what had been ignored or overlooked, and for discovering the future coming our way.

George Hunsinger has raised an urgent, critical and inescapable issue confronting the Christian churches and the American people as the final decade and a half of the twentieth century makes way for the year 2001. In questioning the possibility of a Confessing Church today, he has made available gifts of expository and analytical clarity and cogency, of imaginative sensitivity to the interrelation between faith and political responsibility.

I should like to respond to Hunsinger's article with four notations of disquiet and promise: first, the relation between the integrity of faith and political responsibility; second, the Barmen Confession and the deepening theological and political crisis in the United States; third, Barth, Bonhoeffer and the focus of confessional responsibility; and fourth, faithfulness, responsibility and justice.



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¹Unless otherwise indicated, Biblical passages are drawn from the Revised Standard Version (RSV).

²John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeil and translated by Ford Battles (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1960) Book IV, I, 2.

Such a commemorative occasion was provided by the fiftieth anniversary of the Barmen Declaration of the Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches of Germany of 29-31 May, 1934. As Hunsinger has noted, the anniversary raised the question of a Confessing Church today, particularly in the United States where

the theological situation is largely one of confusion [and] our political situation is more ambiguous and more precarious than that faced by the Church in Germany—more ambiguous because we are surrounded by the trappings of democracy, more precarious because we face the prospect not of persecution but annihilation.

More correctly, I think, we face both persecution and annihilation—and in that order. Indeed, this prospect is mentioned in Hunsinger's Section III on "Resistance and Suffering."

The Sanctuary Movement is correctly identified as "one of the most hopeful signs for a Confessing Church tomorrow." But the stubborn persistence of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in the fiction that persons in flight from Central America are not refugees from persecution but pursue a political and economic agenda alien to a free and open society is an ominous sign of things to come. The Service has prosecuted and imprisoned ministers and members of churches offering "sanctuary to the refugees."³ The Noble Laureate for Peace of 1986, Elie Wiesel, can say (with reference to the Sanctuary Movement), "We should walk within the law and, if need be, change the law. In fascist countries it is legal and adequate to break the law, but we have not reached that point."⁴ This is not only a shocking desecration of the moving account of Helen Woodson's "Statement of November 15, 1982" (quoted by Hunsinger) concerning her own suffering and imprisonment occurred but a sign has been given of the subtlety with which cooptation converts "persecution for righteousness sake" (Matthew 5:10) into self-righteous self-justification (Luke 6:26). Thus the "friendly fascism"⁵ of

³See the report by Ari L. Goldman, "U.S. Clerics Debating Ethics of Giving Sanctuary to Aliens", in *The New York Times*, Friday, August 23, 1985, pp. A1 and B18, Column 1. For an instructive account of the complexity of the problem of illegal aliens and of the ambiguities and inadequacy of the *Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986*, see the editorial comment by Ira Gollobin: *No Pasaran* in *The Nation*, Vol. 243, No. 14, November 1, 1986.

⁴As reported in the *New York Times*, Op. cit., B18, Column 3.

⁵On the "friendly fascism" of United States power and policy, see Bertram Gross, *Friendly Fascism: The New Face of Power in America*, (New York: South End Press, 1982) pp. 350ff.

"the wise" and "the noble" companions of "the sufferings of this present time" (I Corinthians 1:26; Romans 8:18) deepens and compounds the theological confusion and political ambiguity of our present crisis and intensifies the urgency of Hunsinger's essay.

The strident rhetoric of Richard John Neuhaus on behalf of the religious legitimization of America's role in the world is also heard against the Sanctuary Movement. As Director of the *Center on Religion and Society*, Neuhaus busily prepares *The Naked Public Square*—not, as he thinks, for the flowering of democracy under religious auspices but for the corpses of the victims of persecution by "friendly fascism" in West Germany, the Middle East, Chile, Central America, under the hegemony of an American government beguiled by its own military junta⁶ into a politics of destabilization through disinformation. The *Center on Religion and Society* is equipped by a socio-political consultant with fifty "articles" celebrating a global society under a capitalism committed to militant anti-communism.⁷ It may be no coincidence that Peter Berger is a Professor and Director of the Institute for the Study of Economics and Culture at Boston University, where he is a colleague of Elie Wiesel and where the Administration seems to be preparing that liaison between academy and Church which provided the Third Reich with its first "Reichsbischoff" and "Minister of Cultural Affairs."⁸ The

⁶So Theodore Draper, "The Reagan Junta" in *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1 (January 29, 1987) pp. 5-14.

⁷See Peter Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution: Fifty Propositions about Prosperity, Equality and Liberty* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

It is as though the Articles of Religion "as established by the Bishops, the Clergy, and the Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, in Convention on the 12th day of September, in the Year of our Lord, 1801" had never been written; or at least, that a Methodist and Lutheran Counter-Reformatory excision of Articles 38 and 39 had been made. Many years ago, Archbishop William Temple of Canterbury remarked in the course of a discussion of the Articles, that he was himself disquieted by Article 38, owing to the socialist direction of his thinking. The disquiet was occasioned for at least the reasons which would seem to lead into Berger's corner and to count the Archbishop among the heretics. But when Articles 38 and 39 are taken together, and taken seriously, as they were meant to be—it is Berger who has found it possible to ignore or to disregard them. The text of the Articles before me is in an edition of *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1929) pp. 575-84. The "Third Reich" was four years away (1933) and the *Barmen Declaration* a year later (1934).

⁸Arriving in Germany, as my wife and I did, in the week before Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of the Third Reich on Sunday, 30 January 1933, the opening of the academic semester at the University of Bonn remains a vivid, awesome and haunting memory of the frenzy and the fury which can overpower reason and humanity when aroused by the rhetoric of national prowess, virtue and destiny. The student leadership in Nazi uniforms preceded the Faculty in the Procession to the rostrum as the ceremony began. The student leader preceded the Rector of the University in addressing the Assembly, with the fanatically resounding declaration: "Foreigners are not welcome!"

Deutsche Christen, American-style, are already among us. Our "unseen crisis" is more visible than hidden in the theological confusion and political ambiguity which infect "the living of these days."⁹ The need for a Confessing Church today is more urgent than we admit.

Happily, the Lutherans are making their own ecumenical and "conscience moves" towards the confessional frontier, leaving Pastor Neuhaus and his kind to be overtaken by events.¹⁰ Hunsinger's succinct summation and rejection of the argument, rhetoric and aim of *The Naked Public Square* should become the standard *precis* of this manual for persecution. Of similar pertinence and usefulness is his account of Harvey Cox's *Religion in the Secular City: Toward A Post-modern Theology*. However, a re-reading of Cox's *The Secular City*, in the context of the sequel summarized by Hunsinger, underlines the christological theme of Cox's search for an authentic way of "speaking in a secular way about God" (Bonhoeffer).¹¹ Indeed, the extent to which Bonhoeffer informs *The Secular City* and its sequel has been little noted by Cox's American critics. They have not only overlooked Cox's conviction that it is important by what name God is known,¹² they have also misunderstood how much Cox's pursuit of a commitment beyond secularism and pluralism, fundamentalism and polemical liberationism is informed by the search for "the concrete place" (Bonhoeffer) where the name of God is made known by God. In Bonhoeffer's account of Christian ethics as "Formation," "the concrete place" is the place where

the form of Jesus Christ itself works upon us in such a manner that it molds our form in its own likeness (Gal. 4:19). Christ remains the only giver of forms.... The concretely Christian ethic is beyond formalism and casuistry. Formalism and casuistry set out from the conflict between the good and the real, but the Christian ethic can take for its point of departure the reconciliation, already accomplished, of the world with God and the man Jesus Christ and the acceptance of the real man by God....

⁹As Harry Emerson Fosdick's more than ever timely Hymn: *God of Grace and God of Glory* (1930) has put it.

¹⁰See Wayne Stumme, ed., *Christians and the Many Faces of Marxism* (Minneapolis: The Augsburg Publishing Co.) p. 19. Also, the *Proceedings of the Thirteenth General Convention of the American Lutheran Church in Minneapolis*, May 12-16, 1986.

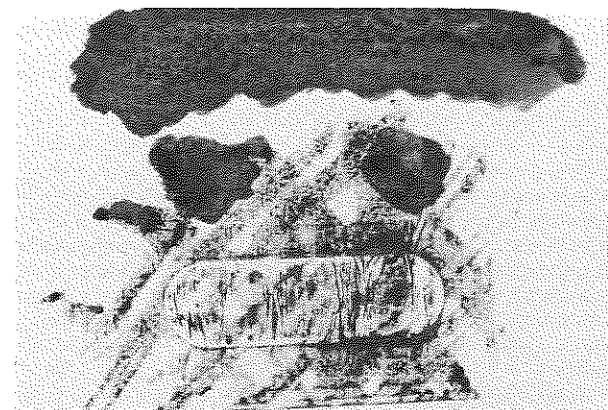
¹¹For his widely known and memorable formulation, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, based on the sixth German Edition of 1963 (New York: Macmillan, 1965) p. 141. The date of the letter is 30 April 1944.

¹²Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1965) p. 266.

Ethics as formation, then, means the bold endeavor to speak about the way in which the form of Jesus Christ takes form in our world.... Concrete judgements and decisions will have to be ventured here. Decision and action can no longer be delegated to the conscience of the individual. Here there are concrete commandments and instructions for which obedience is demanded.¹³

Accordingly, Cox's work reveals the preoccupation of American free churches with the person and work of Jesus and the community of his followers which Bonhoeffer's severe essay on "Protestantism Without Reformation" allows.

In light of the faithfulness and failure of the Barmen Declaration, and amidst the present theological and political crisis, Cox's quest for "a theology that affirms social justice, the rights of the poor, a communal understanding of salvation" is a forecast of an agenda for the persecuted and for a Confessing Church. Such an agenda must welcome Cox's exposure of the insignificance of "the danger in his brand of theological journalism...towards glibness" and the captiousness which suggests this is only a momentary trend. Hunsinger's comments regrettably demean the importance of Cox's book and detract from his probing of the present crisis and of what "Barmen's famous rejection of natural theology... in the form of culture religion" teaches us about confessional faithfulness and responsibility. "The trajectory of natural theology leads from the Christ who is not supreme to the Christ who is not sufficient and finally to the Christ who is not necessary."



¹³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge and translated by Neville Horton Smith, based on the sixth German Edition, 1963 (New York: Macmillan, 1965) pp. 80, 86, 88.

Barth, Bonhoeffer and the Focus of Confessional Responsibility

A more succinct summation of the theological and political distance between the Barmen Confession of 1934 and the cultural cooptation today of Church and society in the United States by principalities and powers alien to God, humanity and responsibility can scarcely be imagined.¹⁴ The distance tragically exposes the ineptitude and irrelevance of Christian preaching, teaching and nurture before "the gathering storm" and the default of the Church in its confessional responsibility. "What father among you would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or hand him a snake instead of a fish? Or hand him a scorpion if he asked for an egg?" (Luke 11:11-12).

The refusal of U.S. theologians to read Karl Barth beyond the early pages of the *Commentary on Romans* and Part One of the *Church Dogmatics* must be a classical instance of what in the tradition was recognized as "vincible ignorance."¹⁵ That is why "Protestantism Without Reformation" in the U.S. has been vulnerable to a superficial reading of Bonhoeffer, to an unnecessary

¹⁴Perhaps the nadir of this distance can be noted in the following "maxim" of industrial management as reported in the *New York Times* as I write. The "Business Summary" of Sunday, January 25, 1987, Section 3, p.1, brings a head-line which reports "Re-making the American C.E.O." complete with a replication of Ivan Boesky and a sub-title which declares: "The new order scorns loyalty, in favor of market leadership, profits and a high stock price." The Summary goes on to note that "many are adopting a new creed that puts corporate survival above all else. The result: a generation of ruthless management" (Emphasis mine).

¹⁵A clear, cogently reasoned and eloquent instance is provided by John B. Cobb, Jr., "Barth and the Barthians: A Critical Appraisal" in *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*, ed. Donald D. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) pp. 172-77. For a more labored and strident case in point, see James Gustafson, *Ethics From a Theocentric Perspective*, Volume I, "Theology and Ethics" (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981). See also, the perceptive and penetrating critical assessment of Gustafson's emerging position by Gene Outka, "Remarks on a Theological Program Instructed by Science," in *The Thomist*, 47, 4, October 1983, pp. 572-91.

What a grim and bitter irony it is that, during the decades since Barmen, America's two most formative and creative theologians should have been rooted in whatever "Reformation" had been granted to "Protestantism" and also unrelenting in their attacks upon Karl Barth. Hunsinger refers to Reinhold Niebuhr's philippic: "Why is Barth Silent on Hungary?". That from the side of political responsibility, one thinks of H. Richard Niebuhr's *Monotheism and Western Culture* in which the animosity towards Barth is more indirect, yet present enough to encourage the risk of courting a monotheism more appropriate to the Koran than to "the seed of Abraham." (Gen. 28:13-15)



mystification by Barth's pivotal essay on "The Humanity of God" and by selective perusal of his political writings following Barmen and the Second World War. This confessional irresponsibility has disregarded the intrinsic account of the relation between theology and politics presaged as early as the Foreword to the *Church Dogmatics*, I/1. It has exhibited an ominous ineptitude in uniting a liberating and a humanizing Word in a confessional faithfulness required by confessional responsibility. Hunsinger's identification of an influential core of Barth's political writings makes plain that these writings, occasional and focussed as they are (*das Wort zur Sache* and *das Wort zur Lage*), intersect to bring Barth's entire theological enterprise together and spell out the inter-relation between the integrity of faith and political responsibility. "No periphery without the center! . . . No center without the periphery!" As Hunsinger summarizes it:

two kinds of argument are in play here. First...the gospel is intrinsically true and self-authenticating in its radical uniqueness beyond all cultural possibilities. Second...the gospel has salutary political consequences which at times are directly to be pursued, consequences that will be subverted should gospel *qua* gospel cease to be the core....Happily, however, between evangelical truth and social justice we need not choose, for in the unity of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, 'there is only one truth and one justice—and no one can serve two masters.'

We here reach the meaning of a "Confessing Church" and of "Confessional responsibility." A Confessing Church is a community of believers in Jesus Christ (baptized or not yet baptized) for whom Bonhoeffer's question "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?"¹⁶ is central, formative and determinative for faith and practice. This question echoed in the debates leading to the Barmen Confession and clearly informs its first article. "Jesus Christ," the First Article declares, "as He is attested in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to obey in life and in death."¹⁷

This question emerges with particular promise and force in the explicit correlation of truth with justice which informs Barth's political writings and, less explicitly but no less centrally, Bonhoeffer's move from christo-centricity to pacifism to conspiratorial involvement. "Let theology at last become primary for us," Barth wrote, "and Church politics only secondary, so that in this properly ordered relationship it may become good politics!" From his prison in Tegel, nine months before his execution, Bonhoeffer wrote:

Man is summoned to share in God's sufferings at the hands of a godless world....To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to make something of oneself (a sinner, a penitent, or a saint) on the basis of some method or other, but to be truly human—not a type of human person but the human person that Christ creates in us. It is not the religious act that makes the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life.¹⁸

Turning from Bonhoeffer's question, and in the light of Barth's and Bonhoeffer's linkage of truth and justice in the interrelation between the integrity of faith and political responsibility, I shall conclude with a thematic suggestion to answer Hunsinger's final questions: "Might a Church grounded in

¹⁶Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, translated by John Bowden and with an Introduction by Edwin H. Robertson (New York: Harper and Row, 1966) pp.27-37.

¹⁷Obviously, "Protestantism Without Reformation" has reached obsolescence among those who, never having paused over The Heidelberg Catechism, especially Article I, prattle about the obligatory repudiation of "western European male-chauvinist oppressor theology." They are either innocent of or indifferent to their own complicity in the cultural cooptation of the churches and to their continuing insensitivity to the confessional question. *Per contra*, as Hunsinger writes, the Church in Latin America—Roman Catholic not Protestant—is clearly "the best parallel between the Confessing Church of yesterday and the one possible tomorrow."

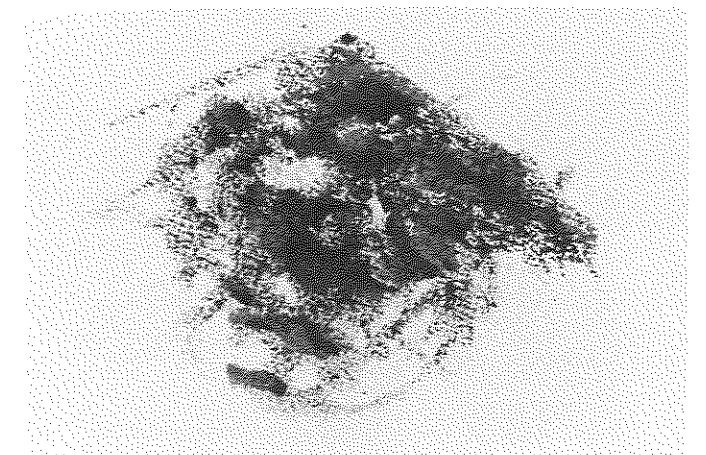
¹⁸Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1967) p. 190. The letter is dated, 18 July 1944. In the interest of "inclusive language," the phrases in parentheses are my alteration of Bonhoeffer's use of the word, "man." They do not alter his meaning.

biblical witness and committed to justice and peace be emerging on the horizon? Dare we hope for a grouping of Christians prepared in theology and politics to resist our more disturbing trends?"

The prospects are less than bright. But steadfast attention to the interrelation between faithfulness, responsibility and justice by churches, congregations, voluntary groups within congregations and theological faculties could nurture the confessional movement coming our way.

Faithfulness, Responsibility and Justice

The confessional state of the Church and the Church in the state of confession (i.e., a Confessing Church) are related but not identical ways of taking responsibility for the faithfulness of the Church to what it is called to be, believe, think about and do in the world. The confessional state of the Church may be recognized by the Church's seriousness about, acceptance of, and obedience to confessional statements, which take form in the Church's response to its calling to faithfulness and responsibility. The confessional statements of the Church express—on the basis of Holy Scripture—the faith, authority, meaning and nurture by which the Church lives and bears witness to what God has purposed the Church and the world to be. These statements summarily formulate, inform and guide what it means to belong to Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the confessional state of the Church is the sign and seal of the Church's faithfulness to the fact that the Church has been called into existence in the world by Jesus Christ for the sake of the world.



A Confessing Church, on the other hand, is the Church stating and doing what it means to belong to the Church of Jesus Christ in the world, on the critical boundary where the presence and purposes of the Church in and for the world and the cross-purposes of the world co-exist and intersect. These cross-purposes disregard and endanger the witness and life of the Church in the world and also disregard and endanger the meaning and purpose of the world and of the Church living meaningfully in it. Accordingly, a Confessing Church is the sign and seal of the responsibility intrinsic to the Church's faithfulness to the fact that the Church has been called into the world by Jesus Christ for the sake of the world, and not only for the sake of the Church. Responsibility for the faithfulness of the Church to being in the world for the sake of the world and faithfulness to the confessional integrity of the Church's presence and purpose in the world are correlated but not identical marks of the Church's confessional situation.

A major—if not the major—significance of The Barmen Confession is its documentation of the Church on the way from confessional faithfulness to confessional responsibility. On the record, the confessional story—from Nicea, Chalcedon and the *Symbolum Romanum* to Trent; and from Trent, via Augsburg and the Formula of Concord, on the one hand; and the Geneva, Scots and Westminster Confessions, on the other, to the Catechisms, Roman, Lutheran and Reformed, and the unexcelled tonalities of Heidelberg—seems more preoccupied with the responsibility of faithfulness of the Church to its calling to be the Church than with the faithfulness of the Church to the responsibility of being the Church in the world for the sake of the world. The watchwords of responsibility for faithfulness have been the

formative and authoritative bearing of Holy Scripture upon the content and witness of the Confessions, the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments, the grace, faith and obedience by which individual believers receive and express their salvation in this world and the next. The world—for the sake of which the Church is called to be the Church—was largely left to its own devices, under the custodial watchfulness of a power settlement which divided responsibility between things spiritual and things temporal. This arrangement, dubiously ascribed by the Church to divine appointment, managed to keep the world on course until the unfailingly anticipated Second Advent, which seemed to have fallen into continual postponement. As Ernst Troeltsch put it: "After the Christian faith had adjusted itself to the present world and had become a Church, the expectation of a complete world-renewal could only be introduced into Christianity from the outside through the pressure of intolerable conditions. . . ."¹⁹

The move from confessional faithfulness to confessional responsibility draws the confessional state of the Church across the boundary to a state of confession. The dynamics and dialectic of this move put Thesis I and Theses IV-VI of the Barmen Declaration either in correlation or in contradiction. The critical issue is whether the unmistakable and inviolable "Jesus Christ alone" of Thesis I is confined to and confined by the affirmations and rejections intrinsic to "by grace alone, by faith alone" of Theses II and III. Or whether the commitment to Jesus Christ alone of Thesis I inexorably draws the commitment to grace alone and faith alone into the tensions, turmoil and risks of Theses IV-VI. These Barmen Theses, especially IV and V, are the "sticky wickets" of the Declaration, now as then. They involve the ministry of Word and Sacrament (Thesis IV) and of the unity of believers (Thesis VI) *expressis verbis* in the question: Whose task is it to take up the responsibility of safe-guarding and furthering justice and peace? Thesis V declares:

"Fear God, Honor the Emperor" (1 Peter 2:17). Scripture tells us that in an as yet unredeemed world in which the Church also exists, the State has by divine appointment the task of providing for justice and peace.... The Church calls to mind God's kingdom, command and righteousness, and thereby the responsibility both of rulers and of the ruled. It trusts and obeys the power of the Word by which God upholds all things. We reject the false doctrine, as though the State, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church, over and beyond its special commission, should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the State...."

¹⁹Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, Vol. II, translated by Olive Wyon (London: Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1931) p. 817.

²⁰The *Theological Declaration of Barmen*, Thesis 5. Emphasis mine.

The Church, on the move from confessional faithfulness to confessional responsibility, intrinsically and inevitably converges upon the power of justice and the justice of power.

Concerning justice, a distinction must be made between the prophets of Israel and Jesus on the one hand and Cicero of the classical tradition on the other. Cicero, whose definition of justice permeates the canon law of the Church and the jurisprudence of western culture, taught that justice is the recognition and application of *suum cuique* (to each his own) in the relations between individuals as citizens and among states.²¹ This notion of justice, however, is tangential to the prophets of Israel and Jesus when they put forward *righteousness* as the test of the obedience of faith and the key to power at the service of responsibility. In the Scriptures, righteousness and justice are interchangeable words. Either word points to God's way of being true to the purposes for which human life and human living in this world were covenanted. This righteousness or justice is—in word and deed—the making room in the world for the faithfulness of God present in human life as help and salvation.²² The righteousness of God so practiced is the power of justice to initiate and to give effect to the justice of power. The justice of power is the commitment of power to the responsibility for setting right what is not right in the world.

Justice is the link between power and responsibility. Justice is the righteousness of God in the world overcoming self-justification by responsive discernment of the neighbor's good, enmity by reconciliation. Oppression is overcome by the freedom intrinsic to being genuinely and fully human in the world. The practice of justice exposes the human reality of enmity as the concrete point of entry for the primacy of responsibility in the healing of human alienation and the making room for freedom. When justice becomes the cutting edge of faithfulness and responsibility in human relations, caring takes priority over competition, trust takes priority over domination and covenant displaces contract as the foundation, bond and promise of human society. In a covenantal society, anchored in a covenanted Word, the justice of power is its commitment to effect the power of justice in making room for what God is doing in the world to keep human life human. "Thus alone is the Church renewed.... Be not deceived by loose talk, as if we meant to oppose the unity of the German nation! Do not listen to the seducers who pervert our intentions, as if we wanted to break up the unity of the German

²¹For a widely discussed contemporary review and interpretation of this Ciceronian tradition under the rubric of "Justice as Fairness," see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.) Hunsinger refers to Rawls' work by way of a note on "how Barth's theological anthropology mediates between his theological and political views" as explored and interpreted by William Werpehowski, "Social Justice, Social Selves: John Rawls: *A Theory of Justice* and Christian Ethics" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) Ch. 1. See especially, Note 69 on p. 26.

²²I am indebted for this formulation to Ludwig Koehler, *Old Testament Theology*, translated by A. S. Todd (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957) pp. 30-35.

Evangelical Church or to forsake the Confessions of the Fathers!

Try the Spirits whether they are of God!... If you find that we are speaking contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to us! But if you find that we are taking our stand upon Scripture, then let no fear or temptation keep you from treading with us the path of faith and obedience to the Word of God, in order that God's people be of one mind upon earth and that we in faith experience what he himself has said: 'I will never leave you nor forsake you! Therefore, 'Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!'²³

The Resisted—you see—are the Resisters!

The Church, on the way from confessional faithfulness to confessional responsibility, is summoned by the commitment to and practice of justice to break the conspiracy of sound, silence and safety which spells out its cooptation by the culture and society, in the midst of which the Church is called to be in the world for the sake of the world. The Church is summoned to take shape in comradeships—within and among congregations and within and among its Judicatories—identified by the Resisted as Resistance.

Perhaps in these days of rising military, legislative, moral and religious madness, such comradeships could be drawn toward confessional faithfulness and responsibility. From Micah to the Magnificat, the Church, called to be in the world for the sake of the world, has been shown what is good. And "what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8) "He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away." (Luke 1:51-52) "So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matthew 6:22-23).

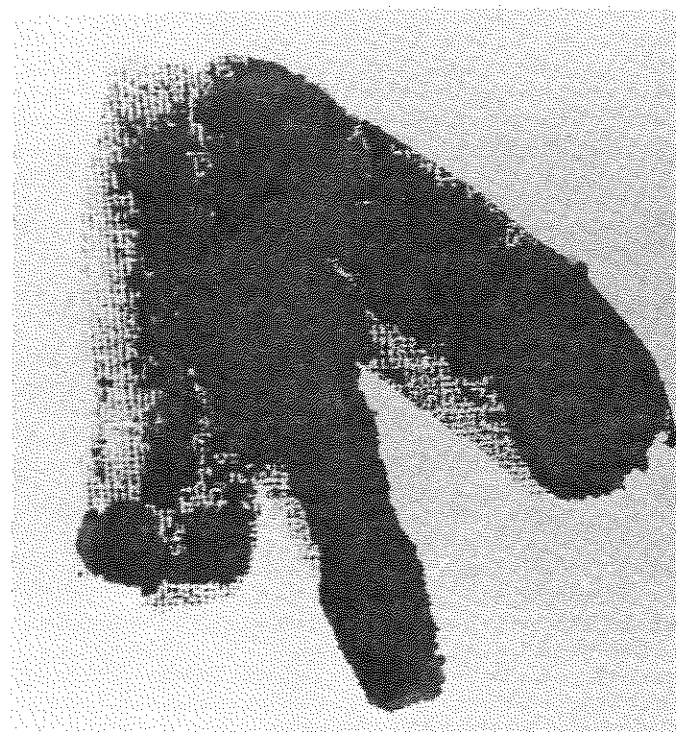
"Who knows whether it is not for such a time as this that (Barmen, that a Confessing Church in the United States today) has come to the kingdom?" (Esther 4:14). Or—to borrow an apostolic phrase—"even as some of (our own) poets have said" (Acts 17:28b):

King Christ this world is all aleak
and life preservers there are none:
and waves which only they may walk
Who dare to call themselves human.²⁴ □

²³See—"I. An Appeal to the Evangelical Congregations and Christians in Germany" in *The Theological Declaration of Barmen*, Op.cit., Paragraphs 8:01-8:04.

²⁴E.E. Cummings, *Complete Poems* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972) p. 438, No. 54. The last two lines have been altered in the interest of "inclusive language." The original reads:

and waves which only he may walk
who dares to call himself a man.



Hunsinger and Historic Analogies

David Little

Historical examples are always precarious as keys to interpreting the present. This is especially so when an example is as emotionally supercharged as the "Hitler time" is for us. Unless the fit is very close, reactions appropriate in one case may not apply in the other, and, as a consequence, may distort rather than clarify understanding. That, unfortunately, seems to have happened in George Hunsinger's thesis concerning the relevance of the '30s and '40s in Germany to our present predicament in the United States.

Above all, if an historical analogy is used, the parallels must be carefully and systematically demonstrated. One or two passing similarities will not do. Hunsinger has not assumed that burden of proof. While he cites items that persuade him of the force of the analogy between Germany of the '30s and '40s and the present, these do not, on inspection, make up a thoroughly persuasive case.

Hunsinger begins with current U.S. policy in Central America. He suggests that there exists among North Americans today the same wide-spread indifference toward "human rights violations" caused by U.S. action in Central America as was found among German citizens in face of Nazi atrocities toward Jews and others. In support, he claims that denunciations of these violations, such as an essay by Charles Maechling, have "vanished from public notice without a trace." Hunsinger underscores the point: "The Maechling example, which could be multiplied many times over, documents that [George] Orwell was right. Atrocities committed by our own side do not meet with our disapproval, and we have developed a remarkable capacity for not hearing about them.... Whatever we do must be virtuous, simply because we do it."

Hunsinger's comparison of reactions by North Americans to U.S. Central American policy to reactions of the Germans in the '30s and '40s to Nazi policies is not accurate. Maechling's essay did not fall on deaf ears but provoked a vigorous exchange in the next issue of *Foreign Policy* between Maechling and the then-Assistant Secretary for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs,

Elliott Abrams. This format of intense, ongoing and public dispute between representatives of the U.S. government like Abrams and human-rights advocates like Maechling is of considerable consequence in recent U.S. public discourse. It is not unusual to witness, for example, a heated argument between Aryeh Neier of *Americas Watch* and Elliott Abrams, or other U.S. officials, on ABC's *Nightline* or on some other major television news program, or to encounter a published version of a similar dispute in the Op-Ed sections of the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times*. While one might hope that conclusions about U.S. human-rights policy registered by *Americas Watch* or by other human rights organizations, not to mention a variety of churches, might have greater influence on public opinion, it is mistaken to infer that these organizations are ignored and have no important impact on members of Congress and other significant opinion-makers.

After all, much of Reagan's Central American policy, such as armed assistance to the Contras fighting against the Nicaraguan government, has, during the course of Mr. Reagan's term of office, been rejected or only barely supported by Congress. Furthermore, in light of the recent "Contragate" scandal, it is reasonable to take one senator seriously when he suggests that it will be a cold day in Washington before Congress extends additional military assistance to the Contras. Moreover, polls regularly indicate that, for whatever reason, the majority of Americans reject important features of the Reagan Doctrine as applied to Central America. A recent *Washington Post*-ABC News poll indicates that public support for U.S. military aid to the Contras, never very high, is now down to 22 percent. Figures like those will help erode further the President's support in Congress for Contra aid. However we may assess the degree of reluctant indulgence with which Congress and the public have treated Reagan's Central American policy, this is hardly the acquiescence or subservience toward government policy that existed among citizens in Hitler's Germany.

There is the additional question, not discussed by Hunsinger, as to whether the Reagan Doctrine as applied around the world is "just like" Hitler's policies. Such a suggestion needs to be defended. Arguably, one might reject the Reagan Doctrine as applied to the Contras as well as to the insurgents in Angola, and still have sympathy for supporting rebels fighting against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Moreover, it is possible to contend that the Reagan Administration is selectively guilty of serious and reprehensible abuses of power without conceding that those abuses are on the Nazi scale.

This plea for recognizing distinctions between the Nazi period and the present, and for developing more precise and effective tools of analysis and criticism applicable in our own time, is reinforced by Hunsinger's discussion of U.S. nuclear defense policy. To imply, as Hunsinger does, that all moral features of a satisfactory nuclear policy are self-evident, just as the moral features of a satisfactory response to Hitler should have been self-evident in the '30s and '40s, is another misplaced comparison. For one thing, it is not clear just what precise policy Hunsinger believes follows from his absolute indictment of the indiscriminant character of nuclear weapons. His "no-first-use" proposal is significant in the discussion, but does not really touch the deep questions of deterrence strategy. Does Hunsinger favor unilateral nuclear disarmament, as many do who echo Hunsinger's tone? Even George Kennan, upon whom Hunsinger extensively relies, does not favor that. In *Nuclear Delusion* (1981), Kennan wrote, "I am not suggesting any unilateral disarmament. Plainly, two—and eventually more than two—will have to play this game."

My own view is in accord with Kennan here: Under present circumstances, the U.S. bears a heavy moral responsibility (which it has not been exercising of late) to enter into *multilateral* and *balanced* nuclear arms reduction agreements in the name of "common security." If one supports the collective-bargaining approach to arms reduction, as I do, then one must believe that some forms of deterrence strategy are morally defensible as inducements to serious negotiation. It follows that the discussion over nuclear arms policies is morally more complicated than evaluating Hitler's treatment of the Jews or his aggressive military policies toward his neighbors.

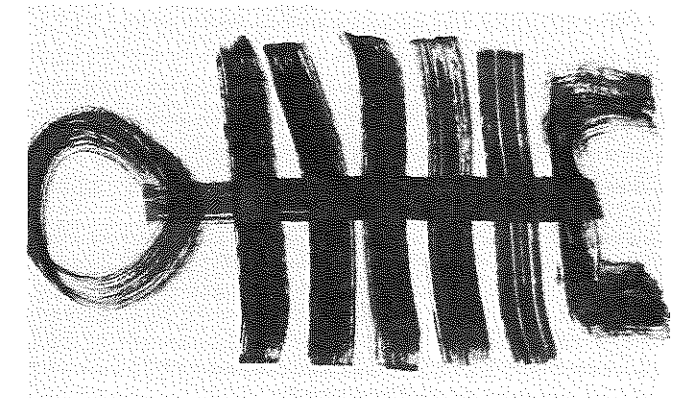
If, as I believe, the moral predicament of U.S. citizens is importantly different from the predicament of German Christians in the '30s and '40s, direct moral lessons from the earlier period are not useful, whatever moral positions American Christians may adopt toward prevailing U.S. policies. Moreover, Hunsinger's attempt to draw special moral lessons for U.S. churches from convictions expressed in the Barmen Confession, and in the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth, is similarly unpersuasive. There is something powerful in Hunsinger's condemnation—drawing upon Bonhoeffer and Barth as it does—of the theological triviality of many American churches, together with their frequent lack of moral and spiritual discipline. Still, there are limitations to Hunsinger's criticism here as well. We ought not forget that the black churches in this country have humanized American society by showing the way in the civil rights struggle, and in other ways. Moreover, Hunsinger's wholesale criticism that the white church—Protestant and Catholic—is more or less guilty of "cultural protestantism" is overstated. With all the examples of religious support for the *status quo* throughout American history, there are important counter-examples of social reform outside the Church's contribution to the civil rights movement. These include the struggle for religious freedom, abolition of slavery, economic justice, alterations of foreign policy, etc. Indeed, the peculiar American

denominational arrangement that has, on the one hand, domesticated much religious expression, as Bonhoeffer explains, has also generated a rich variety of social protest and dissent. The current protest concerning Central American policy, nuclear arms policy, the Sanctuary Movement (which Hunsinger himself alludes to hopefully in the conclusion) are in the grand tradition of American religious dissent.

It will not do to suggest, as Hunsinger does—drawing on Barth and Bonhoeffer—that despite this record of vigorous and influential religious ferment, American religion is still deeply deficient because, quoting Bonhoeffer, "it has never been able to understand the meaning of criticism by the Word of God and all that signifies.... and that God has founded His Church beyond religion and beyond ethics." What exactly does that complaint mean? Though the contributions of Barth and Bonhoeffer to religious resistance against the Nazis remain deeply moving and important, it is not self-evident that either of them developed a sure-fire method for generating "deeper" and "more important" criticism by the Church of the world superior to the patterns of protest and dissent characteristic of the American religious tradition.

This is not to belittle a call for serious theological reflection in American churches (and elsewhere). But it is to resist the idea that, for example, Barthian formulations of Christology or other theological doctrines will automatically produce transparent moral guidance for difficult questions of public policy. One cannot help but recall that after Barth had finished pouring scorn on the "cultural protestants" of his day for employing "natural reason" in coming to moral judgments, his own method for deducing ethical guidelines from Scripture, as worked out in his famous essay, "Christian Community and Civil Community," is hardly much of an improvement.

It is not my intention, in dissenting from Hunsinger's main thesis, to leave the impression that there is nothing for the contemporary American church to worry about. There is much to worry about, and Hunsinger has ably identified some moral and cultural issues of the greatest urgency to American Christians. My only reservation is that by drawing so close an analogy between the present and the Hitler time, Hunsinger not so much illumines our task as distracts us from it. □



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A Silent Church Shares the Guilt

Gary MacEoin

Were the citizens of Hitler's Germany more guilty of the war crimes committed by their leaders than are the citizens of the United States for the war crimes being committed by their leaders? From my reading of George Hunsinger's article, he seems to think that the situation in Germany was clearer and that consequently the Germans were more guilty.

I do not think that this is, for us, the fundamental issue. Rather, the most fundamental issue is whether as citizens of the United States we are responsible for the war crimes being committed by our government. Nevertheless, the issue of relative guilt seems to me of some importance, and I consequently propose devoting some thought to it.

I agree with Hunsinger that the average German must have had some awareness of the commission by the German military and paramilitary units of gross violations of international law as a matter of policy. However, the Nazis had total control of all the social media of communications within the territories they ruled, and they had developed a hitherto unparalleled propaganda machine. As Hunsinger correctly notes, there were many reasons -- including the unjust Versailles Peace Treaty to accept and internalize this Nazi propaganda.

Perhaps even more significantly, as we now know, the French Quai d'Orsay, the British Foreign Office and our State Department were thoroughly informed of what was happening inside Germany but agreed, "for reasons of state," to keep silent not only before but during World War II. All three governments had powerful radio transmitters which reached every corner not only of their own countries but of the countries under Nazi control. They used them to promote the war effort but never to tell either their own citizens or the Germans what was actually happening to the Jews and other victims of the Holocaust. Given all of this context, it seems to me difficult to sustain a definitive judgment of guilty on the average German.

Now a look at the violations of international law committed by the United States, and at some of the concrete violations of human rights that have followed as a logical consequence. I limit myself principally to U.S.-Central American relations in the past five or six years, while emphasizing that this experience follows logically and inevitably from a long previous history.

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Under Secretary of State for Latin America, Miller stated in 1950 what has been U.S. policy for at least a century and a half: "No government is to be allowed to come into existence anywhere in the Caribbean or Central America which does not have Washington's approval, and a government from which Washington withdraws its approval is not to be allowed to continue to exist in the region." This policy has been consistently maintained by Democratic and Republican administrations alike. The Marines implemented it in Nicaragua from 1911-1932. The CIA implemented it in Guatemala in 1954. The Marines again implemented it in the Dominican Republic in 1965. Since 1980 we have the massive covert and overt support of the Contra, the conversion of Honduras into a U.S. "aircraft carrier," the U.S. direction and supply of a war in El Salvador that has already driven at least one quarter of the population from their homes and that continues to increase in barbarity. In part through our surrogates and in part directly through US-AID and other U.S. agencies we have been supporting the ethnocide of the Indians who constitute the vast majority of Guatemala's ten million inhabitants. The civilian deaths, mostly children and old people, from these operations are not insignificant; in El Salvador, more than fifty thousand; in Nicaragua, thirty thousand; in Guatemala probably more than a hundred thousand.

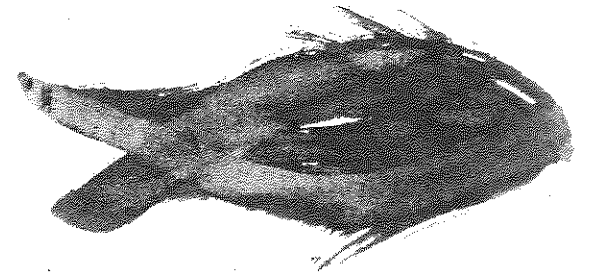
The ability of the United States Administrations to manipulate the media is substantial. I recall a *New York Times* story on the eve of the 1984 presidential elections in El Salvador. A short time before, the principal leaders of the popular parties, meeting publicly in a Jesuit high school in San Salvador, were all seized and assassinated. The surviving leaders understandably fled the country, leaving a large proportion of the electorate without representation in the elections. Nevertheless the *New York Times* described the situation to the American public as a contest similar to United States elections between an "aggressive conservative" and a "moderate leftist." The *New York Times*, with its vast computerized pool of information, knew perfectly well that the "aggressive conservative" had been described -- accurately -- by former United States Ambassador Robert White as a "pathological killer"; and that he had also been identified as the intellectual assassin, that is to say, the person who had arranged the assassination of Archbishop Romero. The *New York Times* knew that the "moderate leftist" represented in fact only the right wing rump of the Christian Democrats, a party that in Germany, Italy, and practically every country of Latin America in which it exists is as reactionary as Margaret Thatcher's government in England. Such mindless repetition of the Administration propaganda is typical of the American press. The network TV news is even more distorted and misleading.

Contempt for international law and disregard in practice of proclaimed principles is not new in foreign policy. Walter LaFeber in his recent *Inevitable Revolutions* has documented the consistency of U.S. policy toward the Caribbean and Central America for 150 years, a policy always based on the premise that the United States has the right to interfere in the internal affairs of these sovereign nations. LaFeber's authority in this area, as a professor at Cornell University and a specialist in US-Soviet relations is unchallengeable, but his book does not depend upon his personal credibility. It rests on the facts which he presents as a historian. What is new is not the policy but the increasingly brutal and barbaric techniques used to implement it. We have the repudiation by the World Court which confirmed such terrorist actions as the mining of the waters of a friendly nation. We have the supply of the planes, bombs, napalm, and all the supporting armaments for the conduct of a scorched earth policy in El Salvador, a project directly targeting the civilian population and directed by the Pentagon. We have the collaboration of US-AID in a long-term policy of ethnocide (in Guatemala) which replicates the Vietnam Hamlet program that caused the death of endless thousands of innocent people.

Given the effectiveness of this Administration's propaganda, thanks to the cooperation of the major media, it is understandable that the vast majority of U.S. citizens, for most of whom the TV news is the primary source of information, should be as ignorant of these realities as the average German may have been of Hitler's atrocities.

We are not talking about the average American citizen. We are talking about the leaders of religious communities; Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Moslem or whatever. These people have available adequate sources of information to know exactly what our government is doing. They are able to judge whether United States foreign policy in general, and specifically in Central America at the present time, is or is not moral, equitable and in accordance with the concepts of civilized society.

Unlike Nazi Germany we have access to vast quantities of information. Much of it is recorded in the religion-oriented opinion journals. Much more can be found in the newsletters published by faith-based solidarity groups. We have the testimonies of thousands of United States citizens who have seen for themselves as members of Witness for Peace, CRISPAZ, and other groups, people who have risked their lives in an effort to establish the truth for themselves and to share it with others. We have the testimonies of the refugees who have come to us with the help of the Sanctuary Movement and in other ways, bringing with them not only their eyewitness accounts of torture, mutilation, killings, rapings, destruction of homes, animals and food, but also the emotional and physical scars of the torture they themselves have endured.



The role of the Sanctuary Movement in clarifying for Church leaders the immorality of United States policy in Central America has been particularly important. As a substantial portion of the massive outflow of refugees from institutionalized terror in El Salvador and Guatemala began to reach the United States in 1980, the churches made their traditional response of caring for the hungry, homeless, and frightened people. They assumed that the Immigration and Naturalization Service would treat the refugees with sympathy and provide for them whatever protection was available under the law. Instead they discovered to their horror that the Immigration and Naturalization Service was committed as a matter of policy to prevent them from learning their legal rights, to cheating them into signing documents that paved the way to shipping them back to what for many would be torture and death.

Painfully, it became clear that the reason for this denial of justice to oppressed people was strictly political. The Administration could not admit that the governments it supported were torturing and killing their own people. The resulting outrage, expressed in the rapid growth of the Sanctuary Movement into a national network embracing churches, synagogues, universities, cities, and even two States (New Mexico and New York) revealed the solidity of the popular conscience. Administration harrassments, including major court trials, have only strengthened and deepened the Movement.

All of this, I suggest, is telling us that the time has come for our religious leaders to stand up and be counted. When I say religious leaders, I am not thinking simply of the bishops, the moderators and other official denominational leaders. They obviously have special responsibility to be the prophetic voice of conscience and morality. I am speaking about all of us who have positions of influence as university professors, writers, politicians, molders of opinion. I do not see how any of us can, in good conscience, maintain a position of neutrality, to keep silent in the face of the overwhelming evidence available to us. Just as the German religious leaders did in the Barman Declaration and as the South African religious leaders more recently have done in the *Kairos Document*, the hour has struck for us, not only individually but as the voice of the religious community in the United States, to make an equally unambiguous repudiation of the wholesale violations of human rights being committed in our name.

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Berea, Kentucky 40404
1 April 1986

To the Editor:

I have written frequently about the need to cultivate the civic, and religious, virtue of civility. Civility is much more than mere politeness. It is a strong virtue requiring disciplined and respectful engagement with one's critics. At the risk of using a word debased by over-use, civility requires dialogue.

I therefore readily agreed when the editor asked me to respond to Mr. Hunsinger's excited attack upon me and my work. Upon rereading the article in question, however, I can only publicly protest Mr. Hunsinger's impassioned caricature of my views. I deeply regret that there seems to be no basis for dialogue since I simply cannot recognize as my own the opinions that Mr. Hunsinger attributes to me. Nor is it evident to me that Mr. Hunsinger is either capable or desirous of dialogue with one whose social and political views he dismisses as being beyond reasonable hope and whose theology he condemns as "a form of blasphemy."

I am very sorry that Mr. Hunsinger thinks America today is comparable to Nazi Germany and that he feels "forced to the painful conclusion that today to be an American is to be an executioner or, what is much the same thing, an accomplice to the executioners." I believe that judgment, as well as his judgment of my work, is inaccurate, wrongheaded and slanderous. Mr. Hunsinger writes that Christians must call one another to repentance. On that he is right and, as a brother in Christ, I do.

Sincerely,



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Is the Church Political?

Robert T. Osborn

I am happy to have this opportunity to respond to George Hunsinger on Barmen, because with Hunsinger I believe that the Barmen Declaration is not so much a document of our recent Church history as it is a confession of the Church that can and should speak to the Church today, in particular to the American Church.

Hunsinger's Thesis: The Need for a Confessing Church

As I read him, Hunsinger contends, drawing on the experience of the German Confessing Church as reflected in the Barmen Declaration, that two kinds of conditions can make a Confessing Church necessary and therefore possible—the political and the theological. In 1934 Germany the political situation was determined and defined by the criminal Nazi society, by the direct criminal action of the German government and the indirect criminal complicity of the German people. He finds, rightly in my judgment, an analogous situation in America today, as our government pursues its policies, which may or may not be well intended, with criminal means to which the American people give their silent consent. He is forced therefore to "the painful conclusion that today to be an American is to be an executioner or, what is much the same thing, an accomplice to the executioners." This situation establishes the need for a Confessing Church in America today, "the need for a grouping of Christians 'resolved to speak out clearly and to pay up personally' (Camus)."



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As for the theological situation, in 1934 Germany it was critically determined by a so-called German Christians theology that made a new theological confession both necessary and possible. For his part, Hunsinger does not discuss this theological context of the Barmen Declaration, but turns instead directly to the theological context in America today which suggests to him the need for an analogous confession. Following Bonhoeffer, he contends correctly that American theology has never really had its reformation, and cites as evidence the writings of Richard Neuhaus and Harvey Cox, who understand religion in terms of its social utility, according to which Christ functions "to endorse but not to reign." And, notes Hunsinger, "where Jesus Christ is worshipped for reasons of cultural utility, he is not worshipped as Lord, and to that extent he is not worshipped at all." He is not, in the language of Barmen, "the one word we have to hear in life and in death." There is indeed a theological crisis.

Conditions for the Rise of a Confessing Church

Now, while I agree whole-heartedly with Hunsinger that both our political and theological situations call for a confessional Church, I do not believe that as such they make it necessary or possible. The example of the German Confessing Church suggests that at least two other conditions must be obtained before a *status confessionis* exists. First is the radical combining of the political and the theological through a politicizing and ideologizing of theology or a theologizing of the political and its ideology as were undertaken by the German Christians. The other and decisive condition is the ecclesial, the effort of this politicized theology to take over the Church and so bring into jeopardy the very being and truth of the Church itself, as was the case when the German Christian movement sought to gain control of the Church.¹

¹It is this situation that is alluded to in the introduction to the Barmen theses: "The theological presupposition in which the Church finds its unity...is being contradicted consistently and fundamentally and rendered ineffective by alien presuppositions....If these prevail, then according to all the confessions which are in effect among us the Church will cease to be Church." (Cited by Wolfgang Huber, *Folgen christlicher Freiheit* [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1983], p.19.)



"The great lesson from the Confessing Church of yesterday is the Barmen Declaration," says Hunsinger. I suggest, following the observations above, that the even greater lesson was the Confessing Church as such. The struggle out of which this Declaration arose is known as "the Church struggle," which was the struggle of the Church not for its confession but with its confession for its life. The Church itself is what was at stake. Indeed, as Bonhoeffer insisted, there would be no German Church were there no Confessing Church. "The Confessing Church is the true Church of Jesus Christ in Germany."² Thus, "whoever knowingly cuts himself off from the Confessing Church in Germany cuts himself off from salvation."³ And the threat to the Church was neither the political crisis nor a theological crisis as such but a powerful faction in and of the Church that was attuned to the political situation, well-positioned theologically, and which was seeking to take over the Church and so, in the judgment of the Barmen fathers, bring its being as Church into question. Unless the political and theological situations Hunsinger identifies find expression politically within the Church such that they bring the authenticity of the American Church into question, it would appear that our situation cannot be viewed as a *status confessionis*, desirable as Confessing Church might be.

²Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Way to Freedom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p.87

³Ibid, p.96

Barmen: Political or Ecclesial?

Hunsinger alludes to but does not directly focus on another problem relating to a political interpretation of Barmen. The implication of his effort to find the occasion of the Barmen confession in the political situation is his persuasion that it had a direct and immediate political meaning. "Properly understood, Barmen lays a foundation for a political resistance by the Church." But the need to reach a "proper" understanding suggests that in fact it is not explicitly political, so that, as Barth himself observed, most members of the Confessing Church failed to recognize its political implications. In truth, the Barmen Declaration is explicitly, directly and immediately ecclesial. It was not occasioned directly by the crimes of the state, by the political *per se*, but by the attack upon the Church from within the Church. The Barmen Declaration is in the last analysis ecclesiology, much in the way that we say that Chalcedon is christology.⁴ The question then is how can Barmen be read "properly," as the foundation for a political resistance against the crimes of the State and the complicity of its citizens, then and now?

I suggest that the answer does not entail a criticizing or supplanting of its ecclesial focus but rather the realizing of its full implications. We do not need to go beyond the Church into the world, but rather to ask, with Barmen, about the meaning of the Church in the world. Bonhoeffer said that "the Church is...the real body of Christ on earth."⁵ If he is right, then Christians address the political crisis not by leaving the Church to enter the world, but by being Church in the world. In the prison correspondence with Bethge, Bonhoeffer stated that the non-religious form of Christian existence in the world would be the Church.⁶ Barth, whose later theology can be understood as a working out of the theological implication of the Barmen Declaration⁷, was to state very explicitly that what the Church owes the State is first of all the Church itself.⁸ The Church has no other mission than to

⁴"The main theme of the Barmen Declaration is the Church." (Huber, p.28).

⁵*The Way to Freedom*, p.178

⁶*Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1967), pp.142, 144ff., 203ff.

⁷"The most important ecclesiastical expression of Barth's christological concentration came during the battle for the Church in the Theological Declaration of Barmen, which can truly be read as the basic text of Barth's theology." Eberhard Jungel, *Karl Barth. A Theological Legacy* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), p.43.

⁸Karl Barth, "The Christian Community and Civil Community," in *Against the Stream* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), pp.22-24.

witness Christ in the world, and it can do this in no other way than being Church in the world. The question then is: can the Church be Church in the world without addressing the political situation?⁹

The Answer of Barmen: Theses Three and Four

To answer this question, I would turn to the Third and Fourth Barmen theses. The first two theses address the question of the foundation of the Church in "Jesus Christ.... the one Word of God," who makes a "mighty claim on our total life." Barmen theses Three and Four ask about the nature and self-understanding of that community, the Church, which is brought into being and whose concrete historical, institutional existence is determined by that one Word and its mighty claim. We ask, does that self-understanding implicate the Church immediately in the political reality? I recognize of course that Barmen explicitly addresses the relation of Church and state in the Fifth thesis, but here a traditional Lutheran two-kingdoms reading has been possible, according to which the being and calling of the Church must be understood in total separation from the civil community. I suggest that we look at the Third and Fourth theses to realize that the Church based on Jesus Christ and Him alone cannot understand itself as such as so separated from the political reality—distinguished from it, indeed, but not separated.

The Third thesis (exclusive of the rejection clause) is as follows: "The Christian Church is the community of brothers (and sisters) in which Jesus Christ, in word and sacrament and through the Holy Spirit, is present and acting as Lord. It must, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, testify in the midst of the world of sin, as a Church of forgiven sinners, that it is His property alone, that it lives and may live only in His comfort and by His direction in expectation of His appearing." The Fourth thesis states: "The various offices in the Church establish no authority of one over the other, but rather the exercise of the service entrusted to and demanded of the entire community." For the purposes of this paper I want to focus briefly on the first sentence of the Third thesis—that the Church is "the community of brothers and sisters...in which Jesus is present and acts as Lord."

This community is determined by the presence and action of its Lord Jesus Christ, the one Word it has to hear in life and death (Thesis one). This Jesus, according to the First thesis, is Jesus Christ "as attested in Scripture." If the holocaust means anything to the Church, it is at least this, that it has reminded us that Jesus as attested by Scripture is Jesus the Jew, declared by the resurrec-

⁹Commenting on Barth's essay, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community," Eberhard Jungel observes that Barth's view "allows the political activity of the Christian to be understood as a confession of faith." *Karl Barth*, p.51.

tion to be the Messiah of the Jews, whose first community, those whom He came first to save, are the Jews, the children of Israel. I agree with Bertold Klappert, among others, that Barmen cannot be interpreted today except in remembrance of the holocaust, which after all is the final denouement of the story in which the Barmen confession was set.¹⁰

Accordingly, the first to be said about the Church, as the community in which this Jewish Messiah acts as Lord, beyond of course that it is the community of Jesus Christ, is that it exists in special community with the Jews. In Paul's words, it is grafted onto the branch which is Israel.¹¹ The Church cannot be a community created and determined by Jesus except as it claims His people, the Jews, and their God. The Confessing Church failed to realize the fuller implication of its confession when it imagined that it could come to itself without addressing the Jewish question as such, and could limit its concern to Jewish Christians, whose full participation in the Church was proscribed by the infamous "Arian clause." Now, after Auschwitz, the Church must understand that the Jewish question is also a Christian question, that the Church cannot be in the world except in community with Judaism, regardless of the response it receives from Jews. That Jews do not recognize Jesus as Messiah or Christians as their adopted brothers and sisters is the occasion for Christian regret but not for Christian neglect or denial of the Jews. The community that Christ creates is not only a community among its immediate members but between the Church and Israel.



¹⁰See Bertold Klappert and Helmut Starck, *Umkehr und Erneuerung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1980), p.50.

¹¹Romans 11: 17-24

As to our question about the political implications of the nature of the Church, is it not clear that had the Confessing Church understood fully what it means to be the Church in which this Scripture attested Jesus acts as Lord, the Jesus whose own Scripture was the Old Testament and whose people were and are the Jews, it could not but have identified with these victims of the state and perforce have found itself resisting the state directly?

Christ is not only the Messiah of the Jews, but as such also the One in whom God's covenant with Israel is extended to Gentiles and thus beyond the bounds of Israel. The new community which He brings into being is a world-wide, ecumenical community.¹² While it is always embodied in a particular, local congregation, that congregation understands itself aright only as in communion with all Christian congregations everywhere. The failure of the German Church generally to hear the Word of God addressed to it during the Nazi period had its roots in an anti-ecumenism and the entrenched tradition of German nationalism, as reflected for example in the famous book by Bishop Otto Dibelius, *The Century of the Church*, in which he stated that "the Church must do justice to its task of becoming a style of life for Protestant Christians of a German kind." "Internationalism...is always morally untenable, external and superficial." The neighbor whom Jesus commands that we love (and listen to) is always the German neighbor.¹³

A negative corollary of the above is that the larger community of which the local church is a part and in terms of which it understands itself is not the community of the immediate society or nation in which it finds itself. Not much essential is said about Church when it is designated as "German" or "American." To designate it as "Jewish" and ecumenical (Catholic) is more to the point. This too has political implications. For instance, a local congregation, as well as the individual Christian, will seek out and listen to the brothers and sisters of the world Church before they listen to governments and their representatives in those political matters where the Church has competence: I think of the evaluation of apartheid in South Africa or the human rights situation in Central America. This was an implication of Karl Barth's famous or infamous statement in 1934 that the German Church should behave "*als wäre nichts geschehen* (as if nothing had happened)," meaning that neither the rise of Hitler and the

Nazi state nor the state itself had anything to say to the Church as Church, or could make a claim upon it, contrary to the contentions of the German Christians.¹⁴ What Barth and Barmen failed to recognize adequately, however, was the positive other side of the coin, that it should have heeded not only the cry of the Jews but of the wider community of Christians in lands targeted for Nazi oppression.

Applied to the American situation, this insight means that the American Church can understand itself aright only as a part of the Church in South Africa, or the Church in Nicaragua, for instance, which must mean, further, that if it truly believes in itself as the body of Christ, as the Church of God (*Credo in ecclesiam*), then it will listen to the voice of these communities as to the demands of its own being, especially when those voices conflict and contradict the voice of our nation. I will, for instance, listen to a Bishop Tutu before it hears from the State Department on the implications of apartheid for the blacks of South Africa, and it will heed Christian voices from Nicaragua before it accepts testimony from an Elliott Abrams on the situation of human rights in that country.¹⁵ In these fully political contexts, the very being of the Church is at stake, a being it can claim only as it faithfully hears and answers to the Word of God as it is spoken by the Church of Christ, even when it thereby puts itself in contradiction to the prevailing voices of the nation.

Finally, the Christian is part of a community even more universal than the catholic, ecumenical Church—namely, the world community, the community of humankind that God has reconciled and redeemed in Jesus Christ and that God will reveal in all its fullness with the coming of His Kingdom. This is humankind not as it now exists, characterized as it is less by community than by conflict and contradiction, but the new humanity as reconciled, redeemed and united in Jesus Christ. We are talking about the Kingdom of God, "the affirmation of the creation and the denial of sin," a "No" to the world as it is, but... "Yes" to the world as God's creation—a dynamic, liberating, fulfilling and effective "Yes."¹⁶ So, the Church embraces the world in hope, not according to its rules but according to the promises of Christ. It is not taken in by the world, but rather takes in the world, just as the Church itself is taken in by the love of Christ. As Paul says in II Corinthians 5, we "regard no one from a human point of view," for "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself."¹⁷

¹⁴*Theological Existence Today* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1933), p.9.

¹⁵See, for instance, "Stop the Lies, Stop the Killing," *Sojourners Magazine*, XV, No.5 (May, 1986), pp.8-10.

¹⁶Helmut Gollwitzer, *Forderungen der Umkehr* (München: Christian Kaiser, 1976), p.70.

¹⁷II Cor. 5:16-19

Karl Barth, the primary author of the Barmen Declaration, later in his *Church Dogmatics* and elsewhere, argues that this last, the universal dimension of the Christian community, rooted in the reconciliation of the world in Christ, is ontologically first.¹⁸ The world (humankind) is first also from the standpoint of creation, in the sense that prior to the election of Israel or the calling of the Church, God created humankind to be God's covenant partner. And were it not that God has in fact reconciled humankind to Himself in Jesus Christ and thus fulfilled His creating and covenant purpose, there would be no reason for the Church, since the Church would then have nothing to witness, no story to live out or tell to the world.¹⁹ Just as Jesus himself looked forward to the coming of God's kingdom, so in Christ the Church looks ahead to the coming of the Kingdom, to God's loving reign over all.

I conclude this section with a brief consideration of how these three dimensions of the Christian community are ordered, observing that the Church, the local Church as a member of the ecumenical Church, includes Israel as its presupposition and the world as its promise. The love in which the Christian community has its reality is grounded in its faith in the God of Israel and in His Messiah Jesus, and is sustained and given its life by its hopeful participation in the universal community whose redemption is promised with the coming of Christ. In community with Israel, the Church has its faith; in community with the world it expresses its hope; sustained by this faith and hope it finds itself as a community of love. We make a similar point when we remind ourselves that the Christ who creates the Christian community as His body in the world is the Messiah of the Jews, the Son of God who has reconciled the world and, as such, the Lord who reigns in the Church.

Properly understood, that is, as testifying to the Church as a community of brothers and sisters in which the biblically attested Jesus, the Messiah of the Jews, the reconciler of the world, is present and acts as Lord, the Barmen Declaration does provide the basis for political opposition to an oppressive and unjust state. Barmen is political not just because of Barmen Thesis Five, where the synod addressed the question of the relationship of Church and state, but because the Church as the community in which Jesus Christ acts as Lord cannot abstract itself from the Jews who always seem to be so much a part of this world and its politics, even though perhaps the least among its brothers and sisters, and because it belongs to the human community, the body politic, to whom Christ promises to bring God's kingdom.

¹⁸Thus in volume IV/1 of the *Church Dogmatics*, where Barth discusses the effects of Christ's priestly office he turns first to the "justification of humankind" (para. 61), then to the "gathering of the Christian community" (para. 62), and only finally does he turn to the individual Christian under the rubric of "The Holy Spirit and Christian faith" (para. 63). He follows the same ordering, from the universal to the particular, in IV/2 and IV/3.

¹⁹II Corinthians 5:18

Is the American Church in a *Status Confessionis*?

Finally, I return to the first question—is the American Church in or close to a *status confessionis*? We have seen that the *status confessionis* is occasioned not by the political or the theological situations *per se*, but by a falsely politicized and ideologized theology that has such advocacy within the Church as to threaten its very being. Is this advocacy to be found in the Church today? Is the Church, as the community of brothers and sisters, Jewish, ecumenical, universal and eschatological, being brought into question, threatened in its very being, by an ideologized "American Christian" theology? It is beyond the scope of this paper to try to answer this question, though I suspect that it could be demonstrated that there is a theology, such as implicit for instance in American "civil religion," or in the radically individualistic habits of the American heart, that, as Robert Bellah and his colleagues have demonstrated, find expression in the American Church.²⁰ As Hunsinger has pointed out, pluralism certainly has found a voice in the Church, and among professional theologians, as well as the utilitarianism represented by Cox and Neuhaus, and both are intolerant of the Barmen Confession of Jesus Christ as the "one word which the Church has to hear in life and death."

All in all, Hunsinger has argued convincingly that there is a theological crisis, that Church theology is in need of a reformation. What is missing is a focussed advocacy of this American Christian theology by a heretical party within the Church, a clearly delineated front upon which a confessional struggle should and could be waged. So, as it is, we do not appear to have as yet a *status confessionis*.

Therefore, it must be concluded that the Barmen Declaration cannot yet be the inspiration of an American Confessing Church. On the other hand, I submit that Barmen can and should guide Church and theology, perhaps to shed that light upon the Church that could lead it further into its truth, or so clarify its actuality and reveal both the possibility and necessity of a confessional movement. □



²⁰See Robert Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co.), especially pp.142-163, 219-249.

Some Perils of Confessional Theology in Modern Politics

Max L. Stackhouse

My regard for George Hunsinger as a person, our work together in American Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT) and the respect I have for the integrity of his faith makes my response to his article, "Barth, Barmen and the Confessing Church Today," (*Katallagete*, Summer, 1985) very difficult. For, I not only disagree with him but fear that the perspective he advocates would deflect the Church from its most important tasks in our social and intellectual environment and prevent it from effective witness to our cultural and political situation.

We agree on much. Hunsinger is correct that a new resolve to faithful witness is demanded today; that Christians must be concerned about political matters; that some of our national policies with regard to Latin America and military spending are morally unjustifiable; that our situation is both more ambiguous than it was in Nazi Germany, because of the relative health of democratic structures in our context, and more dangerous than it was there because of the presence of nuclear weaponry; and that much theological confusion reigns in the churches, in the seminaries, and in the popular forms of religiosity that sweep the nation.

And yet, I pray that the Churches do not follow his response by calling for an American Barmen. Part of my discomfort derives from the quite practical fact that I know so few contemporary theologians whom I would want to write such a statement today that I would be hard-pressed to name candidates for a drafting committee. More substantially, I have a different assessment of Barmen and its context, of confessional approaches to theology, and of what is required when theology addresses public issues.

When Barmen was written, the Church was faced with one of the most vicious tyrannies in human history. The Nazi regime attempted, through brute force legitimated by ideological romanticism, to seize control of every sector of social life. Schools and universities became instruments of thought control in the service of the "spirit of the people" (*Volksgeist*) against universalistic values of learning and science. Civil procedures sabotaged the rule of law and became the spirit of obedience to command,

inducing arbitrary chaos masking as order. Economic life became dominated by governmental decree in the national socialization of all means of production. The arts became only instruments of propaganda. Medicine became the tool of genocidal "purification" and racist propagation. Historic allies of the Church had been disarmed from the capacity to resist totalitarian madness, because they had come to believe, on the heels of Hegel, Humbolt, Ranke, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and a host of lesser lights, that there are no objective and constant standards of right and wrong, knowable by reason or revelation and defensible in public discourse. These are outmoded Jewish, Christian, idealist and bourgeois fantasies, oblivious to their radical relativism of history, convention, and cultural individuality as expressed by the will of leaders who embodied the spirit of the nation.

In that situation, and faced with the growing influence of militant "German Christians" who threatened to take over the Church itself and turn it into an instrument of State will, a tiny minority of pious sectarians, confessional theologians, and ecclesiastical custodians issued the "Barmen Confession." They said, in effect, "this turf you may not have." The state cannot have our Lord and Savior or the souls of those loyal to Him. It was a heroic, if belated and ineffective, witness.

The Barmen Confession built a fortress against a demonic culture, and posed the question, as sectarians had done since the early Church, in terms of "Christ against Culture," to borrow from H. Richard Niebuhr. The Barmen Confession tried to keep the *zeitgeist* from occupying also the communion of faithfulness. It was, given the political context and the theological resources at hand, a spiritually courageous decision. But, for the most part, they left the rest to the vultures.

The problem with a fortress of faith is that it as frequently keeps faith in as it keeps demonic forces out. It locks faith into enclaves of protest which prevent it from engaging and transforming culture. It preserves a certain confessional purity at the cost of repudiating contact with philosophy, science, jurisprudence, and the humanities, for these are understood to be capitulations to culture in the first place. It makes for spiritual ghettos, also incapable of resisting the powers of destruction once they have gathered unto themselves the resources of civilization. Politically, it may bear faithful witness by civil disobedience, but is tempted to abandon the ongoing tasks of constructing and reconstructing political orders. Thereby, it tends to induce situations where civil disobedience is more frequently necessary.

It can be argued that the terrors of Nazism rose in German society precisely because the middle-European forms of Christianity had been essentially confessionalist for centuries. The German Evangelical accent on confessionalism, reinforced by pietist tendencies to form sectarian *ecclesiolae*, and to leave all philosophical and social matters to the state, had already committed the structures of academic, jurisprudential, artistic, economic, and political life to the pragmatic and calculative province of "the world." The church in Germany gained its income from State taxes. Such matters, it was held, were *adiaphora*, to be dealt with, if at all, by prudential patterns of worldly wisdom guided and supported by the "State" responding, as every State must, to the contextual dynamics of history. All this had nothing essential to do with questions of salvation. However, it was recognized that whenever demonic spirits capture the State, two responses are possible: obedience to the culture with capitulation to its principalities and powers, or resistance to them by symbolic protest against their errors and terrors.

That is precisely what happened when the Nazi tyranny erupted into modernity through the chasms of anti-rational, anti-modernist folk-romanticism, captured the bastions of civil society, and began to invade the enclaves of piety. Many capitulated to the new nationalist confessionalism. For others, the only defense available was to tighten and heighten the walls of retreat and to intensify the confessional focus on Jesus Christ from under the cross. The intellectual, social, and theological options of engaging the world and reconstructing the options had already been cut off, as much by the confessionalist character of most understandings of faith as by the resurgence of the Germanic gods.

If that was the situation of the Church during the "Hitler-time," as the Germans say, it is less than clear that the situation is analogous to the American situation today. The dominant traditions in America have been much less pietistic and evangelical in these senses than they have been reformed, reforming, and engaged. To be sure, much of the old Puritan energy may have dissipated, but today the Progressive Catholics and ecumenically-oriented denominations whose distant roots are Anabaptist have taken up where they left off. Having discovered the "Social Gospel" at various times in the twentieth century, they represent what H. Richard Niebuhr called "Christ Transforming Culture" rather than "Christ Against Culture." They have become willing to engage its science, art, jurisprudence, medicine, and politics, to learn from it and to struggle with it for righteousness's sake on the basis of warrantable arguments. Non-Fundamentalist neo-evangelicals are, at present, the newest group to enter this stream of thought and now face critical decisions as to whether they will remain in their traditional confessionalist "Christ Against Culture" posture or become engaged in the reformation of a public theology which can contribute to "Christ Transforming Culture."

Perceptions of our context make a great difference at this point. The anti-Constantinian suspicions of many post-Anabaptists and neo-evangelicals predispose to a Revelation 13 reading of every political and cultural situation. To be sure, idolatrous celebrations of "the American Way of Life" can easily be found, as in the media hype surrounding such events as the rededication of the Statue of Liberty. But accurate reading of a civilizational context requires structural analysis and, structurally, the United States has never had the temptation to rely on centralized governmental authority to control all intellectual, legal, artistic, economic, social or ecclesiastical affairs. Indeed, many current public policies seem geared toward the dismantling of government. The danger in our context is much less of a centralized political authoritarianism or totalitarianism than the relative absence of a positive vision of governmental responsibility. The terrors of our situation are less those of tyranny than those of anarchy: each person, each little group, each corporation and union, each party and church decides what it wants to pursue on the basis of its own needs or desires or interests, often without regard for the common good.

If this is so, the remnants of confessional purity are unlikely to challenge the pathologies that beset us. They are more likely to fragment society into isolated enclaves which make no difference to anyone except those who are in them.

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It is not only the assessment of the contexts of Barmen and our own situation that is at stake in these observations. It is also a question of the nature of theology itself. The problem is this: every confessional position is based on an epistemologically privileged perspective, on some special insight which we grasp, or which grasps us, and which is not generally accessible by "common grace," as progressive Catholics have claimed. Theology then becomes the rhetorically-ordered proclamation of what some are graced to know with assurance but for which no public warrants could be given. Such a view of theology presents three problems:

First, in our pluralistic religious world, in contrast to Germany, it is already believed that religious convictions are a matter of preference for a tradition which is meaningful to those who accept it. Some may be into this or that Confessing Church, others into Sufi meditation, others into Orthodox Judaism, others into the "human potential movement," and still others into Christian pacifism or Post-Christian feminism. All these confessional stances are tolerated because they make no basic difference to public life. If some are arrested for bearing public witness to their beliefs — say, by demonstrating at the launching of a submarine carrying nuclear missiles, or sitting-in at a state university dining hall to get vegetarian food, or by taking off their clothes at a public beach to call attention to the goodness of the human body — their stories appear in the newspaper and are done. Each confessional stance is a curiosity. Confessional stances are not understood to be, and may not be, so much claims to truth as expressions of private opinion, to which everyone is entitled. "Personally," said a recent cartoon, "I'm a Zen-Presbyterian."

Second, it may be that confessional positions should not be particularly important in politics, and that the most consistent confessionalists are correct when they tend to maintain their sectarian character. Very few want the Quakers or the Mennonites to run the Pentagon, or anything else in Washington; and very few Quakers or Mennonites want to run those shops. The State is not the Church, and no one can expect it to act like one. It may well be an error of the left as well as of the right to want to make the nation-state a holy communion or assess its behavior by the standards of redemption.

Confessionalism may have had some greater integrity when everyone one might encounter in a lifetime was already at least a nominal Christian and when religion is territorially established. Confessionalism then becomes simply a call to intensify fidelity to what was already "known" to be true and just for the salvation of the nation. But we live in a much more complex world in terms of religious epistemology and in terms of the relationship of religion to society. And when we are confronted with confessionalist groups around the world who do not share Christian assumptions, and who do indeed want to run Pentagons, the results are frightening. The world would be a better place if the Shi'ite Muslims of Iran, the "Block of the Faithful" in Israel, the Sikhs and RSS Hindus of India, the Soka Gakkai Buddhists of Japan, the Protestants and Catholics of North Ireland, most Fundamentalists, and a good number of the militant Liberationists in the United States would simply not try to be politically relevant on the basis of their confessions.

Of course, we can claim that "our" confessional position is right, just and revealed by God, while all others are but false ideologies; but so can everyone else. Certainly few confessionalisms want the governments of the world to start making decisions about whose confessions to heed, since they are based on the very Word of God, or whose to ignore, since they are based on some human invention. And yet, Christian evangelical confessionalism, precisely because it is confessionalist in its epistemology, has no basis for showing that its claims are any more valid in public discourse than any non-Christian or anti-Christian confession. Even should it be argued that the criteria are ethical, since "by their fruits ye shall know them," we would have to show that the ethical fruits which we want used as criteria are universally valid and not simply the reflection of a particular groups' confession.

That brings us to the third problem of confessionalism in relation to politics. Confessional approaches may betray something essential to both theology and politics in every age and perhaps most particularly in our own. If theology is to be taken seriously in its attempt to address political matters, it has to demonstrate that there are good reasons, compelling also to those who do not already believe, for heeding what it has to say. Any theology which does not illuminate the cross-historical and cross-cultural standards of justice (such as human rights), which is in contradiction to the best findings of modern science, and which is unable to enhance the understandings of how complex civilizations function will be ignored — and should be. That about which theology speaks, and must speak, is not, in the final analysis, something esoteric, preferential, private, privileged or disengaged from culture, society and civilization — with all its philosophy, science, jurisprudence, and arts. Theology must wrestle with the very *logos* of *theos* as it is also present in the public and non-confessional structures of the world. It must, to be faithful to the God who is not confined to pious conventicles, be engaged with the dialogical discernment of, reconstruction of and transformation of the world beyond the little companies of the committed who gather in prayer to protest the evils of the day. A god or a logic which only makes sense in a small context is too small.



A contemporary call for a new confessionalism, then, may not help us in our cosmopolitan world. Indeed, it may exacerbate our problems. What we may need, more than anything else, is the recovery and recasting of an apologetically-oriented public theology.

Hunsinger quotes Barth to the effect that ultimately there is only "one truth and one justice." That must, indeed, be the presupposition of all theology worthy of the name. Barth and Hunsinger may have erred, however, by confining that singularity to a particular understanding of the second person of the Trinity and thinking that a Christocentric confessionalism solves the problem. But whether one works in this theological tradition or in a fuller Trinitarian theology, one which speaks of a necessary pluralism within a larger unity, of which Christology is but one aspect (as I do), what is most disputed today is whether we can speak of universally valid truth and justice in any objective and reliable sense at all. Thus, if Christians are to be relevant to our present political realities, we shall have to engage in a fresh apologetic articulation of theology and ethics in such a way that people can understand why anyone in higher education, in law, in the arts, in medicine, and in the guiding structures of our political economy, should take what theologians have to say seriously in the first place.

Of course, it is possible to propose the formation of larger and larger constituencies of believers confessing the redemptive significance of the "people's revolution" in the Philippines, or of the Black protests in South Africa, or of the attempts to help refugees, and to expect that our confessions on these issues will then have to be taken seriously by political leadership because of the potential political influence of our constituencies. But then the political significance of what we say is simply based on the practice of "scripturally-grounded" power politics, a practice which can be exercised just as well by every other confessional group, as Jerry Falwell, Rabbi Kahane and Louis Farrakan have clearly recognized. It then becomes a contest of the relative strength of competing power-blocks, and not a recognition of the truth and justice of any message. Of course, it can be argued that even this kind of political struggle demands two important things: that the democratic process be kept open, and that people be persuaded to join one or another constituency. Neither the defense of democracy nor the development of apologetic modes of theological discourse for the people, however, has been the hallmark of modern confessionalism.

I think the problems are deeper than those Hunsinger and Barmen recognize. Our situation is sufficiently open that the possibilities of persuasion still make a difference. The problem is that few contemporary Christians are prepared to think about what is, and what ought to be, persuasive about the truth and justice of God in public discourse. We shall have to make the case in a way that few modern theologians have attempted (and the theologians to whom Hunsinger appeals explicitly repudiated), that it makes some public sense to take religion seriously, to speak about God, to refer to the Bible, and to hold that Christ has anything to do with the shaping, the transformation of our politics

and policies. Moreover, when increasing numbers of people in our pews also work with, do business with, socialize and intermarry with Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and morally decent agnostics or atheists, we have to show what difference it makes to speak theologically about public issues at all.

Yet, in the final analysis, I am less pessimistic than Hunsinger. I think it is possible to have a reform of theology leading to a transformation of social ethics and public life. The range of theologians and religiously engaged social and political analysts presently confronting the crises at hand, and not simply the battles of the '30s and '40s, seems to me to be growing. I list some who seem to me most compelling at the end of this response.

To extend their number, we might do better to take our models not from Barmen but from those who took Christianity seriously in the midst of the complex pluralism of the ancient Roman empire; from those who had to face the rise of modern urban cultures; from those who had to struggle for the reconstruction of meaning, Church and society after the early bursts of confessionalist protest had plunged the Reformation into relative chaos; from those who had to minister to people whose confessional worlds were shattered by the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution; and from those Christians in such places as India, China, Indonesia, and Korea who, as tiny minorities, are struggling to show how and why Christian understandings of God's truth and justice are valid foundations for the transformations of loyalties and of ancient, if now rapidly modernizing, cultures. These are the heroes of faith who refused to be merely confessional, who refused to disengage Christ from Culture or see Christ as only against Culture, who refused to remain sectarian, and who refused to allow their protests to override their engaged hope for the reconstruction of faith and civilization.

- Joseph Allen, *Love and Conflict* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984).
 Robert Bellah et. al., *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
 Franklin Gamwell, *Beyond Preference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).
 Kosuke Koyama, *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1984).
 Robin Lovin, *Christian Faith and Public Choices* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).
 Martin Marty, *The Public Church* (New York: Crossroad Press, 1981).
 Alvin Plantinga et. al., *Faith and Rationality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).
 A. James Reichley, *Religion in American Public Life* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1985).
The Religion of the Republic, E. A. Smith, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).
 Max L. Stackhouse, *Creeds, Society and Human Rights* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers, 1984).
 David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad Press, 1981), especially Chapters 1-3.
 John Whittaker, *Matters of Faith and Matters of Principle* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1983).
 John F. Wilson, *Public Religion in American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979).
 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers, 1983).

The Thinking Church Today

Katharine Temple



True instruction was in his mouth and no wrong was found on his lips.

(Malachi 2:6)

When the writings of Karl Barth were first presented to me, they went over my head—too hard, too abstract, too theological. Later, only when I associated him with the Barmen Declaration, his greatness came to me, like a gift from God. This intellectual *par excellence* was among the few thinkers to say “No!” to Hitler publicly, from the beginning. He showed me the intellect can make judgments about justice. In contrast was Martin Heidegger, called by many the thinker who has most profoundly understood the modern world, whose identification of his principle philosophical category—Dasein—with *der Fuhrer*, became a scandal to others. The difference pushed me to pursue

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Karl Barth, while there seemed no reason to read Martin Heidegger for guidance. Many people, I am aware, find a response like mine simplistic (if only because subsequent theology has adopted so much Heideggerian language). Still, Barmen and Barth testify to the unity of thought and justice, to the covenant of the Word.¹

George Hunsinger sheds light on the Confessing Church in Germany which issued the Barmen Declaration, and on the reality that no parallel voices exist in North America today. I agree fully with his conclusions and his comments on the black church, the Sanctuary Movement and those involved in civil disobedience. True, there are “men and women outstanding in holiness, living witnesses to Your unchanging love” (from the Eucharistic Prayer, the Roman rite Mass for Feast Day of a Saint), whom God raises up in every age, but I sense great darkness about the possibility for an unequivocally Confessing Church proclamation today. I am concerned specifically about the plight of thought within our churches.

The problem is not a dearth of statements from religious bodies. Perhaps because many Christians feel guilty about our confessional failure in World War II, a concerted effort has been made not to commit that error again. This reaction has been called a “Barmen complex.” Often we seem to believe by virtue of who we are, we can tell it like it is and end up on the right side. Whether or not these characterizations of Church statements are fair, I have become increasingly indifferent to promulgations that flower but bear no fruit, no public repercussions.² Somehow, the desire to be meaningful does not itself produce another Barmen Declaration.

¹When William Stringfellow spoke at the Catholic Worker in New York in 1984, he reminded us that the Nazi regime responded to the Barmen Declaration more seriously than the Church. With varying degrees of severity, the Nazis tracked down every signer. Stringfellow went on to observe that, as in Holy Scripture, the demons recognized Jesus as Messiah before His own disciples did.

Those of the Confessing Church were not the only Christians pursued by the Nazis. The Jehovah's Witnesses and the Hutterite Brethren were also persecuted. I single out Barmen because it was a public, theological statement.

²Throughout this article, I write about the churches in North America. I believe statements like the *Kairos* document from South Africa or the documents from Medellin or Puebla in Latin America, though I might not agree in detail, are genuine confessions of faith in the theological sense.

What has gone wrong? George Hunsinger suggests part of the problem is capitulation to the “Christ of culture,” so that we draw on sources different from Karl Barth's. The problem is doubled when theology is part of a liberal culture that absorbs and levels all previous notions of truth. By liberalism, I mean the beliefs that man's essence is his individual freedom, that all values are subjective and that through increasing control over human and non-human nature, humanity will progress to a better life. Immersed in such an environment, we cannot think about the content the Church must speak. Therefore, the proclaiming activity of theology has fallen by the wayside.

At stake is our faithfulness to God's truth which contains the promise that righteousness and peace can kiss (Psalms 85:12). To be a genuine teaching Church is hard, requiring a renewed theology and a greater wisdom about the world. Not that hard, though, if we remember 2 Corinthians 12:9, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness,” a favorite text for Karl Barth. The whole history of the Church instructs us that nothing less will do.

I am Your servant—give me understanding and
I will know Your testimonies.

(Psalms 119:125)

Above all, theology requires the conviction that Scripture, as the transcendent Word of God, speaks a content that can be known and relied upon as medicine, not poison. Most of us cannot come close to George Grant's statement, “There is a phrase of Simone Weil's that faith is the experience that the intelligence is enlightened by love,”³ let alone ask what it means. We see no intrinsic connection between love and intelligence, except for reason as a tool for tactics. Although Karl Barth was no Platonist, he turned to St. Anselm to learn the meaning of “faith seeking understanding,” with the belief that this is central to Christianity's creedal tradition.⁴ Without such a foundation, a Confessing Church has no sound doctrine to confess, only self-selected “values” or rote dogma, itself an inexplicable value beyond Tertullian's dictum “I believe because it is absurd.”

³George Grant, “The Moving Image of Eternity,” The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Montreal, Canada, p. 26. Grant also cites Weil's statement, “A village idiot who loves the good knows more than Aristotle.”

⁴I hesitate to discuss Karl Barth in the same breath with Simone Weil. The point where they come closer to each other than to modern liberalism is in the conviction that there is content to revelation. Into this general camp I would also put the rabbinic tradition of study.

Unfortunately, Western theology has survived Barth's theological bombshell without so much as a ripple.

The theological renewal associated with Karl Barth? It has had its day. We now live in the post-Barth era. What this means in reality is that we are really living as if it were fifty years before Barth.⁵

Renewal in theology, therefore, means yet another revival of something dormant, for theology remains an undertaking within established, liberal educational assumptions and participates in their structures and conformism. Far from bringing about renewal, our theologians partake too much in liberalism's dainties.

Renewal should not be confused with the newness that is the order of the day: new theologies, new spiritualities, new methodologies, new texts, etc. Through this pursuit of novelty, theology is increasingly emptied of content, apart from some subjective feelings of well-being, and emptied of a living tradition. She could eventually have no message at all, only perspectives. Equally to the point for a Confessing Church, the applauded dissent and novelty exist only within narrow limits and are largely illusory. The limits are the educational institutions; the illusion is that these institutions can be cells for change. On the contrary, as an essential part of liberal society, they tend to veil and strengthen the powers-that-be.

Modern liberalism has been a superb legitimizing instrument for the technological society because at one and the same time it has been able to criticize out of the popular mind the general idea of human excellence and yet put no barrier in the way of that particular idea of excellence which in fact determines the actions of the most powerful in our society. The mark of education is claimed to be a scepticism about the highest human purposes, but in fact there is no scepticism in the public realm about what is important to do.⁶



⁵Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 1986, p. 201. For the development of modern liberal theology, Barth's *Protestant Theology in the 19th Century* (London: SCM Press, 1972) remains the best source.

⁶George Grant, *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: Anansi press, 1969) p. 129.

In short, links among contemporary theology, institutional centers of learning and the dominant social and political powers are as nebulous as when Karl Barth first spoke.

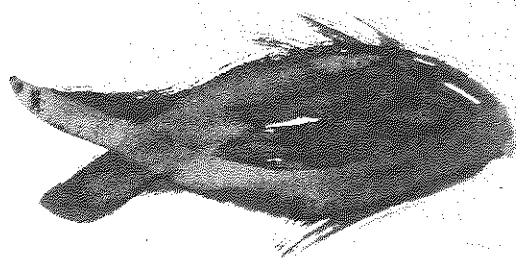
Barth responded to a twofold challenge: that of Hitlerism and that of the nibbling away of revealed truth by a liberalism that desperately wanted to harmonize the evangelical message with current scientific thinking. Barth pronounced a radical stop to the compromise with Nazism for theological, not political, reasons—the first time this had happened in the Western world. In contrast, he acted with great flexibility and perspicacity in the matter of science and Protestant liberalism (which is not unlike Roman Catholic modernism.) He was thus able to bypass the inflexible and hopeless debate between the orthodox and the liberals. He posed scientific questions in a rigorous way and made clear the limits and temporality of some of these affirmations. He also put questions to science, not content simply to receive question from it. For one or more generations of Christians he was thus able to provide an authentically Biblical thinking, a possibility of renewal of faith, an opening for advance in history and in truth.⁷

Another Karl Barth is needed for the Confessing Church today.

God, with our ears we have heard; our fathers
have told us.

(Psalms 44:1)

Great as my admiration for Karl Barth is, we cannot simply repeat what he said. He would be the first to insist that no theology is once-for-all. Hence, the truism that theology must be done once every 25 years, not simply as an improvement on a deficient past or a further development of doctrine. Theology, a humble, partial, serving discipline, must clarify, for specific settings, what God has spoken in the Bible. Theology's task is to allow us to hear what God desires. Not only do we live 50 years after the Barmen Declaration, but the highly Germanic nature of Karl Barth's expression has never been translated successfully into the North American idiom. The fault is not Barth's; yet he remains a foreign import whom most American Christians have difficulty hearing.



⁷Ellul, p. 201.

In seeking an alternative to theology's Babylonian captivity, many believe liberation theology provides a way out. Without going into specific controversies, I would say it already has—in Latin America, in Africa, in Asia. But not in North America. It has been heard, but this theology also remains a foreign import. It is espoused from institutions, but does not draw people from them. The great strength of liberation theology comes from basic Christian communities, and the substance of "the preferential option for the poor" comes from and with those who are poor, outside the ruling structures. The transforming power of liberation theology has yet to reach our shores. We have not heard with our ears, have not taken it into our very bodies. We should not relegate our deficiency to mere strategy for it is an intellectual question put to us. Until the voice of theology mingles with the cry of the poor, we delude ourselves that we have heard with fresh ears the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I applied my mind to seek and probe by wisdom all
that happens beneath the sky. It is a sorry task that
God has given to the children of man with which to
be concerned. I have seen all the deeds done
beneath the sun, and behold all is futile and a
vexation of spirit.

(Ecclesiastes 1:13-14)

Just as theology must speak clearly in a given setting, the setting itself must be clarified. Otherwise, we too easily ignore the seriousness of the situation. With other commentators George Hunsinger has faulted the Barmen Declaration for its social and political vagueness,⁸ and liberation theology has also taught us to look more carefully at our world. Recent Church statements do not ignore social analysis; however, we do not know how to think about society much better than we know how to think about theology. When we do look around us, we do not look deeply or critically enough. Philosophically speaking, we lack the acumen of Athenae or prudence, the mother of all thinking.

⁸Barth saw this as a weakness early on; nevertheless, it remained a weakness. He seemed to think right action flows automatically from the right formulation of belief. Elsewhere he said that the Christian should have the Bible in one hand, the newspaper in the other, but even if this was his procedure, the Confessing Church was unable to recognize that the destruction of European Jewry was the central plank in Hitler's platform. This can be seen as both a theological and an analytical failing.

Biases in the mass media and the social sciences, coupled with our naivete, make social analysis hard for North Americans. What's more, over the last 50 years, the issues have become not more complex but more elusive. Christopher Lasch states our dilemma:

We live today in a curiously insubstantial world. A world of images and abstractions in which organized expertise has replaced practical experience and images of things have become more vivid than things themselves.⁹

I am tempted to say we need another Karl Marx, but the polemic about him and Marxism has already reached demonic proportions, due in part to a lack of detailed study. Even without a full analysis, however, we could learn from him the starting point for good social thought.

As Marx says: "Men are for other men objects." No thinker ever had a more passionate hatred of the evils men inflict upon each other, nor a greater yearning that such evils should cease.¹⁰

Furthermore, Marx provided a critical account of liberal society which, if not totally adequate today, probed beneath the surface of appearance to view society whole.

Let me suggest one point for departure to reorient our thinking about North America. Even among those who dislike any given administration, the axiom of North American pluralism is accepted. I suspect that Karl Marx would have us look again, or, as non-Marxist George Grant has written:

As for pluralism, differences in the technological state are able to exist only in private activities: how we eat; how we mate; how we practice ceremonies. Some like pizza, some like steaks; some like girls, some like boys; some like synagogue, some like the mass. But we all do it in churches, motels, restaurants indistinguishable from the Atlantic to the Pacific.¹¹

To re-assess the fallacy of pluralism and set it within the overriding monism of technical domination, other changes in our understanding of North American society would follow. For example, relationships between advanced technology and democracy, between domestic and foreign practices, the U.S. as empire as well as haven, protest and conformity. This is not to argue that class structure or racism should be discounted, but I am convinced an analysis based on the fallacy of pluralism would make a more realistic and somber appraisal of liberalism.

⁹Christopher Lasch, "1984: Are We There?" *Katallagete*, Summer 1985, p. 32. The decision in 1934 at Barmen could pose a more clear-cut situation for an either/or decision. In any case, one must be careful in comparing the two historical periods.

¹⁰George Grant, *Philosophy in a Mass Age* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1959, 1966) p. 57.

¹¹George Grant, *Technology and Empire*, p. 26.

To look wisely at reality is not a cheerful activity as Solomon observed in *Ecclesiastes* (1:13-14)¹² His writings have always been regarded with suspicion and had a hard time getting into the Biblical canon. Perhaps this passage was given us, as revelation, to check our tendency to look at the world, and our place in it, through rose-coloured glasses, a tendency that impairs our ability to make judgments about justice. Today, we are not clear who we are or where we are, and so Christian protest groups risk becoming part of the atomistic fragmentation which is itself the basis for the highly centralized society we seek to deflect rather than reflect.

Offer God confession, and then redeem to the
Most High your vows.

(Psalms 50:14)

Commentary: "Offer God confession" [literally, "thanks"]. The translation follows Rashi who renders [it] as confession of sin rather than its more common translation of *thanksgiving offering*. Thus: acknowledge your errors and sincerely repent—this is the sacrifice I truly desire. After you have discharged this primary obligation you can proceed to redeem to the Most High your vows.... Offer sacrifice by placing your Evil Inclination before God and this will be reckoned as if you had brought an actual *thanksgiving offering* (Targum).¹³

The obstacles to clarity indicate the first pre-requisite for a confessing church: the confession of sin as an essential act of worship. The failure to confess sin affects all Christian life, but in the realm of thought, it blinds us to ourselves and reality, so we are unable to think clearly. The same Solomon asked for and received wisdom (I Kings 3-5), but the rest of his story teaches that self-examination is the first notion lost. How quickly he was lured into thinking that right action would flow automatically from his gift, so he did not have to think or be scrupulous in matters of peace and trade (I Kings 10): Then seduced by his wives, he did not see what was going on in his own territory (I Kings 11) and in questionable labor practices (I Kings 13). No recognition of sin, no capacity to grasp the situation of his kingdom.

¹²The citation from *Ecclesiastes* tends to support Hans Jonas's "heuristics of fear" spelled out in *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethic for the Technological Age*. He summarizes it this way: "Consequently, an imaginative 'heuristics of fear,' replacing the former projection of hope, must tell us what is possibly at stake and what we must beware of. The magnitude of those stakes, taken together with the insufficiency of our predictive over the prophecy of bliss." p.x. He writes as a non-believer. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

¹³*Tehillim/Psalms*, Volume 2 (New York: Artscroll, Mesorah Publications, 1978).

How quickly clarity is obscured by the glitter of the world and our own power. Thanks primarily to the major chord of triumphalism throughout Christian history, the Church has been more lax about our confession of sin than about spreading our confession of faith. (Private confession has been important, but it could not include what the Church as a whole would not confess.¹⁴) From the time of Marcion and John Chrysostom, our collective mark of Cain has been the sin against Judaism. Thus our failure in World War II. Even the Confessing Church was unable to see its complicity in anti-Semitism, and we have not done so adequately since the years of Barmen. If we cannot root out this sin, theologically connected to all our sins against the poor, our efforts to do theology, to think about reality, to confess our faith will turn to ashes. As inheritors of liberal individualism, we are not prone to humility or to accepting responsibility for the weight of our past. Confession is not simply to distance ourselves from the rest of the Church but to sacrifice our Evil Inclination to God, so we can redeem our vows to confess our faith not only with our lips but with our lives.

Commenting on Micah 4:6, Calvin said that the Church is sometimes hardly distinguishable from a dead or sick person. Nevertheless, we need not despair. For the Lord raises up His own just as He wakened the dead from the grave. We should note this. For when the Church does not shine, we think too quickly that it is extinguished and done for. But the Church is so upheld in the world that it will suddenly rise from the dead....Let us cling to the fact that the Church is not without resurrection, and more than that, not without many resurrections.¹⁵



¹⁴Although the predominant practice has been a private act, either to a priest or directly to God, the original meaning contains *con* (together), so true repentance must be corporate as well as individual. It is hard to grasp what that might entail.

No, we do not need to despair, for resurrection is not our own doing. At the same time, we should also not assume that God will act according to our plans. In fact, we must be prepared for the likelihood that God is resurrecting His Church elsewhere. That we may not be the prophetic voice can be a bitter thought for North Americans, especially white, educated North Americans who always expect to be leaders. Perhaps for this very reason, we will not be God's chosen instruments.

According to legend, the world is upheld by thirty-six Just Men.

One must be aware of the ancient Jewish tradition of the Lamed-Vov, a tradition that certain Talmudists trace back to the source of the centuries, to the mysterious time of the prophet Isaiah. Rivers of blood have flowed, columns of smoke have obscured the sky, but surviving all these dooms, the tradition has remained inviolate down to our own time. According to it, the world reposes upon thirty-six Just Men, the Lamed-Vov, indistinguishable from simple mortals; often they are unaware of their station. But if just one of them were lacking, the sufferings of mankind would poison even the souls of the newborn, and humanity would suffocate with a single cry. For the Lamed-Vov are the hearts of the world multiplied, and into them, as into one receptacle, pour all our griefs.¹⁶

This legend may contain a deeper thought than all our church commissions, seminaries and departments of religion put together, for it alludes to a hidden hope and a mysterious faithfulness. □

¹⁵Karl Barth, *A Karl Barth Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) p. 104.

¹⁶Andre Schwarz-Bart, *The Last of the Just* (New York: Bantam Books, 1960) p. 5.

Excursus--Barth, Barmen, Catholic Worker (Katharine Temple)

She was the ideal student, who learned his synthesis and put the ideas into practice in the public realm. Years later she wrote:

No one asked us to do this work. The mayor of the city did not come along and ask us to run a bread line or a hospice to supplement the municipal lodging house. Nor did the Bishop or Cardinal ask us that we help out Catholic Charities in their endeavor to help the poor. No one asked us to start an agency or an institution of any kind. On our responsibility, because we are our brother's keeper, because of a sense of personal responsibility, we began to see Christ in each one who came to us. If a man came in hungry, there was always something in the ice box. If he needed a bed and we were crowded, there was always a quarter around to buy a bed on the Bowery. If he needed clothes, there were our friends to be appealed to, after we had taken the extra coat out of the closet first, of course. It might be someone else's coat, but that was all right too.²

In her books and columns in *The Catholic Worker* newspaper, Dorothy Day passed along Peter's vision, writing about the day-by-day efforts to live it.

Love of brother means voluntary poverty, stripping one's self, putting off the old man, denying one's self etc. It also means non-participation in those comforts and luxuries which have been manufactured by the exploitation of others. While our brothers suffer, we must be compassionate with them, suffer with them. While our brothers suffer from a lack of necessities, we will refuse to enjoy comforts....And we must keep this vision in mind, recognizing the truth of it, the necessity for it, even though we do not, cannot, live up to it. Like perfection. We are ordered to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, and we aim at it in our intention, though in our execution we may fall short of the mark over and over. St. Paul says, it is by little and by little that we proceed.³

Until her death in 1980, she lived and taught what she had been taught and added her own unique blend of direct action (including pickets, civil disobedience and a refusal to cooperate with the State) and Christian non-violence. In the way she articulated Roman Catholic theology, she engaged scores of folks into "the new life" of wholeness and peace, and many believe she should be made a Doctor of the Church.

The resemblances between those in the Confessing Church in Germany and the founders of the Catholic Worker movement may not be obvious. Despite their different views on Church, their different styles and the different contexts, what united them was greater than what separated them. Confessing Church and Catholic Workers were together in their devotion to those early Christian sources that give the power to know what ought to be said and done in the world, to stand against the principalities and powers. They are teachers in thought, word and deed, witnesses who direct our minds and souls and bodies to love of God and love of neighbor. □

² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare, you will find your welfare.

(Matthew 25:40)

In the years Karl Barth was forging his theological revolution, Peter Maurin (the French peasant-worker-scholar who founded the Catholic Worker in 1933) was developing his synthesis of cult, culture and cultivation. His philosophy was "so old that it only looks like new," a philosophy grounded in traditional Roman Catholic doctrines and sacramental understandings, canon law discipline and the lives of the saints. It was a theological-political program so radical, few have absorbed it. Partly because English was his second language, Maurin was fascinated by American slang and often cast his thought into that mold, and formulated a deceptively simple sing-song style. His *Easy Essays* are, in fact, critical analyses that pre-date confidence in "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," while his "green revolution" envisages an agrarian, distributist life based on the Common Good. His route was a Christian response as one of personalism, self-sacrifice, voluntary poverty and the works of mercy.

By 1933, this eccentric, saintly man of ideas had a co-founder for the Catholic Worker in Dorothy Day. Inspiration took root at their meeting. In a relatively unknown easy essay, Peter said, "Man proposes and woman disposes." Whatever we may think of this aphorism, it aptly described what happened in their case, for Dorothy always called Peter her mentor.

Peter's ideas of hospices seemed like a simple and logical one to me; hospices such as they had in the Middle Ages are certainly very much needed today. But I like even better his talk about personal responsibility. He quoted St. Jerome, that every house should have a "Christ's room" for our brother who is in need....Peter brought up the idea of a paper the first time I met him and he kept harping on it day after day. He told me I needed a Catholic background and he came day after day with books and papers and digests of articles which he either read aloud or left with me to read. It was impossible to be with a person like Peter without sharing his simple faith that the Lord would provide what was necessary to do His work.¹

¹ Dorothy Day, *Meditations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1970), pp. 14-15.

How America Is Different

John Howard Yoder

George Hunsinger's reading of the facts is so close to the mark that there is no point in quibbles of detail. The facts are: first, the description of present United States policies, particularly regarding the nuclear arms race; second, the description of the pluralistic characterlessness of American Christian thought, illustrated by the parallel epistemologies of our two strongest opposing voices, Harvey Cox and Richard John Neuhaus; and third, the description of events in Germany after 1933.

The gaps which appear when we juxtapose Barmen and our setting are, however, important. They are gaps not so much in Hunsinger's account as in the underlying unspoken assumptions about the uses of Church history. Why should we take our signals from Barth, Bonhoeffer and Barmen (at their best) instead of from their adversaries? By "adversaries" I do not mean the "German Christians," the supporters of the Nazi regime, but the intact provincial churches whose leaders shared Barmen's vision not its strategy, or the theologians like Assmussen, Thielecke, and Eberhard Muller, who shared in the confessing struggle but who, since 1950, have drawn opposite lessons as to its meaning.

Barmen was flawed ecclesiastically. It assumed a church structure which had been trusted for so long that no one at Barmen thought to question it. It was assumed that the Church speaks through the professional theologian conversing with their guild according to the rules of their game. Within that understanding the confessors at Barmen did well. The relevance of the Lordship of Christ was restated with formal and material elegance. Alas, that word had few legs. As an emergency synod, Barmen arrogated to itself emergency powers to define doctrine, and those present set about valiantly to create ongoing liaison networks with mixed results. Most of the signers were so *volkskirchlich* in their concern to avoid anything divisive or sectarian that they disavowed Bonhoeffer's wanting to say "outside the Confessing Church there is no salvation," to say nothing of Franz Hildebrandt's vision for a visible free church structure. For a long time few of Barmen's confessors agreed that their right of dissent went beyond objecting to Hitler's interference in church order to criticize his political project on moral grounds (as we are called to do by Hunsinger's vision for today's readers). The Confessing Church remained *ad hoc* and ephemeral, the theologians who led it were either in prison or at the front by 1945 (not having thought that if Hitler's war was unjust they should refuse incorporation).

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Perhaps we can learn as much from the gaps in Barmen as from the strengths. Without particular, accountable, community structures inclusive sexually, economically, and professionally, prophecy will have no fiber and prayer or resistance no locus.

Barmen was flawed ecclesiologically. If the doctrine is right, the rest will follow, Protestant pastors since Luther and Zwingli have said. Irresistibly, without human governance, the Word will have its way if properly preached. The Reformers used this half-gnostic over-evaluation of the verbal to defend their establishment status against the calls of Andreas Carlstadt, Martin Bucer, and the proto-Anabaptists for the creation of visible church structures with membership and discipline.

It is not true biblically, statistically, or in terms of social science theory that the verbal proclamation of a theologically impeccable message will automatically renew the Church, without attention to any other measures of discipleship and discipline.



The ecclesiastical flaw is explained by the ecclesiological one. Together they explain that what we can most appropriately celebrate about the Barmen Confession is a magnificent beginning. From 1934, the intensity of the conflict was heightened by Hitler's initiatives. There were countless deeds of heroic comradeship in resistance. Yet, as body and movement the Confessing Church from 1934 grew not together but apart. Lutheran/Reformed differences, which the Barmen Confession had begun to bridge over, surfaced again: differences about the utility of keeping the given church structures intact, or how overtly to oppose the war itself. It was much clearer that Nazism should be opposed as bad for Germany and the Church than that the War itself should be opposed as bad for Poles and Russians, Dutch and French.

That is why George Hunsinger's exposition moves from the Confessing Church as a movement to the discipline he sees in the thought of Karl Barth, ordered under the non-Barthian categories of differentiation, unity, and hierarchy. The categories are so broad that the description cannot be faulted, but neither does it explain why Barth so consistently exasperated his interlocutors instead of communicating with them, nor give guidance as to how, today, we should find a faithful way between Cox and Neuhaus.

Just because of the concrete and dated quality of the political component of Barth's (unified, differentiated, hierarchical) political engagement, I doubt the feasibility of a systematic access to political bindingness. Hunsinger's categories transcend and therefore do not explain Barth's changes over the years. (e.g., from pacifism to firm antipacifism to nuclear pacifism to "practical pacifism"). Agreeing as I do with most of Barth's methodological axioms and with much of Hunsinger's description of these, I still doubt that academic theological articulation can be the Church's salvation or even her lighthouse. I agree that all the theologian should do is honest theology, "as if nothing had happened," subject only to the laws of integrity of the discipline itself. But it is precisely that objectivity, that disinterested attention to the proper object of the discipline, which forbids our speculating about when or whether the Church might be renewed around a renewed grasp of true doctrine. In Barth's own case, after all, that did not happen.

Where Barmen was flawed, we in America are worse off. Barmen had a sense of "The Church," within whose definition (baptism, Sunday worship, pastoral role) the ministry of the men (and one woman) of Barmen could go on. We in the United States do not have that commonality. Cox and Neuhaus can (and must) take America (as defined by their respective locations within competing elites) as bearer of the meaning of the human adventure. There is not, within our cafeteria pluralism, any lived community for whose members Jesus Christ is so normative as to include principled resistance to authority, and which is a common, verifiable basis for shared commitment and sacrifice.



It seems as yet unlikely that antinuclear actions will create this unity. The overkill preparations have been with us too long, the deterrence arguments are too complex, and the selection of what law to break when in protest seems too subjective. Hunsinger may be right that "sanctuary" may do it. Here is a concrete class of victims on whose behalf one can act locally. It would be ironic if the primitive notion of a special holy place, made into a refuge by a unique divine presence there, alive in biblical and medieval cultures, hardly credible in Protestant thought about church buildings, hardly valid in our law, should become the way community would again become costly and binding. It has the fundamental advantage of being local, as most church reality is not, anymore, these days.

I share Hunsinger's respect for the black church's not being split between "fundamentalists without justice and liberals without doctrine," and for base community renewal in Latin America. Yet that pre-Canaanite liberationism is facing a different struggle from ours.

So long as the liberation they wait for from God is theirs, so long as they themselves are the poor who claim the Churches' preferential option, there are several phases of ecclesiological evolution between their states and ours. Some hope for a Che Guevara or a Cromwell.

Some hope without a recipe. It does make a difference. There does need to be an accountable moral hermeneutic. After all we do know Cromwell was a wrong recipe.

Appendix: The Continuing Church Struggle (John Howard Yoder)

When in the 1950's the curtain dividing Germany continued to harden and the formation of a Federal Republic in the West enabled Germans to become part of the North Atlantic defense system, those German Protestants who had formerly been together in the Confessing Church's opposition to Hitler found themselves divided. Some, among them Hans Asmussen, Helmut Thielicke, and Eberhard Müller, supported the Christian Democratic party and government of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, including Adenauer's readiness to rearm. Others, represented by Martin Niemöller and with Barth's sympathy, were convinced that Christians should again be in the opposition. Informal groups called "church brotherhoods" (*Kirchliche Bruderschaften*), claiming the heritage and some of the membership of the Confessing Church, became the bearers of this protest, and addressed it with increasing sharpness to the particular issue of atomic armament.

The high point of this wave of protest, and a fitting final document in our review of the echoes of Barmen, was a petition (*Anfrage*) addressed by the *Bruderschaften* in March, 1958, to the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany (the federative body then grouping most of the Protestants of both Germanies). The core of this text was a series of ten articles, which are here reproduced with their immediate context:

- I. The Evangelical Church confesses that in Jesus Christ she finds "joyous liberation from the Godless bonds of the world unto free, thankful service to His creatures." (Barmen Thesis 2.) This forbids to her not only any approval of or collaboration in an atomic war and its preparation, but also her tacitly letting it happen. This awareness demands that in the obedience of faith . . . here as in every issue . . . we ourselves must take the first step to hold back the threatening destruction and to trust more in the reality of the Word of God than in the "realism" of political calculation. The first step is the act of *diakonia* which we, as Christians, owe to the menaced and anxious world of today. Let the faithless hesitate . . . we as Christians may and must dare it in trust in God, who created this World and every living creature in East and West for the sake of the suffering and victorious Jesus Christ, and will preserve the same through Christ and the preaching of His Gospel until His Day.
- II. If the Synod finds itself unable to assent to this confession, we must ask how the Synod can refute it on the grounds of Scripture, the Confessions, and reason.

For the sake of the men and women for whom we are responsible, and for our own sakes, we must insist upon receiving an answer to this question. We owe it to the Synod to remind it of its spiritual responsibility, since it is in the shouldering of this responsibility that it shows itself to be the legitimate authority in the Church. It is our conviction that in the face of this issue the Church finds herself in the *status confessionis*.²

If the Synod agrees with us, that an unreserved no is demanded of Christians facing the problem of the new weapons, must she not also say promptly and clearly to the State, that the true proclamation of the Gospel, also in the Chaplaincy, includes the testimony that the Christian may not and cannot participate in the design, testing, manufacture, stocking and use of atomic weapons, nor in training with these weapons?

III. We, therefore, ask the Synod whether she can affirm together with us the following ten propositions, for the instruction of consciences concerning Christian behavior with regard to atomic weapons:

1. War is the ultimate means, but always, in every form a questionable means, of resolving political tensions between nations.
2. For various reasons, good and less good, churches in all lands and all ages have hitherto not considered the preparation and the application of this ultimate means to be impossible.
3. The prospect of a future war to be waged with the use of modern means of annihilation has created a new situation, in the face of which the Church cannot remain neutral.
4. War, in the form of atomic war, means the mutual annihilation of the participating peoples as well as of countless human beings of other peoples, which are not involved in the combat between the two adversaries.
5. War, in the form of atomic war, is therefore seen to be an instrument incapable of being used for the resolution of political conflicts, because it destroys every presupposition of political resolution.
6. Therefore, the Church and the individual Christian can say nothing but an *a priori* No to a war with atomic weapons.
7. Even preparation for such a war is under all circumstances *sin against God and the neighbor*, for which no Church and no Christian can accept responsibility.
8. We therefore demand in the Name of the Gospel that an immediate end be made to preparations for such a war within our land and nation regard-

²Much of the debate about the Ten Articles centered on the meaning of this phrase. *Status confessionis* designates that situation in which the Church is challenged to take sides, with her very existence as Church being at stake. The later debate had to do with the sense in which the choice of this phrase meant a personal condemnation of anyone holding another view. Cf. Article 10 below.

less of all other considerations.

9. We challenge all those who seriously want to be Christians to renounce, without reserve and under all circumstances, any participation in preparations for atomic war.
10. In the face of this question, the opposing point of view, or neutrality, cannot be advocated Christianly. Both mean the denial of all three articles of the Christian faith.³

As of early March 1958, this text had 364 signatures, largely from among the Protestant clergy of West Germany, gathered in nine provincial *Bruderschaften*. The submission and publication of this text set loose a flood of debates, expositions, declarations, counterdeclarations in church and secular press. A further meeting of the *Bruderschaften* was called in Frankfurt for that fall, to which Karl Barth was invited. A portion of the letter in which he stated his inability to attend follows:

. . . It is perhaps also good if I am not there in person — among other reasons because the younger generation must learn to push more and more into the front lines and to fight the battles which must be waged on the practical-theological front, on the basis of their own insight and responsibility . . . This, however, does not mean that I in any way withdraw from my preoccupation with the problems to be dealt with in Frankfurt. These problems have also become significant here in Switzerland in a very special way, and demand my daily

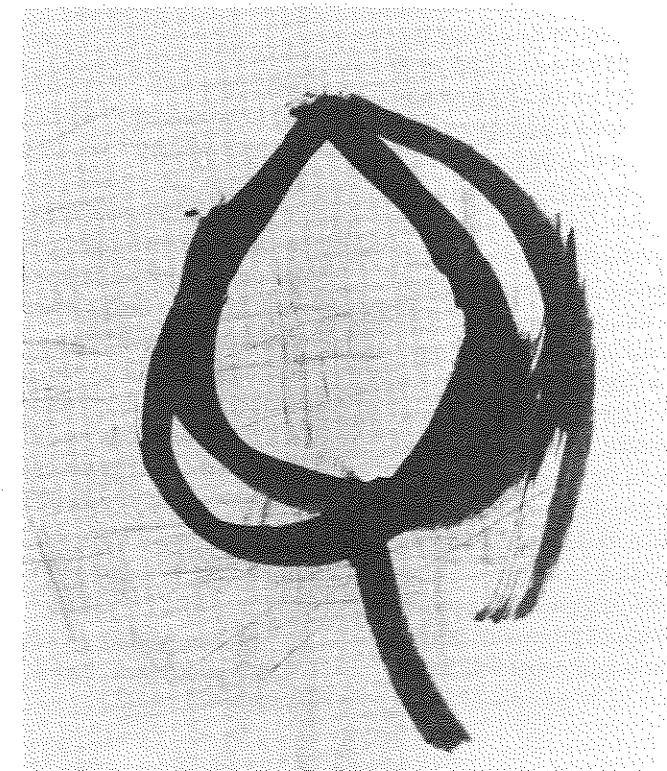
³Quoted from *Junge Kirche*, March 10, 1958. An earlier draft included here the sharper phrasing, "and excludes one from the communion of the Church Universal."

attention.⁴ The West-German *Bruderschaften*, having their origin in, and belonging together with, what happened 25 years ago, should be assured that I am with them wholeheartedly and stand behind them, always, but especially in the concern which disturbs them now, and that I shall continue to do so in the future all the more joyously, the more they continue the pathway upon which they have entered, free of all profundity and despair, clear and decided, uncompromisingly and consistently. What was the rumor spread about in Germany's newspapers, "that Professor Barth is not theologically in agreement with the Ten Theses of the Petition"? You may say to all and to everyone, that I am in agreement with the Theses (including the 10th!), as if I had written them myself,⁵ and that I desire nothing more earnestly than that they should be maintained and interpreted worthily, convincingly, and joyfully, but in principle unbendingly, in Frankfurt and thereafter in all the Evangelical Church in Germany.

Whether the Frankfurt meeting will be a "success" (*Erfolg*) is a secondary question beside what I wish you all: namely, that it be dominated and determined by a good spirit of "discipleship (*Nachfolge*)!"

⁴Letter in *Junge Kirche*, October 10, 1958. Karl Barth was at this time member of the Theological Commission of the Swiss Evangelical Church Federation, to which the question of atomic armament for the Swiss armed forces was referred. Barth, Jacques Courvoisier, and two others responded with an eight-point statement substantially like that of the *Bruderschaften*; Ernst Staehelin, Eduard Schweizer, and four others denied to the Church the authority to settle such technical military matters. The Swiss Reformed Association of Pastors, following a debate at its meeting November 10, 1958, turned down by mail poll a resolution calling on the Swiss military authorities to renounce atomic arms (*Junge Kirche*, January 10, 1959, pp. 52-53).

⁵For political reasons the fiction of collective i.e. anonymous authorship needed to be maintained. Barth was in fact the author.



¹Reprinted by permission from John Howard Yoder, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), pp. 133-137.

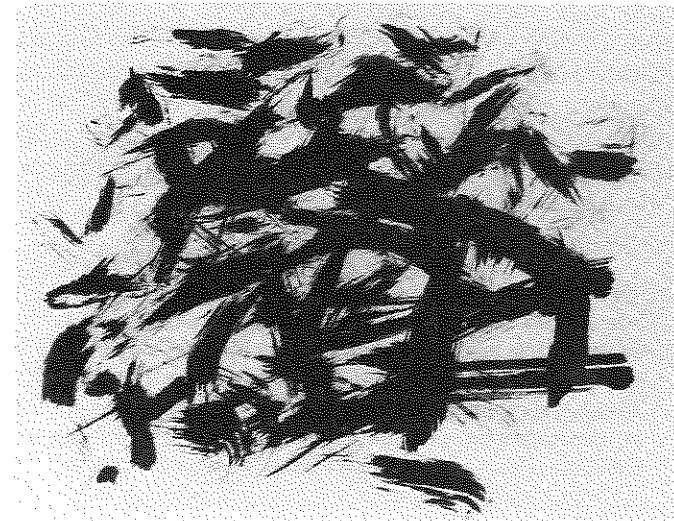
The Note in the Bottle: Reply to My Respondents and Critics

George Hunsinger

Writing an essay is something like sticking a note in a bottle and tossing it out to sea. One never expects anything to come of it, but one goes ahead and does it anyway. Having stuffed my Barmen essay in a little bottle called *Katallagete*, I felt pretty sure that was that. It had, after all, been hard enough to find a publisher in the first place. Those who could accept the point of view could not take the length, and those who could accept the length could not take the point of view. When, hoping against hope, I telephoned the editor of *Katallagete*, the gruff reply at the other end of the line was something I'll never forget: "If nobody else wants it, why should we?" Little did either of us know that it would be the beginning of a happy relationship.

Now, much to my surprise, I look up only to find a number of little bottles floating back to me. Each of them contains its own special message in response to mine, sometimes more encouraging, sometimes more critical, even at one point a demand that I repent of my manifold sins! I would like to take this opportunity to thank the respondents. Each of them has had something very worthwhile to say, and each has given me much to think about. For the time and the care which went into the responses I am grateful.

Although I reply to each respondent individually, perhaps it would be well to say something about the collection of messages as a whole. Some respondents seem to feel that our political crisis is as severe as I suggest, fewer would seem to agree that our theological crisis is at least as severe, if not worse, and still fewer would go all the way by rooting the political crisis in the theological. Indeed, some would deny either a political or a theological crisis at all. What am I to make of this perhaps unsurprising result? Why is it that so few of the respondents display an acute sense of crisis, even when they may generally agree with me? Could it be that things are not really so bad after all? Or could it be that there is such a crisis, but that the author of the original essay suffers too much, openly or secretly, from an advanced case of "works righteousness," whereas others, stronger in the faith, trust more fully in the sovereignty of God? Or could it be that we are working with the wrong analogy? Could it be that the "Confessing Church" for all its retrospective glamour is simply not applicable to our present circumstances, and that to suppose otherwise is to make oneself like those proverbial generals who are always lost in fighting the last war? These and other questions I have had to ponder in my heart. For the time being, however, while taking all questions under advisement, I am not persuaded to change my basic course. For better or for worse the point of view I had three years ago remains my point of view today. How it informs my replies to the respondents and critics will be evident to those who peruse what follows, a new bottle which I toss out to sea.



To Berrigan: To Sneeze or Not to Sneeze?

A clever but serious parallel has been drawn by Robert W. Bertram between confessing and sneezing. Consider, he says, what sneezing is. "It is (1) the body's protest against contaminants in its head, (2) protesting within an inch of its life. Moreover, sneezing is (3) apparently an overreaction, though only apparently. It is (4) not optional yet (5) whenever possible it is to be averted."¹ Pursuing Bertram's analysis will help us to see why we don't yet have a "Confessing Church" in America today.

First, confessing is an act of protest. It is the body of Christ reacting against threats to its vitality. It is an extraordinary means of coping with an internal disorder. The object of protest is internal to the body. Alien forces inimical to health build up a tension which needs to be resolved by a decisive act of rejection. The body is relieved of its internal disorder and recovers its equilibrium. Political disorders in themselves, therefore, cannot be the object of confessional protest. They are disorders in the body politic but not necessarily in the body of Christ. It is only when members of Christ's body attempt to accommodate the

¹Robert W. Bertram, "Confessing the Faith of the Church," *The New Church Debate*, Carl E. Braaten, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 123.

Gospel to political disorders that the matter becomes internal to the Church. In a confessional situation the integrity of the Gospel is at stake. Confessional protest occurs against the admission of alien authorities which threaten the Gospel's integrity.²

Second, confessing subjects the body to enormous stress. "I have it on good medical authority," writes Bertram, "that when we sneeze we are momentarily very close to death. Not that sneezing is mortally dangerous as practiced, though it would be if it lasted longer. For that split second, without air and with blood pressure and spinal-cerebral fluid excessively high, the conditions are fatal if they were to be prolonged. Timing is everything."³ In a confessional situation the stakes for the body of Christ are high. It is a matter of incommensurable loyalties, either fidelity or apostasy to the Gospel. The questions at stake require definite and binding decision. Indifference is not an option. "It would be as if, by having to sneeze to clear one's head, one risked losing one's head."⁴

Third, contrary to appearances, confessing is not an overreaction. What is at stake in a confessional situation is not just something but everything. Not some minor quibble but the Gospel itself is on the line, not some ordinary failure but the default of the Church. Ecclesiastical or civil authorities (or both) may need to be disobeyed for the sake of obedience to God. "To call that situation by such a prestigious name, a *status confessionis*, a *martyria*, is to take what is to all appearances a ridiculous and petty squabble and dignify it with the image of a cosmic tribunal — which in truth it is."⁵

Finally, to be avoided if at all possible, confessing, when the time comes, "is no more optional than sneezing."⁶ A confessional situation is a "time of trial" — the kind we pray to be saved from in the Lord's Prayer. Such times are not always spared us. "There have been times when the truth of the Gospel could only be preserved through prophetic and charismatic leaders . . . only in unusual ways . . . The whole community will need to be attentive to the challenge of such special ministries."⁷ Action at such times supersedes restraint. Internal disorders are to be named and rejected. The Gospel reasserts itself by polemical application to the Church.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 123-127.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), p. 28. Quoted by *ibid.*, p. 130.

I agree with Daniel Berrigan, whose response I deeply appreciate, when he argues that we are being "normalized" into an abnormality at whose heart lies the question of mass murder. I also agree that our only way out as a church will be by faith deepened through acts of prayer, worship and public witness. Our commitment to peace will only be increased by deepening our commitment to Jesus Christ, and our commitment to Jesus Christ will only be deepened through classical practices and disciplines of the faith. Faith will then come to be seen as a gift to be sought again and again never as something we possess once and for all. We will then come to see more fully that we live solely by the grace of God. God will then be known more truly as the One to whom we already belong, and trusted as the One from whose love nothing in heaven or on earth will ever separate us.

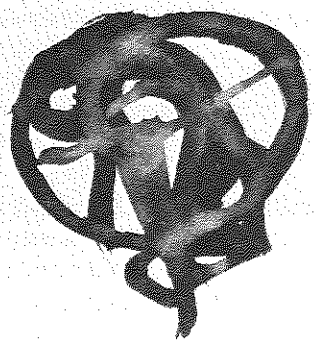
Although a Confessing Church today would, as I have suggested, need to be a resisting church, a resisting church is not necessarily a Confessing Church. Confession is a particular form of resistance, and no doubt resistance in its own way is also a form of confession. Political disorders can be resisted, however, without requiring the Church to "confess" in the technical or formal sense. Whereas political resistance is directed toward external disorders, confessional resistance pertains to internal ecclesial disorders. The two forms of resistance may sometimes need to be conjoined, though in principle they are surely distinct. Confessional resistance is peculiar, moreover, in that its focus is primarily "doctrinal."

It is at this point, I think, that Berrigan's analysis begins to diverge from my own. He perceives questions to be "moral" at the very point where I would regard them also as "doctrinal." My differing perception is perhaps the mark of a decidedly Protestant sensibility. As Gordon Rupp points out, others had attacked the manners and morals, the abuses and corruptions of the Church, but "Luther prided himself on the fact that . . . he had begun with doctrine."⁸ "Where the doctrine is not right," wrote Luther, "it is impossible for the life to be good; for life is spawned and shaped by doctrine."⁹ Luther's one-sidedness here can be granted without sacrificing the basic point. When morals are shaped by beliefs contrary to the Gospel, moral correction is futile without doctrinal realignment. Sometimes moral malaise can be corrected only by attending to the doctrinal disorder which sustains it.

⁸Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), p. 9.

⁹Martin Luther, *W.A.*, Vol. 32, p. 408.

It is for this reason that I suspect "the crime of silence" cannot be so neatly divorced as Berrigan suggests from the "confessional" integrity of the Church. Certainly we would both like to see the crime of silence ended in the churches. Certainly integrity is far more than a matter of open doctrinal declarations. Certainly such declarations can be fairly empty when not followed by the corresponding actions. Nonetheless, I am convinced that to think "Christ and nukes are compatible" is more than merely a "moral problem." When "the suffering Christ" is disowned, degraded, and distorted beyond all recognition, as Berrigan asserts and I agree, then more than just "morality" has gone awry. A reconsideration of basic convictions — convictions sanctioned by theology and Church but in direct conflict with the Gospel — will need to occur if idols are to be toppled, and forgotten tasks are to be remembered and undertaken. For it is by basic "doctrinal" lapses that abuses and corruptions are spawned in the Church, at least in part, and that its manners and morals are shaped. That is why I have stressed, as far as the Church is concerned, that our political crisis is rooted in disorders which are theological. The dimensions of each and of their interrelations will be explored in the reflections that follow.



To Cochrane: The Laborers Are Few

In 1959 Karl Barth was asked by *Christianity Today* to indicate the most vital issue confronting the Church. "Atomic warfare," he replied. "How," he continued, "do you explain the fact that the large Christian bodies cannot produce a definite yes or no on the matter of atomic warfare? What significance has this fact, first, in regard to the Church's own message; second, in regard to the world around her?"¹⁰ Seven faculty members of Dubuque Theological Seminary, largely at the instigation of Professor Cochrane, were moved by Barth's questions to produce a definite yes or no. Their declaration was circulated in America, Germany and Japan. Twenty years later, in 1980, the original signatories reaffirmed their stand. If a Confessing Church ever emerges in America today, it will look back to the Dubuque seven and their statement, though largely ignored at the time, as one of its most important indigenous forerunners.

¹⁰Karl Barth, *Christianity Today*, Vol. 4 (Oct. 12, 1959), p. 29.

"A Statement Concerning the Use of the Means of Mass Extermination of Waging War," as the Dubuque Declaration was called, contains among others, the following articles:

The threat and exercise of the means of mass extermination in waging war is blasphemy against God . . . and . . . sin against the creature for whom Christ died and rose again.

There is no conceivable end which justifies these means.

All men and nations who follow the policy of war by mass extermination provoke the wrath of God and His just retribution, whether they deny Him or whether they profess their worship of Him.

We therefore confess our sin and the sin of our people to Almighty God and to the survivors of those whom we have wantonly destroyed. We further confess that we as Christians have been shamefully weak and tardy in this our confession of guilt.

We declare that we can no longer support the government's policy of the threat and exercise of the means of mass extermination, whether nuclear, chemical or biological. We cannot sanction the production, testing and application of the means of mass extermination, nor can we approve any military service that involves the use of such instruments of warfare.¹¹

Arthur Cochrane has been an eloquent and lonely voice in the struggle for an American Confessing Church. From his early work on *The Church and the War* (1940), through his principal authorship of the Dubuque Declaration (1960), on to his classic study of *The Church's Confession Under Hitler* (1962), and down to his most recent major work on *The Mystery of Peace* (1986), he has striven to bring confessional clarity to bear on the most vital issues of the day.¹² *The Mystery of Peace* in particular is an indispensable text for any who are interested in the prospects for a future Confessing Church. (I would especially call attention to the chapter on "Confessing the Peace of Christ.") It is true, as Cochrane says, that the laborers are all too few. But thanks be to God for the way he himself has been among them.

¹¹Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Mystery of Peace* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1986), pp. 168-169.

¹²Cochrane, *The Church and War* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1940); *Idem*, *The Church's Confession Under Hitler* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962).



To Conard: Enemy-Love Is the Heart of the Gospel

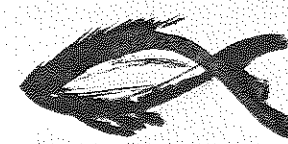
The Confessing Church in Germany retained its strength, as Arthur Cochrane observes, only insofar as it was rooted not in ecclesiastical superstructures, but in confessing congregations. The special significance of Audrey Conard's reflections on the possibility of a future Confessing Church is that they arise from a congregational setting. "My viewpoint is one in the pew," she notes at the beginning of her moving essay. It thus stems, as she rightly suggests, "from that particular place where reform will come, if at all."

As if in echo of Nietzsche's searing question, "Why don't the redeemed look more redeemed?" Conard surveys even the strengths present in the congregations and finds that "I still cry out, 'Where are we?'" We are not ignorant of what is going on in the world, she says, yet we lack a clear sense of direction, and we feel paralyzed when confronted with the overwhelming suffering of our distant neighbors, such as the starving children of Ethiopia. And so we settle for "Sunday sociability," in which we neither agree nor disagree, neither hurt nor forgive one another freely.

Yet beyond our vacant sociability lies that "common core" of Christian conviction, "the central doctrines of love and sacrifice," to which Conard would direct our attention. Included in that common core, as she retrieves it, is not only the command that we should love God with all our heart, mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves, but also the command that we should love our enemies and do good to those that hate us. One could envision a Confessing Church, Conard suggests, which at least got clear on this much.

Conard's association of enemy-love with love for God and neighbor-love, though traditional, is intriguing. For how many of us can recall hearing even a single sermon devoted to enemy-love? How many of us find ourselves in congregations where enemy-love is understood not as some exotic doctrine occasionally to be acknowledged, then quickly dismissed, but rather as the very heart of the Gospel and therefore of the Christian life? How many congregations understand the Gospel itself as the good news of God's enemy-love?

Yet is it not the good news of the Gospel that in the Crucified One we have been changed from enemies of grace into friends with the grace to love enemies? Was it not while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us? Was it not while we were enemies that we were reconciled to God by the death of God's Son (Romans 5:8, 10)? Therefore, how can we respond to God and one another in any other way than God in Jesus Christ has responded to us? Conard is exactly right: "A Confessing Church would enlarge our sense of the size of our community and those to whom we are responsible; it would make mandatory that we find new ways of responding." It would do so, as it learned to receive the good news that there are no enemies. It would therefore know, in Cochrane's words, that "to become a follower or disciple of Jesus and to suffer for his sake is to find peace." A Confessing Church would be defined by how well it had grasped at the congregational level that God's power is in enemy-loving.



To Cox: A Confessing Church Confesses Christ

Are Cox's disagreements with my essay primarily political or primarily theological? They might easily be construed as political. In that case Cox would be saying that instead of just a political no, a Confessing Church needs to utter a political yes. Resistance, as called for by the essay, is not enough. Liberation of the oppressed and captive is the positive political alternative needed to save us from an empty oppositional stance. In other words, unless placed in the service of revolution, mere resistance is "despair and posturing."

There may be a difference here between Cox and myself, but it cannot be gotten at on the political plane. We do not much differ, it seems to me, on what we would like to see happen in the way of social transformation. That is why we both take part in some of the same political organizations (e.g., the Democratic Socialists of America). Although I was surprised that Cox chose to concentrate so heavily on Latin America that he said nothing about nuclear weapons, even here it is unlikely that we have any serious disagreement. We would, I am sure, both agree that any

opposition to nuclear weapons which does not include opposition to U.S. intervention in the Third World is likely to be an exercise in futility, since the most probable flashpoints for a strategic nuclear war are mainly in the Third World. There is, in short, a great deal of political solidarity between us (as I indicated in the original essay).

Where Cox and I differ, it seems to me, is over what is central and what is peripheral in theology. Like many others, Cox makes peripheral matters central and thereby vitiates the Gospel. For him the Gospel makes sense only insofar as it awakens Christian social responsibility. The Gospel commends itself as the means whereby social responsibility is discerned and sustained. When Cox resorts to traditional Christian vocabulary, such as "the nature of the Gospel" or "the reign of God," he shows little interest in anything other than the social question. Everything reduces rather quickly to "speaking truth to power" and "liberating the oppressed." I am, of course, not opposed to these things. I am simply opposed to a view of the Gospel which has no substance of its own and which merely adds texture to what can be said about social responsibility on other grounds.

Let me be more specific. Cox and I would differ, as far as I can see, on such theologically serious matters as salvation, the Church and Jesus Christ. Salvation, I would say, is centered not on human existence but on Jesus Christ. Opposition to social injustice and struggling for a more humane world would therefore, at best, parallel and correspond to salvation (and thereby point to it), but would never constitute or define it. Salvation is defined by faith in Jesus Christ as the one into whom we have been incorporated by his death on the cross. Salvation is constituted by Christ's work on our behalf and in our place, not by what we are to do in response, not even if it meant our establishing a completely just society (which of course we will never do). Salvation is a gift of God, completed apart from us in Jesus Christ. We are called to receive it by faith and to correspond to it in our lives.

The Church, too, I would say, centers not on human existence but on Jesus Christ. Humanizing social structures, discerning God as the agent behind movements for social change, and making world history come out right are not tasks which define the Church. Although Christians in our culture should take part in secular movements against injustice, hunger, imperialism and war, the Church is defined not by these activities, but by Jesus Christ as the one whom the Church worships, embodies and testifies. In particular it is the Church's inner communal life which is called to break with the world by conforming to the crucified Christ. A Church which tries to enact in society a content not embodied in its own ranks will be met with the suspicion it deserves. This shortfall is precisely what happens when the center is usurped by the periphery.

Jesus Christ, then, is the center not the periphery; and our human response is the periphery not the center. Jesus Christ is, as it were, an intrinsic not an instrumental value. He is important for his own sake, not at all as the means to our ends. As the Word of God incarnate, he is rightly the object of our worship; he alone

reveals God to us; he alone reconciles us to God. It will not do for Cox to play off the Jesus of the Gospels against the so-called Pauline Christ. This is simply a typically instrumentalist move which wants to restrict Jesus to an ethical prototype and to ignore the fact that his exclusive uniqueness as God's Son is, as Ernst Käsemann says, "presupposed throughout the New Testament."¹³ The whole point of the Gospel is to de-center us so that we will see Jesus Christ in this light. We are to learn to love him above all else, and in so doing to love also all those whom he loves.

What does a Confessing Church confess? It confesses neither a political yes nor a political no. A Confessing Church confesses Christ. In so doing it will take care that this confession is embodied first in its own communal life, then in its action in the world. There is even an important sense in which its inner communal life is its action in the world. Without the autonomy of a faithful inner life, the Church can have no real reciprocity with others. Nuclear war, in my opinion, would be the greatest of crimes. The systematic violation of human rights sponsored by our government in Third World countries constitutes, in my opinion, a crime against humanity. If a Church confessing Christ remained silent in the face of these crimes, it would forfeit the integrity of its confession. If it did not as a community actively oppose such unspeakable offense, it would repeat the crucifixion of its Lord. Although it will not be lacking in "positive alternatives," it will not regard policy changes, as important as those may be, as the overriding goal. Government policy in any case shows every sign of being intractable here. For the sake of confessional integrity and the authenticity of its own inner life, and hence for the sake of faithful witness to the world, the

¹³Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 5. Cox worries that fidelity to the exclusive Christology of the New Testament will rule out the possibility of "common theological ground" between Christians and Jews. In general, I believe Christians should be more concerned to listen than to speak about this possibility, that is, to learn primarily from what Jews have to tell us. Epigrammatically, Martin Buber's statement would seem to be unsurpassed: "To the Christian the Jew is the stubborn fellow who in a redeemed world is still waiting for the Messiah. For the Jew the Christian is a heedless fellow who in an unredeemed world affirms that somehow or other redemption has taken place" (Quoted by Reinhold Niebuhr, "Martin Buber: 1878-1965," *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. 25 [1965], p. 146). Much that is highly instructive may be found in Walter Jacob, *Christianity Through Jewish Eyes* (Hebrew Union College Press, 1974). New Testament Christology, it seems to me, represents the limit, not the preclusion of "common ground."

community, regardless of what others may or may not do, will therefore undertake to resist. Such resistance will not be seen as an empty oppositional stance, except perhaps by those who mistake the periphery for the center. Others will see it for what it is — a testament of hope in a world run amok.¹⁴



To de Gruchy: The Church Is the Transformation of the World

A subtle question lies unresolved at the heart of John de Gruchy's fine essay. What, according to him, is the Church's primary social responsibility? At this agonizing moment in South Africa's agonized history, how is the Church called to bear witness against racism? Is it to do so primarily by making the world more peaceable and just, or by manifesting more peace and justice in the world? Is the Church to be on the scene primarily as an agent of social change, or as a community of changed social agents? What, in short, is the Church's primary calling — to transform the world or to be the transformation of the world?

De Gruchy might be read as coming down on either side of this question. On the one hand, he might be saying that the Church is called primarily to take part in transforming the world. Struggling for political liberation, establishing a just peace in the world, approximating the coming kingdom through social transformation are watchwords of the idea that the Church should be on the scene primarily as an agent of social change. The Church cannot withdraw, nor can it be neutral, but must instead be directly involved in the struggle. The Church is called to be an effective political actor.

¹⁴Cox says I am mistaken to associate him with Neuhaus's suggestion that religion has a place in the public square. In reviewing Neuhaus's book *The Naked Public Square* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), Cox writes: "I strongly agree with what I take to be the book's main thesis . . . Mr. Neuhaus's underlying theological point is essentially sound . . . I believe restoring religion to the public square is essential but that restoration is not without its perils" (*New York Times Book Review*, Aug. 26, 1984, p. 11).

De Gruchy might be saying, on the other hand, that the Church's primary calling is not to transform but to be the transformation of the world. Listening to God's Word as this Word speaks to us today, the Church may declare certain ideologies to be a "heresy" (a term that has little meaning outside an ecclesiastical context). It will thus challenge those ideological theologies which falsify God's Word by legitimating injustice and oppression (a challenge which, by the way, I think Cox's essay articulates for our setting very well). First in its own inner life, then in its outreach to the world, the Church will bear witness to God's reconciliation of all persons and to their responsibility for one another. It will thus be a sign of the new humanity — a sign that in Jesus Christ the walls have been broken, the divisions abolished and the warrings made to cease. The Church is thus to be a faithful embodiment of justice and peace.

What difference does it make whether we think the Church is called to transform or to be the transformation of the world? If, as I believe, the Church is called essentially to be the latter, then an ethic of faithfulness will take precedence over an ethic of effectiveness. There will thus be some things which the Church cannot do as an agent of social change, no matter what good might accrue. The limits of the permissible are suggested by the conviction that enemy-love is the heart of the Gospel. The Church can give up on no one, not even the enemy. "It must witness to the reconciliation of all, at all costs, even death," as Bishop Desmond Tutu has stressed.¹⁵ The most powerful form of this witness, in my opinion, would also be the most faithful. It would be a Church whose inner communal life showed the world what it meant to be a community of justice and peace. How can a Church which has not learned how to deal with racism within its own ranks, for example, expect to deal effectively with racism in the world?

Transforming and being the transformation of the world are not to be understood as mutually exclusive. I am not arguing for their separation but for their proper ordering. Communal faithfulness without regard for worldly effectiveness is mere sectarianism, just as worldly effectiveness without regard for communal faithfulness is mere accommodationism. The Church has to contend on two fronts, against sectarian and accommodationist temptations. Just how the Church is to do so in any particular situation is not for me to decide, certainly not for the South African situation out of which de Gruchy so thoughtfully writes. I simply propose that the Church make its decisions in conformance with its true identity. As the community of those who have received the gift of reconciliation with God and one another through faith in the crucified Christ, the Church is and is to be the transformation of the world.

¹⁵This is Bishop Tutu's position as summarized in the words of Clifford J. Green, "Here We Stand: South African Church Leaders Speak Out," *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. 45 (1985), p. 443.



To Earl: Can the Split Be Healed?

With extraordinary candor Riggins Earl, Jr. tells a sad and poignant tale. Racial humiliations, missed opportunities, petty exclusions, conflicting loyalties and tragic choices are the stuff of which the tale is made. Yet more extraordinary than the tale itself is the amazing moral vision that guides it. Earl jolts us into awareness that if we can indeed remember a sermon on enemy-love, it is from the black church that we are likely to have heard it. "Loving Your Enemies" by Martin Luther King, Jr. is a classic sermon on the theme, and with Earl, who quotes from it extensively, King's moral legacy lives on.¹⁶

It is a legacy which opposes the split conscience. Conscience is split when the Church places lesser loyalties above loyalty to its crucified Lord, even though Christ-centered loyalty is the only reason for the Church's existence. When the Church chooses to commit rather than to suffer wrong, when it does evil that good might come, when it refuses the risk of the cross for the security of conforming to the world, its supreme loyalty has been betrayed. Loyalty to Christ is a gift from God to be sought again and again, not something the Church possesses in itself. But when competing loyalties — those which deny the inclusiveness of God's love for the world in Jesus Christ — are not recognized and renounced, havoc is wreaked, and not least upon the Church. False loyalties insert divisions of caste into the community of reconciliation. The split conscience underlies the split Church.

"How much longer will it be possible in the United States and South Africa," writes Karl Barth, "to ratify the social distinctions between whites and blacks by a corresponding division in the Church?"¹⁷ The ratification of caste by the Church led H.

¹⁶Martin Luther King, Jr., "Loving Your Enemies," *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 34-41.

¹⁷Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, Pt. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), p. 703.

Richard Niebuhr to speak of denominationalism as "the moral failure of Christianity." For denominations in America, he argued, represent the Church's accommodation to the caste system. "They are emblems, therefore, of the victory of the world over the Church, of the secularization of Christianity, of the Church's sanction of that divisiveness which the Church's Gospel condemns."¹⁸ They are emblems of false loyalties and the split conscience.

In the New Testament, and especially in the letters of Paul and his followers, reconciliation as an imperative was based on an accomplished fact. "He is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14). The death of Christ had made our peace actual and therefore also possible. Peace had been made "by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:20). "The dividing wall of hostility" was abolished "in his flesh" (Ephesians 2:14, 15). Since all were reconciled to God "in one body through the cross" (2:16), we had no choice but to be reconciled to one another in love. Reconciliation with God was at the same time a social and political event. Those formerly hostile were given access to one another as friends.

Worship was the setting in which this two-fold reconciliation was most fully acknowledged and expressed. Worship made possible by our reconciliation with God was not actual without our reconciliation to one another. "First be reconciled to your neighbor, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:24). Celebrating the eucharist, the Church's central act of worship, was to be a parable of the final kingdom. It was thus to be a sign not only of joy, but also of justice and peace. As a taste of the bread of heaven and the cup of blessing, it was a sign of joy. As a fellowship of forgiven sinners made equal by the righteousness of our Lord, it was a sign of justice. As a communion of friends whose hostility had been vanquished by the cross, it was a sign of peace. The Church at worship, reconciled to one another and to God, signified the transformation of the world.¹⁹

"The general tendency of the Church in the twentieth century," writes H. Richard Niebuhr, "has been toward a conception of social responsibility which virtually made it an agent of secular society." Against this tendency Niebuhr argued for "a strong countermovement" in which Christians would seek "forms of church life that are independent of secular society not only in source but also in purpose." Reconciliation within the Church itself needed to be recovered, Niebuhr contended, as the Church's "highest form of social responsibility." For the Church

¹⁸H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: New American Library, 1929, 1957), p. 25.

¹⁹Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (London: Epworth Press, 1971), pp. 58-59.

would thus demonstrate directly and powerfully that divisions and hostilities in the surrounding world are as unnecessary as they are contrary to the will of God.²⁰

Reconciliation in the Church, Niebuhr recognized, was the highest but not the only form of social responsibility for the Church. He wanted a strong countermovement, not a cancellation of the tendency toward secular involvement. His point can, I believe, be illustrated by the career of Martin Luther King, Jr. himself. Without the black church which nurtured him and gave him an audience, King's role in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s would have been unthinkable. The internal vitality of the black church was an indispensable precondition for its inspiring a movement of nonviolent direct action in the world.²¹ How much stronger that movement might have been if only it had been preceded by an open Church whose internal vitality had been based more fully on the recognition that all are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

"Black and white hear the Word and receive the sacrament in separation. They have no common worship." The "deep cleft in the Church of Jesus Christ" which Dietrich Bonhoeffer observed among us nearly fifty years ago unfortunately still is ours today.²² Like Barth, Niebuhr and others, Bonhoeffer knew that the Church's social form is part of its confession of Jesus Christ. I sometimes dream that some day Christians in local congregations will reach out to one another across the racial divide. They will not need a top-down program devised by some denominational executive in a remote bureaucracy. Theirs will be an approach from the bottom up. They will look one another in the eyes and learn of one another's pain. They will take risks, hurting and forgiving one another freely. Discovering their common and overriding loyalties, they will hear the Word and receive the sacrament together, no longer in separation. As they come to have common worship, the promise of the Gospel will swallow up the cleft which divided them. They will find themselves newly inspired and disturbed by the knowledge that in Jesus Christ the split has been healed. In their own small way they will embody the transformation of the world.

²⁰H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Responsibility of the Church for Society," *The Church, the Gospel and the World* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), pp. 126, 132. A similar point is made in Niebuhr's highly acclaimed but not always well understood chapter, "Christ the Transformer of Culture," *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), esp. pp. 194, 205, 206, 209, 225, 229.

²¹John Howard Yoder, "World Council Study on Violence and Social Change," unpublished manuscript.

²²Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Protestantism Without Reformation," *No Rusty Swords*, Edwin H. Robertson, ed. (London: Fontana Library, 1970), p. 108.



To Ellul: Were We Wrong About Vietnam?

If I were to concentrate on Jacques Ellul's response as a whole, I would ask about his understanding of the Church's political failures. What significance does he finally assign to them? Does he think political failures themselves can be enough to create a *status confessionis*? Does he thus endorse the concept of "ethical heresy"? Notice that all four of Ellul's main points are political in thrust. First, he argues against empty pronouncements. Condemnations of government policy which involve no risks for the Church are, he suggests, without substance. Second, he argues that the Church must be discriminating. A Church which fails to distinguish between corrigible and incorrigible political systems would suffer from a peculiar blindness. Third, he argues that criticism of the means is not enough. A Church which criticizes immoral means to the neglect of immoral ends may well end up abetting political crimes. Finally, he argues that criticism must be adequate in scope. Not only some but all forms of idolatry must be opposed in the political realm.

Even if one were to accept these points, as in general I do, it would still be possible to raise questions about them. One might ask, for example, whether the four points really cohere with one another. In particular, does the last point really cohere with the first two? Can a Church which sets out to criticize every single form of political idolatry really remain properly discriminating and still avoid empty pronouncements? Doesn't the Church have to be more politically selective in the issues it tackles than Ellul implies? More seriously, isn't a *status confessionis* created not

by mere political failures themselves, but by a betrayal of the Gospel and disloyalty to the Church's confession? Isn't it possible for Christians to fail on a wide range of political issues without basic betrayal and disloyalty coming into question? Isn't the idea of "ethical heresy" thus rather spurious? If so, then why concentrate on political failures to the exclusion of all else when discussing the idea of a "Confessing Church"? "A person who transgresses the divine commandment of works cannot be called a heretic" (Luther).²³

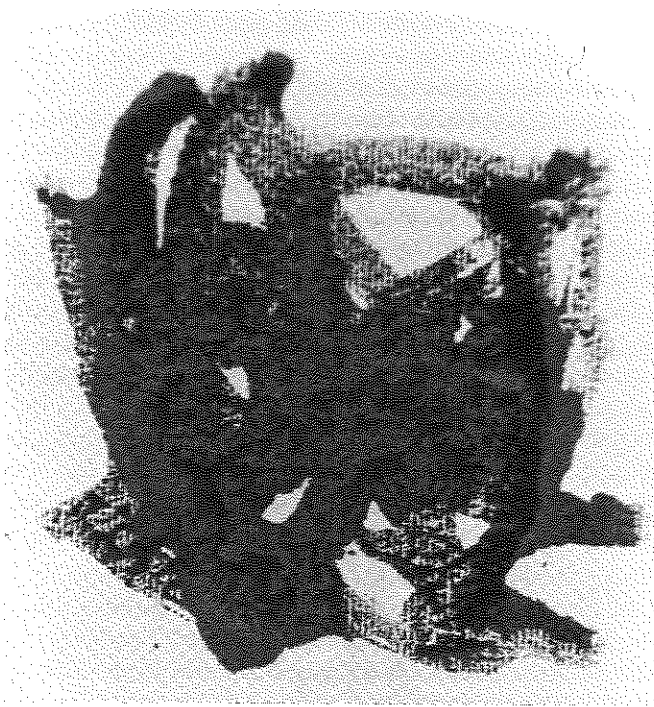
These and other questions might be pursued. However, they must be set aside in order to comment on a single point. Perhaps the kindest thing which can be said of Ellul's sensational remarks about communism is that they are ill-considered. For one thing he seems to have no concept of the political climate on this side of the Atlantic within which his remarks will be received. Consider the following statement: "The Reagan Administration, if it is honest, must argue bleakly that there are higher priorities than Salvadoran human rights...and that military aid must go forth regardless of how many are murdered, lest the Marxist-Leninist guerrillas win. And indeed, the guerrillas must not win...."²⁴ These words do not stem from the "extreme right." They stem from *The New Republic*, one of the leading journals of American "liberalism." They display with uncommon clarity the extent to which concern for human rights can be brushed aside in our political climate by the dictates of anticommunism. "Regardless of how many are murdered" military aid must be continued to those whom the magazine's editors do not hesitate to describe as "Latin-style fascists." Does Ellul realize that—despite his concern about the means—his lurid depiction of communism as the very incarnation of evil is precisely the sort of argument used to justify our ghastly involvement in Vietnam and now in Central America—"regardless of how many are murdered?"

"Ellul is often accused of internal contradiction," writes a sympathetic commentator. "Usually these complaints are the result of a failure to understand his dialectic...."²⁵ If a dialectic somehow unites the conflicting assertions Ellul makes about communism, let me confess I am unable to make out what it is.

²³Luther, W. A., Vol. 30, II, 422, 13. Quoted by Richard Slenczka, "Bekenntnis als Deutung, Gemeinschaft und Grenze des Glaubens," *Kerygma und Dogma*, Vol. 26 (1980), p. 259. For the concept of "ethical heresy," see *Idem*, "Die Lehre trennt, aber verbindet das Dienen?" *Kerygma und Dogma*, Vol. 19 (1973), pp. 125-149.

²⁴Editorial, *The New Republic* (April 2, 1984). Although not without ambivalence, the editorial comes down on the side of the words cited. For comment on the editorial, see Noam Chomsky, *Turning the Tide* (Boston: South End Press, 1985), pp. 167-168.

²⁵David W. Gill, *The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984), p. 161.



No "simple" judgments are said to be possible, yet we have only to read the classic Marxist texts, it seems, in order to know *a priori* what any given Marxist regime will be like: brutal and dictatorial. (We are thus relieved of needing to ask whether communism in Allende's Chile might not be something different from communism in Stalin's Russia, or whether communism in Italy or in South Africa might not be different from communism in Cuba, etc.) Protests against American atrocities in Vietnam were "justified," yet the protesters are "totally responsible" for the brutality of the ensuing communist regimes. No thought need be given, apparently, to the possibility that American atrocities may have had something to do with that brutality, nor to the possibility that many protesters opposed that brutality as well, nor to the possibility that they nonetheless bore a primary responsibility only for the crimes of their own government. Finally, "all *hybris*" is to be condemned, yet America's self-appointed role as global policeman in the fight against communism is apparently "essential" and "just," requiring no adjustment of the ends but only of the means. No *hybris* is involved, it seems, in our readiness to intervene in the internal affairs of one Third World country after another.

It is sad that Ellul, who has written wisely about propaganda, should himself have come to be influenced by it. His comments on Nicaragua, Vietnam and Cambodia all bear overtones of Western propaganda. (These overtones are unfortunately predictable of any position which holds that only a familiarity with certain texts is the prime necessity for understanding current affairs.) Nicaragua is presented as if it were on the brink of becoming a "communist dictatorship." No attention is given either to the *extreme* economic and military pressure exerted on that impoverished nation by the U.S. or to the real achievements of the Sandinista revolution. The new constitution, the improvements in health standards (cited by the World Health Organiza-

tion as the best in a Third World nation), in literacy, in agrarian reform, in abolishing administrative torture (cited repeatedly by the Americas Watch Committee) apparently need not be considered by those familiar with the proper texts. There are, of course, certain ominous trends as well. These are precisely the trends U.S. policy is designed to exacerbate in order to "prove" that "communism" is always brutal and dictatorial, and that no Third World revolution which breaks with the U.S. will be allowed to proceed unmolested.²⁶

Ellul's statistics about communism in Indochina, unfortunately, also bear the marks of a dubious provenance. No serious scholar, to my knowledge, argues that a "bloodbath" took place in Vietnam after 1975 when U.S. troops pulled out (despite all dire Western predictions beforehand). On the contrary, despite many long years of civil war and foreign military intervention, collaborators, "bourgeoisie," and so on were not physically eliminated (in contrast, say, to what took place in France after World War II). If Ellul's statistic of "one million victims" in Vietnam is meant to refer to refugees, however, rather than killings, then without any loss of sympathy for the victims, one needs to remember that it is not only communist regimes from which people flee.²⁷ Is there not a striking difference, for example, between the attention and reception given to Vietnamese refugees in the U.S. and that given to the refugees from Haiti, many of whose "boat people" were heartbreakingly turned away from our shores? Is there any real difference between these two groups of refugees, apart from their value to the propaganda system?

²⁶For an account of the extreme economic pressures applied by the U.S. from the very outset of the Sandinista revolution, see Richard H. Ullman, "At War With Nicaragua," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 62 (1983-84), pp. 39-58. For a most recent survey of political affairs in Nicaragua, excellent for its balance, see Andrew Reding, "Nicaragua's New Constitution," *World Policy*, Vol. 4 (1987), pp. 257-294.

²⁷See William J. Duiker, *Vietnam Since the Fall of Saigon*, 2nd Edition (Ohio University Press, 1987). Even if one accepts Ellul's very high figures about the number of victims under communism in Indochina, his statement that they greatly surpass the number of victims generated by the war is open to question. J. Davidson, a British naval officer and diplomat with extensive experience in Indochina, writes: "The casualties within Indo-China are to be measured in millions. These include the Cambodians, Laotians and Vietnamese of both sides. In addition the French left behind 75,000 dead in Indo-China, and hundreds of thousands were maimed. For Americans, the price was almost as heavy" (*Indo-China: Signposts in the Storm* [Singapore: Longman Malaysia, 1979], p. 198). The number killed by war in Indochina may have been close to 4 million, according to Paul Quinn-Judge, *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Oct. 11, 1984), pp. 48-49.

No serious scholar, to my knowledge, denies that the Kampuchean revolution was one of the bloodiest in history. Nor, however, does any still accept the figure of "two and a half million" killings cited by Ellul, a figure now known to have been concocted and disseminated at a time when almost no reliable information was available. On the basis of extensive interviews conducted directly in the Khmer language, Michael Vickery has made an impressive case that under the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979 conditions varied greatly from one section of the country to the next (thus making unlikely any centralized policy of genocide). Vickery estimates the number of political killings at 400,000.²⁸ Other estimates are higher, but none is authoritative, since reliable data do not exist. A typically cautious statement by one scholar would be this: "At least a third and possibly as many as one-half of the Khmer people have perished as a result of war, disease and starvation, and political terror."²⁹ The statement is cautious (although the figures may be high), because the deaths are not attributed to any single source. The U.S. carpet-bombing program, which between 1969 and 1973 rained down more than one billion pounds of high explosives over some of the most heavily populated areas of the country, did much not only to slaughter civilians and to generate conditions of starvation and disease, but also to create the influence of the Khmer Rouge in the first place.³⁰ To place the blame for the horrifying events in Cambodia exclusively on the "communism" one reads about in theoretical texts would be less than a responsible assessment. Is it not almost always better to concentrate more on actual practices in these matters than on theories, and thus more on the beam in one's own eye than on the impediment, however real, in someone else's?



²⁸Michael Vickery, *Cambodia, 1975-1982* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), p. 186.

²⁹Craig Etcheson, *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), p. 149. My remarks are not meant to imply that communist ideology played no role in the political executions. See Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power* (London: Verso, 1985).

³⁰Etcheson, *op. cit.*, p. 99.



To Gritsch: The Word of God Remains

No reason exists for optimism about the prospects for a Confessing Church in America today, and none was offered in my original essay. Many factors conspire against optimism, some of which are noted by Eric Gritsch in what he presents to us as a "realistic analysis." "Realism," it seems, would insist on the following. The Confessing Church in Germany was organizationally ineffective, quickly neutralized by the government, and had only a limited impact after 1945. In any case confessing churches do not endure, but always succumb to the allure of the surrounding culture. The call for a strictly Christ-centered theology, on which confessing churches depend, has always caused conflict and aroused mixed reactions. It is a call which can make one unpopular in many sectors of the Church. Cultural Christianity, based on compromise, confusion and convenience, is, in America, a massive fact. Our Christian formation is weak, if not perverted. The essentials of the faith are not grasped, and no consensus exists about how to rectify matters. Calls for a Confessing Church are not likely to be heeded, and on badly trained Christians the demands of such a call ought not to be imposed. We may console ourselves with the thought that God's attention has shifted to the Southern half of the globe.

This is the sort of "realism" associated with Reinhold Niebuhr, whose name we would have had to invent if Gritsch himself had not invoked it. It is a realism conveyed with a mood of disillusionment even as the prescriptions of disillusionment are studiously suppressed. Yet even though suppressed they can always be drawn upon whenever it is suspected that ardor is getting out of hand. Ardor is only for those who have failed to learn the lessons of history. For ardor is, in effect, a practical

denial of the doctrine of original sin. "Better attempt too little than too much" is the guiding maxim here, along with "Remember that even so you will have to get your hands dirty" — meaning that deep ethical compromises will have to be made.³¹

The problem with this sort of "realism," in my opinion, is not that it takes sin too seriously, for sin can never be taken seriously enough. The problem, rather, is that it takes sin more seriously than it takes grace. For no matter how seriously sin is taken, grace is always to be counted on all the more. From any truly evangelical perspective, it seems to me, grace not sin provides the touchstone of "reality."

Had the Church been guided by a "realism" in which sin weighed more heavily than grace, there would have been no spreading flame of the Gospel through the first three centuries after Christ. There would have been no perseverance of the Church during times of persecution. There would have been no Council of Nicaea, no Dominicans and Franciscans, no Protestant Reformation. No abolitionist movement, no missionary movement, no ecumenical movement would even have been undertaken. There would be no Sanctuary Movement in the United States today, and no base communities in Latin America. There would be no church history worth talking about.

The dire circumstances out of which the Confessing Church emerged in Germany are not to be underestimated. The vast majority of Protestants were prepared to offer binding loyalty to Hitler and to absorb Nazi doctrines into the preaching of the Church. Sanctuaries of the Church were decked out in Nazi regalia (even as the obligatory American flag intrudes into our sanctuaries today). Furthermore, to make matters worse, strong precedent existed for this kind of compromise. For nearly two hundred years, as Karl Barth points out, it had been the great modernist project to sacrifice that autonomy of the Gospel by reducing it to fit cultural norms in one guise after another. By the time Hitler came along, "it was about two hundred years too late to make any well-founded objection." The history of compromise made it virtually inevitable that the Church would surrender to Hitler "with exactly the same abandon as it had done to so many other demands."³²

³¹For an account of Reinhold Niebuhr at his best, see Robert McAfee Brown, "Introduction," *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. xi-xxiv. For a powerful critique of Niebuhr's political views, see Noam Chomsky, "Reinhold Niebuhr," *Grand Street* (Winter 1987), pp. 197-212.

³²Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II, Pt. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), p. 175.

What might have been expected was that this time the Church would have slid beyond retrieval. Surely it was so fatally compromised that it no longer knew what it was departing from and was long since past finding out. Surely those Christians who might have hoped for something better had no choice but to resign themselves to history. Yet we know that this did not happen. We know that something roused them, and we know what those closest to the scene believed it to be. "The Word of God still remained, in spite of everything," wrote Karl Barth, "in the same Church in which it had so often been denied and betrayed."³³ "The freedom of the Word of God to gain a hearing," wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer, is not found where the Church has possibilities, "but only where the Gospel really and in its own power makes room for itself on earth, even and precisely when no such possibilities are offered to it."³⁴

Whether there will be a Confessing Church or something like it in America, I do not know. But I do know that the kind of "realism" which, despite all good intentions, ends up in resignation will not help one to emerge. No one who hopes for something like a Confessing Church in America today can fail to find much that is disheartening and painful. Humanly speaking, the prospects could hardly be worse. To raise the prospect at all would be impossible, if not for a simple but sustaining conviction. Even today the Word of God remains.



To Hauerwas: On Learning Faithfulness in a Fallen World

Three questions, or clusters of questions, are raised by Stanley Hauerwas. Do I overstate the political crisis? Does Karl Barth's political theology really help? If our political crisis is nonetheless severe, as Hauerwas agrees that it is, what are we to do? The first question I will take up a little later, since Hauerwas is not the only respondent to pose it. The other two I will deal with here.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 176.

³⁴Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords* (n. 22), p. 100.

Doesn't Barth's political vision, asks Hauerwas, have the kind of all-or-nothing quality which renders it incapable of discriminate political judgments? I think not. Although Reinhold Niebuhr criticized Barth along these lines, I think the criticism, as stated, is refuted by Barth's discriminating assessment of communism. Whether one agrees with his assessment or not — he argued that it was not as bad in principle as Nazism — one would have to acknowledge a capacity for discrimination here. The real question is not which theology has a capacity for political discrimination, but on what basis political discrimination in theology is to be made. It would advance the discussion if charges of incapacity for discrimination were either reformulated or dropped.

Don't the analogies Barth sets up between theology and politics seem rather arbitrary? I agree with Hauerwas and virtually everyone else that they do. But I make this note. Although Barth's case for the analogies is not convincing, that does not in itself render the analogies, or even the method of analogy, as being automatically false. Barth explicitly stated that the analogies were intended to be suggestive not definitive. As suggestive I think they succeed. What is needed, in my opinion, is more reflection on the method, not a scrapping of the method itself.

Doesn't Barth fail to perceive the decisive challenge of our age — "totalitarianism"? Barth, as I understand him, teaches us to stay away from abstractions like "totalitarianism," which are themselves notoriously vague, and instead to attend to actual practices by actual states. From such a perspective the evil practices of the Soviet Union can in no way be made to obscure the evil practices of the United States, or to justify them. The kind of Manichaean vision which demonizes the Soviet Union and euphemizes the United States had no place in Barth's theology. He counseled the Church, wisely in my opinion, to remain neutral with regard to the Cold War, since he perceived that what was at stake was less any great principle than a sorry — and exceedingly dangerous — power struggle. Barth's way of assessing the Soviet Union and the Cold War is represented by people like E. P. Thompson and Richard J. Barnet today.

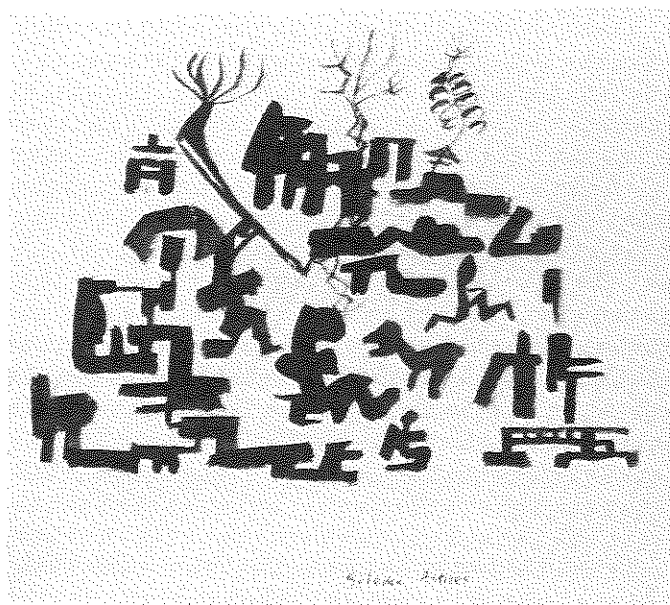
Doesn't Barth's placement of the State within the order of redemption issue in a false utopianism? Two questions are at stake here, one political, the other theological. Politically, the question is whether "socialism," as Barth endorsed it, is necessarily "utopian." Robert Hood, on whom Hauerwas relies, apparently thinks so. Our contemporaries like Michael Harrington, Robert Heilbroner and Alec Nove — who stand in the tradition of democratic socialism with which Barth aligned himself — do not. The issue is complex and cannot be decided, as Hood attempts to do, merely by invoking epithets like "utopian" and "realistic." In any case, it was precisely a concern for the concrete individual which, Barth believed, required him to defend "the truth of socialism in the face of the West and the truth of personalism in the face of the East."³⁵

³⁵Barth, *God Here and Now* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 6.

Theologically, the question is whether by placing the State in the order of redemption Barth is "Constantinian." Unlike Hauerwas, I do not believe Barth's move was meant to "justify" or "legitimate" the State, nor do I believe that theology can adopt a positivist solution that the State "simply exists." The State, Barth argued, does not stand outside the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and is thus not to be demonized even under the worst of conditions, but is always in principle capable in one way or another of greater humanization, even if that way be revolution. I fail to see what is "Constantinian" about such a position. But I think it is exceedingly Constantinian to hold, as Hauerwas does along with Barth, that the decisive test for any social order is the freedom it grants to the Church. Nothing could be more Constantinian that for the Church to expect special privileges from the State. The State finds its decisive test, in my opinion, not in the privileges enjoyed by the Church, but in how well justice and peace are actually secured in practice (cf. Romans 13:3-4).

With these questions behind us, we can turn to something far more important. What does the political crisis demand of us as a Church if, as Hauerwas believes, I am basically right? I am grateful that the question has been asked in such a simple and personal way, for if I am right that is how it must be asked. A Church which embarks upon the path of resistance is a Church whose discipleship will lead to suffering and sacrifice. Such a Church will be girded and carried where it does not want to go (cf. John 21:18). Let me confess that I do not want to go there any more than does Hauerwas. Let us pray that, if possible, there might be some other way. But if our consent to the greatest of crimes would mean that Jesus Christ could not be more seriously betrayed, then let us pray for the grace we now lack to go on.

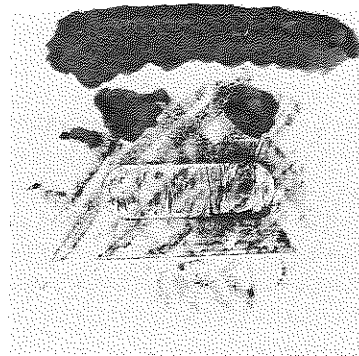
There are those among us, like Helen Woodson, who have the authority to speak of the way the Church must consider if it is to be the Church. Another such person is Daniel Berrigan. Lacking such authority myself, it is with his words that I would conclude:



We have assumed the name of peacemakers, but we have been, by and large, unwilling to pay any significant price. And because we want the peace with half a heart and half a life and will, the war, of course, continues, because the waging of war, by its nature, is total — but the waging of peace, by our own cowardice, is partial. So a whole will and a whole heart and a whole national life bent toward war prevail over the velleities of peace. In every national war since the founding of the republic we have taken for granted that war shall exact the most rigorous cost, and that the cost shall be paid with cheerful heart. We take it for granted that in wartime families will be separated for long periods, that men will be imprisoned, wounded, driven insane, killed on foreign shores. In favor of such wars, we declare a moratorium on every normal human hope — for marriage, for community, for friendship, for moral conduct toward strangers and the innocent. We are instructed that deprivations and discipline, private grief and public obedience are to be our lot. And we obey. And we bear with it — because bear we must — because war is war, and good or bad, we are stuck with it and its cost.

But what of the price of peace? I think of the good, decent, peace-loving people I have known by the thousands, and I wonder. How many of them are so afflicted with the wasting disease of normalcy that, even as they declare for the peace, their hands reach out with an instinctive spasm in the direction of their loved ones, in the direction of their comforts, their home, their security, their income, their future, their plans — that five-year plan of family growth and unity, that fifty-year plan of decent life and honorable natural demise. "Of course, let us have the peace," we cry, "but at the same time let us have normalcy, let us lose nothing, let our lives stand intact, let us know neither prison nor ill repute nor disruption of ties." And because we must encompass this and protect that, and because at all costs — at all costs — our hopes must march on schedule, and because it is unheard of that in the name of peace a sword should fall, disjoining that fine and cunning web that our lives have woven, because it is unheard of that good men should suffer injustice or families be sundered or good repute be lost — because of this we cry peace and cry peace, and there is no peace. There is no peace because there are no peacemakers. There are no makers of peace because the making of peace is at least as costly as the making of war — at least as exigent, at least as disruptive, at least as liable to bring disgrace and prison and death in its wake.³⁶

³⁶Daniel Berrigan, *No Bars to Manhood* (New York: Doubleday, Bantam, 1971), pp. 48-49.



To Hellwig: Reciprocity Presupposes Autonomy

"No center without the periphery" and "no periphery without the center" was the controlling idea at the heart of my original essay. Jesus Christ, it was suggested, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the vital center of the Church's life. Only as we seek and receive him through proclamation and prayer, worship and reflection, only as we learn to put our trust in him as the object of our supreme loyalty and devotion, will our lives and communities be made new. Only so will we be ready for the often painful process not only of disaffiliating from incompatible loyalties, but also of displacing lesser loyalties, so that our lives come to be more fully ordered, filled and shaped by him. Only by acknowledging his exclusive uniqueness, no matter how much some may be offended by it, will we be prepared to grant him the authority to lead us in the way of the cross which he himself makes normative for our lives. For he himself is the true transformation of the world, in whom all things are and are to be made new. He himself is the center, so that only indirectly is the Church the world's transformation, pointing away from itself to him, signifying and incorporating in itself the reconciliation purchased by his blood.

The relationship which concerns me can also be described in terms of autonomy and reciprocity. Autonomy in the sense of centeredness, integration and individuation is not the same as autonomy in the sense of immunity from external influence. Autonomy in the first sense has to do with a clear sense of boundaries and definition. It is the condition for the possibility of self-actualization, for without it there is no self to actualize. Lack of autonomy in this sense leads to disintegration. Disintegration means failure to attain or to preserve one's identity. This failure can occur, as Paul Tillich points out, in one of two ways.

Either it is the inability to overcome a limited, stabilized, and immovable centeredness, in which case there is a center, but a center which does not have a life process whose content is changed and increased; thus it approaches the death of mere self-identity. Or it is the inability to return because of the dispersing power of the manifoldness, in which case there is life, but it is dispersed and weak in centeredness, and it faces the danger of losing its center altogether — the death of mere self-alteration.³⁷

The Church as we know it in America today is a Church dispersed and weak in centeredness. It faces the danger of losing its center completely. Its dispersal and manifoldness in the world creates an incapacity to return to its true identity. It is threatened with death by acculturation. Under these circumstances, there can be no real reciprocity between the Church and the world. Reciprocity is a relationship of mutual influence in which neither partner is reduced to the other, but in which each remains in some sense independent.³⁸ To the extent that God is at work in the world *extra muros ecclesiae*, reciprocity is possible between Church and world. Just as the world can be influenced and unsettled by the biblical or ecclesiastical form of God's Word without yet ceasing to be world, so also the Church can be influenced and unsettled by secular forms of God's Word insofar as they stand in material agreement with Scripture against the present life and understanding of the Church.³⁹ Reciprocity in this sense enhances rather than undermines the Church's centeredness. More to the point, however, reciprocity without autonomy is impossible. A Church with no sure and distinct identity over against the world can neither influence nor be influenced by the world. It has no center from which the world can be influenced, and no center by which influences from the world can be considered and assessed. Only a centered Church can relate reciprocally with the world.

Although broadly agreeing with me on many points, Monika Hellwig apparently disagrees at the decisive point. For what I set in conjunction she sets in disjunction, and what I regard as indispensable she apparently does not. She asks us to make a choice where I think one cannot and must not be made. Either, she says, a Confessing Church will take its stand on the basis of its confession, or else it will make alliances and enter into resistance movements broader than itself. "Only the second of these," she says, "is really a lively option." If I do not misunderstand her, this looks to me precisely like the option we must avoid, an option for the periphery at the expense of the center, and for reciprocity at the expense of autonomy. Hellwig is certainly right to insist, like Gritsch, that clearcut confessional stances will be resisted on more than one front. The fact remains, as far as I can see, that the Church stands or falls with its confession of Jesus Christ in the world.

³⁷Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 33.

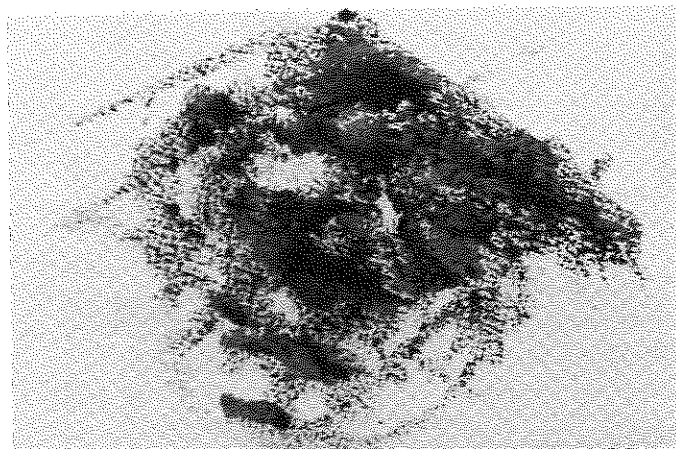
³⁸See John P. Clayton, *The Concept of Correlation, Paul Tillich and the Possibility of a Mediating Theology* (Berlin, NY: de Gruyter, 1980), pp. 42-45.

³⁹See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, Pt. 3, First Half (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), pp. 113-130.

To Lehmann: The Logic of Instrumentalism

I am grateful to Paul Lehmann for his generous response. On all main points we are clearly in accord. A Confessing Church in America today, as Lehmann sees it, is no less urgent in need than it is remote in prospect. To allow the remoteness to detract from the urgency would merely contribute to the problem. For the Church, he insists, can have no integrity of faith without political responsibility, and no political responsibility without integrity of faith. Integrity of faith means faithfulness to Jesus Christ for the sake of the world, and political responsibility means faithfulness to the world for the sake of Jesus Christ. Faith forfeits its integrity without confessional statements centered on Jesus Christ and based on Holy Scripture. Politics becomes irresponsible when faithfulness in the pursuit of justice is replaced by utilitarian calculation. Measured against this standard — faith united with politics and politics with faith, yet neither being confused with the other — both Church and world are exposed. Theological ineptitude and political cooptation are the marks of an acculturated Church. Caring suppressed by competition, trust by domination and covenant by contract are the marks of a degenerate world. Meanwhile, the voice of blood cries out from the persecution sponsored by our government in the Third World, and the road to nuclear Armageddon is paved with good intentions. Annihilation preceded by persecution of the Church may well be the wave of the future.

With so much agreement between us, I am reluctant to concentrate on the only matter where we diverge. I am, in fact, doubly reluctant, since it would mean returning once again to Harvey Cox, to whom I have already responded and whose strengths as a social and theological critic I would not want to see obscured. Lehmann insists, perhaps rightly, that there is more to Cox than I allow. Let me confess I have often felt that there is more to Cox's theology than he brings to expression in his published writings. What interests me is not primarily Cox's theology in itself. What interests me is a logic which I believe it sometimes exemplifies and which devastates contemporary theology. I will call this logic — to state it more directly than in my original essay — the logic of instrumentalism.



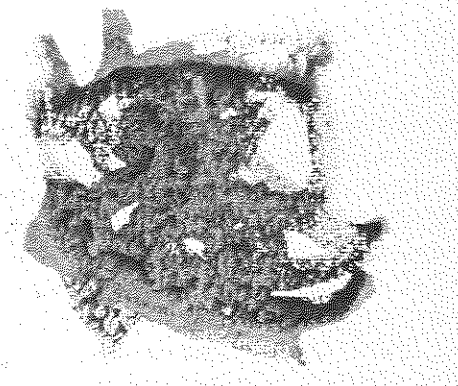
Instrumentalism arises in theology when theological statements are assessed exclusively or primarily not by whether they are true or false, but by their usefulness in attaining some desired end. Relevance or utility becomes the overriding theological criterion. This criterion strongly commends itself if one has adopted an "expressivist" view of theological language. Expressivism is the view that theological language is exclusively or primarily an objectification of "religious experience," where such experience is understood to be essentially emotive. Theological language is thus used primarily to express certain feelings about God, not to assert predicates of God. Since expressive statements make no claims (or no firm claims) about God, the logical force of such statements with regard to matters of truth is weak to nonexistent. Statements about God are assessed by how well they express and evoke religious experience and by how well they enable us to accomplish desired ends. Affective and practical aspects of theological language are stressed at the expense of those which are cognitive.⁴⁰

An expressivist view of theological language is held by many academics today, including many theologians, and this view dovetails with an assessment of "religion" by the criterion of utility. Whenever religion is defined by theology as that which gives access to emotive experience or as that which motivates our ethical lives, the criterion of utility is usually in the wings. For example, whereas religion was assailed by Freud as neurosis and by Marx as a tool of social injustice, it is now commonly advocated by others on the grounds that Freud and Marx got only half the story. The good news, it seems, is that religion can also promote psychic health and political liberation. In fact, this is often just about the only news. Certainly it can be the decisive news around which everything else is made to cluster. "Religion" is here conceived as an instrumental value. Its decisive test is utilitarian. Is it or is it not a means to the desired psychic and political ends? Anything which passes the test is acceptable, and anything contrary or irrelevant to it is altered or dismissed.⁴¹

⁴⁰"Take away assertions and you take away Christianity" (Luther). Quoted by Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (n. 8), p. 272. Cf. George Hunsinger, "Beyond Literalism and Expressivism: Karl Barth's Hermeneutical Realism," *Modern Theology*, Vol. 3 (1987), pp. 209-223.

⁴¹Cox has been explicit about employing the criterion of utility for some time. See, for example, his *Seduction of the Spirit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), pp. 152-153. He breaks with Bonhoeffer on the question of "religion" in "Beyond Bonhoeffer," *ibid.*, pp. 123-143. His advice to students on how to read Barth's *Church Dogmatics* would not cheer Lehmann (*ibid.*, p. 322).

This kind of utilitarian religion is what Bonhoeffer meant by "Protestantism without Reformation." He saw clearly that when doctrine is made subservient to religious experience and ethics, and truth-claims are allowed to wither, then God is domesticated, faithfulness is reduced to effectiveness, and the Gospel no longer heard. By contrast, where Christian doctrine speaks for itself and its truth-claims are allowed to flourish, in principle the opposite situation obtains. There God's initiative in Jesus Christ apart from us, against us and for us is proclaimed. There faithfulness is a higher virtue than effectiveness. There God is God, beyond manipulative control. There Jesus Christ is not the means to an end, but the supreme "end" in relation to whose honor one's life, if anything, is merely the "means." There calculation of benefits must yield to the way of the cross, and the logic of instrumentalism submit to the logic of faith. For there faith is essentially non-utilitarian: God is loved and feared above all else. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him" (Job 13:15).



To Little: Does the Difference Make a Difference?

Searching questions and serious doubts are raised by David Little about my essay. Don't I overstate the political crisis? Doesn't this overstatement render my historical analogy invalid? Aren't the policy implications of my analysis either vague or ill-advised or both? Questions and doubts like these have also been voiced by others, but by no one more forcefully and incisively than David Little himself. I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to these important reservations.

If I have learned anything from my critics, it would be that historical analogies are indeed precarious, as Little suggests. They are precarious, among other things, because unless stated carefully they are likely to be misread. The various misreadings of my analogy, for which Little is a partial example, convince me that I did not state it carefully enough to begin with. Little is certainly correct that there is a difference between the Church's situation in Nazi Germany and our situation in the U.S. today. I indicated as much in the original essay. My only question is: Does the difference make a difference?

Do I overstate the political crisis or not? Little thinks my assessment is too severe; I think his is too sanguine. He presses evidence to counter my case; I think his evidence supports it. He implies that my views are illusory; I worry that they are illustrated by his argument. In my analysis he sees mainly hyperbole; in his I see mainly denial. At the heart of our disagreement, it would seem, is a matter of basic trust. David Little still has faith in our political institutions as they relate to the people of the Third World. Nothing is more discredited by the evidence, in my opinion, than such faith.

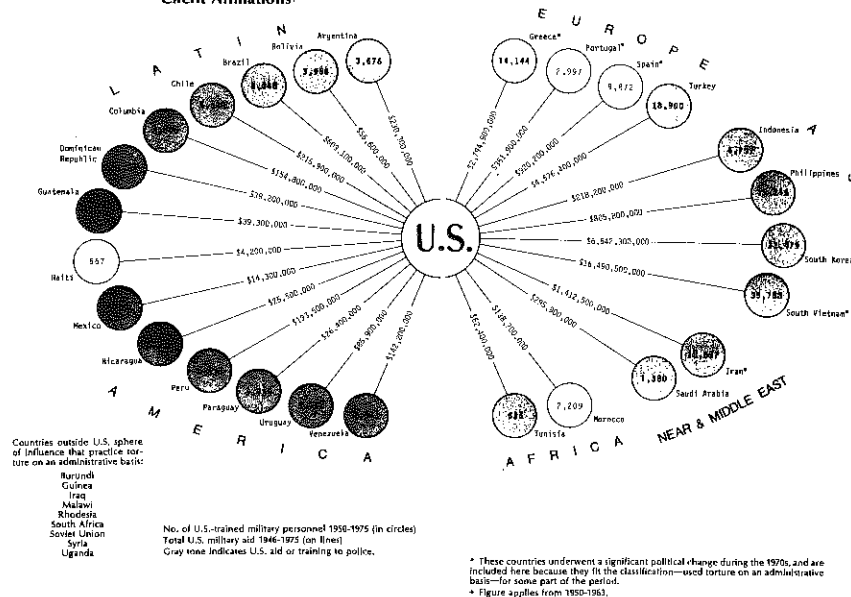
Little's easy dismissal of the evidence I did cite strikes me as breathtaking. Does he think South Korea, Chile and Zaire — massive human rights violators all — are aberrations among the regimes installed and supported by our government around the world? Does he deny that peasants are bombarded from the air and subjected to scorched earth policies in El Salvador? Does he reject Maechling's judgment that our government's policies in Central America approach endorsing crimes against humanity? Does he think we were guilty of anything less in Vietnam? Does he reject the evidence of Hersch and Langguth that for "security forces" in counties like Iran and Uruguay, the CIA has conducted seminars in torture? Has he read Klare and Arnson on how our country supplies such torturers with the instruments of repression? Does the mountain of evidence marshalled by Chomsky and Herman, regardless of their rhetoric, make absolutely no impression on him? Has he looked at it? Allegations that I assumed no "burden of proof" will not do.

We are faced, it seems to me, with Orwell's problem. The problem is not, as Little implies, one of basing large conclusions on paltry data. On the contrary, the problem is: How can we know so little given that we have so much evidence? How can we deny what is staring us in the face? How could anyone take much comfort in the prospect that because of the Iran-Contra scandal, aid to the Contras — a band of murderers, terrorists and rapists we train and supply — may finally be cut off (a prospect which in any case may well turn out to be false)? Does it say nothing that we sponsored them in the first place? Was it a mere lapse? Have such terrorists, whether retail (guerrilla-terrorists) or wholesale (state-terrorists), never before enjoyed our subsidies? Is it insignificant that — exactly as in the days of the Vietnam war — public debate at the moment is dominated not by whether we have any moral right to oppose in this terrible way a government we don't happen to like, but merely by whether the Contras are successful enough to justify the costs? What Little fails to realize is that our moral indifference is not a matter of isolated policies pursued by this or that administration. It is a matter of long-standing and systematic abuse in the Third World of the weak, the vulnerable and the poor.⁴²

⁴²See Noam Chomsky, "Notes on Orwell's Problem," *Knowledge of Language* (New York: Praeger, 1986), pp. 276-287.

"Crimes against humanity" are defined by the Nuremberg Principles as including murder, extermination and other inhuman acts done against a civilian population. Persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds are also specified. Accomplices are identified as those who cooperate with such crimes.⁴³ It is in this context, I believe, in which our access to information should be placed. Contrary to Little, who tries to turn it against my point, this access is precisely what underscores our guilt. We do indeed know more about the crimes of our government than did the Germans fifty years ago about the crimes of theirs. We also have a greater margin of freedom to do something about it. Yet no matter how many times the Charles Maechlings or the Noam Chomskys or the Aryeh Neiers make it into the media, which is certainly not as often as Little would suggest, the criminals are still funded and the matériel delivered, the outcry is still lacking and the patterns persist. Torture in our client states reaches epidemic proportions while academics talk about ambiguity and ironic questions are posed to their critics. As much secrecy is kept as possible; when asked our officials dissimulate and lie. Anti-communism becomes a greater evil than communism itself, and in all this our churches acquiesce. Let judgment begin with the household of God (1 Peter 4:17).

The Sun and Its Planets:
Countries Using Torture on an Administrative Basis in the 1970s, With Their Parent-Client Affiliations⁴⁴

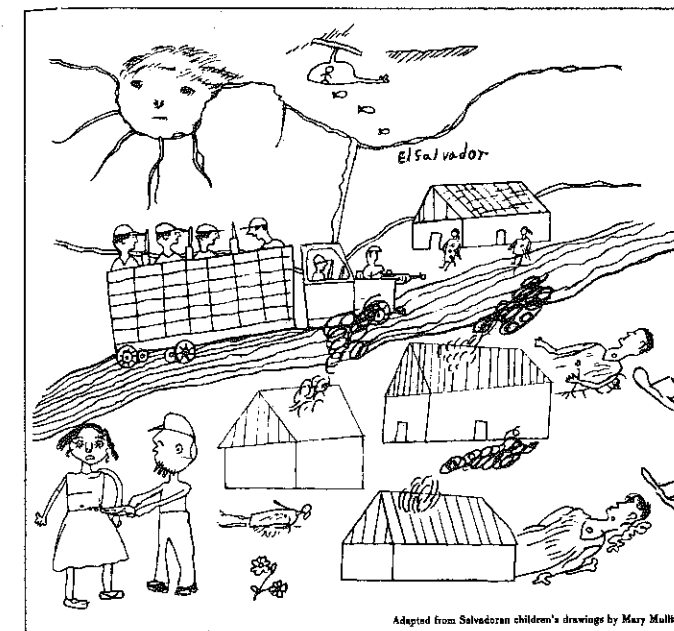


⁴⁴The chart is the frontispiece to Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights*, Vol. I (Boston: South End Press, 1979). The classification system and sources are explained on p. 361. Perhaps it should be noted that South Africa is excluded from the chart only on the technical grounds that it receives no direct military aid from the U.S.

⁴⁵Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 71.

⁴³For discussion and references see William V. O'Brien, "The Nuremberg Principles," *A Conflict of Loyalties* (New York: Western Publishing, Inc., Pegasus Edition, 1968), pp. 140-194. O'Brien notes that accomplices are, according to the Nuremberg Principles, responsible for all acts performed in the commission of crime (p. 142). See also A. Zvie Bar-on, "Measuring Responsibility," *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol. 16 (1984-85), pp. 95-109.

Little asks for more evidence. Though he has not dealt with the evidence already cited, which is meant to be suggestive not definitive, I offer two new exhibits in response. Exhibit A is a chart of countries whose governments practice torture, extensively, as a matter of policy. It indicates the degree to which these regimes have received military aid from our government along with training for police and military personnel. Although the figures are not as recent as one might wish, the basic pattern they display is disturbing enough.⁴⁴ Exhibit B moves us from the general to the particular, from the abstract pattern of Exhibit A to something far more concrete. I offer the second exhibit not from any desire to be sensationalistic, but only because I take to heart the words of Albert Camus, who advised us Christians to get away from abstractions and to confront the blood-stained face that history has taken on today.⁴⁵ Anyone who feels that Exhibit B requires further backing may consult the recent two-volume work by Michael McClintock, a senior staff member of Amnesty International's Research Division, documenting that behind state terror in El Salvador and Guatemala, there lies the American connection.⁴⁶



Little also wonders about the policy implications behind my denunciation of nuclear weapons and the policies that retain them. At the same time he expresses doubt that the theologies of Barth and Bonhoeffer, on which I rely, have any special advantage when it comes to policy-formation. Although deeply moving and important, they are no more effective in their criticism than protest drawn from elsewhere. While I don't mind mentioning the policy implications I think follow from my analysis,⁴⁷ I worry that at this point Little comes close to illustrating one of my central concerns. Doesn't he seem to suggest that Barth and Bonhoeffer should be judged primarily by their contribution to policy-formation? Isn't this an instrumentalist appeal to the criterion of utility? Perhaps that is why Little can't understand Bonhoeffer's appeal to "criticism by the Word of God." For such criticism pertains primarily to faithfulness rather than to effectiveness, and it applies not primarily to governmental policy-formation but rather to the life of the Church.⁴⁸

As can now be made clear, Little misreads my historical analogy in various ways. No equivalence was suggested between the repression of information and dissent in Germany fifty years ago and the domestic situation in the U.S. today. Ours is obviously a more open society. I cannot see how this difference counts in our favor. Nor was it suggested that anything should be considered "self-evident." Matters were not self-evident to those living in Germany, and they are not self-evident in our country

⁴⁶The child's drawing is from *The Catholic Worker* (June-July 1984), p. 5. Cf. Michael McClintock, *The American Connection*, Vol. I, *State Terror and Popular Resistance in El Salvador*. Vol. II, *State Terror and Popular Resistance in Guatemala* (London: Zed Books, 1985).

today. Much was done then, and much is done now, to keep certain questions from even arising in political discourse and public debate. I can see how this factor might be mitigating, but not how it could be decisive, least of all for followers of Jesus Christ. Nor, finally, was it ever suggested that our government's policies are "just like" Hitler's, or that crimes confront us "on the Nazi scale." It is enough that political prisoners are tortured, peasants terror-bombed, and civilian populations murdered with our government's support. It is enough that indiscriminate weapons of mass destruction are proliferated in our name, some of which could exterminate all human life, and none of which can be stockpiled without an implicit threat to commit mass murder. It is enough, that is, to place us in a *status confessionis*, and to call forth resistance from the Church.

⁴⁷I would distinguish between what would follow in principle and what might be urged in practice. In practice I am for "the left-wing of the possible": a nuclear "freeze," a comprehensive test-ban treaty, a declaration of "no first use," economic conversion away from our military economy, a peace tax fund, reduction of Western dependence on oil in favor of renewable energy resources, a general policy of war-avoidance (as opposed, say, to the kind of recklessness currently being displayed by the U.S. in the Persian Gulf, one of the most potentially volatile flashpoints on earth), expanded U.S.-Soviet cultural exchanges and other forms of "grassroots diplomacy," etc. Moving away from a "war-fighting" nuclear policy, such as we currently have, toward "minimum deterrence" is a matter of great urgency, not because the latter is unproblematic, but because the former carries far greater liabilities on both moral and prudential grounds. In principle I am for certain items not even remotely on the agenda at present, especially the non-possession of nuclear weapons, universally if possible, unilaterally if necessary. Non-nuclear national defense would be preferable to nuclear defense. Nonviolent, civilian-based defense would be the most preferable form of non-nuclear defense. Above all, however, I believe Christians should "disarm" themselves independently of the actions of others, including the national government. For the vision of a world more attractive, cf. Duane K. Friesen, *Christian Peacemaking and International Conflict* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1986).

⁴⁸In a seminal essay Stanley Hauerwas has noted the strange phenomenon that the subject of Christian ethics in America is America. Regardless of their viewpoint scholars have assumed "that the task of Christian ethics was to formulate the means for Christians to serve their societies, particularly American society. . . . They differed only on how nearly just such a society could be and the theological presupposition necessary to understand and sustain social involvement." ("On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological," *Against the Nations* [Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985], pp. 23-50; on p. 31).



Inventing Reality: To MacEoin

"Relative guilt," the issue raised by Gary MacEoin, being of no interest to me at all, played no role in my original essay. "Comparable guilt," being quite another matter, was the only point. It is the difference between a rough but telling analogy and sterile calculations of "more" or "less." The historical analogy, I argued, while not perfect, is simply too close for comfort. More than that was not implied.

An important point emerges from MacEoin's analysis. At the same time as human rights are violated by our government in the Third World, the news media are manipulated here at home. Lies and misrepresentations, in other words, are used as a cover for the violence. "Let us not forget," writes Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "that violence does not exist by itself and cannot do so; it is necessarily interwoven with lies. Violence finds its only refuge in falsehood, falsehood its only support in violence. Anyone who has once acclaimed violence as his method must inexorably choose falsehood as his principle."⁴⁹ The insight is an ancient one that lies embrace violence in the pursuit of national self-seeking. "For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue mutters wickedness" (Isaiah 59:3).

⁴⁹Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Nobel Lecture." I am unable to locate the exact source for this translation, but I retain it on the grounds of felicity. Cf. Solzhenitsyn, *Nobel Lecture* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), pp. 32-33.

"Every government is run by liars," writes I.F. Stone, "and nothing they say should be believed."⁵⁰ In an essay called "Lies: The Government and the Press," Jonathan Kwitny, an investigative reporter with the *Wall Street Journal*, sets out to demonstrate what anyone knows who takes human rights violations seriously, namely, that our government is no exception to Stone's indictment. The news media are manipulated in direct proportion to the magnitude of the crimes.

The manipulation of the American public, Kwitny argues, reached a kind of watershed with the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964, an incident which led to our full-scale involvement in the Vietnam war. U.S. expansion of the war, we now know, had been in the works for months. Only the justification was lacking. Reality, not cooperating with the pre-ordained policy, had to be invented. Two U.S. ships, it was proclaimed with alarm, had been attacked by North Vietnam without provocation while on routine patrol. The announcement, however, as we now know, was almost entirely fabrication. "The press was lied to," writes Kwitny, "and so misinformed the public. We were all lied to." Yet the public furor which resulted induced Congress to pass what was taken as a declaration of war. Consequences, of course, followed. Villages were fire bombed, mass populations forcibly removed, countrysides defoliated and poisoned, our boys slaughtered by the thousands, peasants by the tens of thousands — all under cover of manipulations like the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.⁵¹

Whatever may have been the case before, the invention of reality has proceeded apace ever since. Recent examples include the State Department "White Paper" in 1981 designed to justify the horrors of our policy in El Salvador, the spurious rationale provided to justify our invasion of Grenada in 1983, the equally spurious rationale justifying our widely praised bombing of Libyan civilians in 1986.⁵² Should our rulers decide the time has finally come to invade Nicaragua, we may expect a similar manufacture of the appropriate realities in order to engineer our consent.

⁵⁰Quoted by Jonathan Kwitny, *Endless Enemies* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984), p. 357.

⁵¹See *ibid.*, pp. 357-359 and the references there cited.

⁵²For a devastating analysis of the "White Paper," see Kwitny, pp. 355-371. For the actual situation in El Salvador, see Americas Watch, *Settling into Routine* (May 1986). On Grenada, see Kwitny, pp. 407-419; Christopher Hitchens, "The Case of the Menacing Runway," *The Nation* (May 29, 1982). On Libya, see Noam Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors, International Terrorism in the Real World* (New York: Claremont Research and Publications, 1986), pp. 123-155; Ramsey Clark, "Libyan Epilogue," *The Nation* (July 5, 1986); Seymour M. Hersch, "Target Qaddafi," *The New York Times Magazine* (Feb. 22, 1987).

It should not be supposed, of course, that the government simply manipulates an innocent news media. Inventing reality is a project in which the media are more than willing to enlist. Take, for example, the Shah of Iran, who for twenty-five years was portrayed in the most favorable light. "Hailed as a staunch ally of the West," writes Michael Parenti, "the Shah was photographed with presidents and senators and regularly interviewed on American television. Personality profiles and features were run on him and his family, making him a familiar and perfectly likable public personage — with not a word about the thousands of men, women, and children, the students workers and peasants this personable fellow had tortured and murdered."⁵³ Just as friendly torturers are euphemized (friendly, that is, to the U.S.), so enemies of State are regularly demonized. To take only the most prominent example, the Soviet Union, as George Kennan points out, is subjected to an "endless series of distortions and oversimplifications," "systematic dehumanization," "routine exaggeration," "monotonous misrepresentation," and "reckless application of the double standard."⁵⁴ Here, too, the media, more often than not, are simply in league with the government.

Lack of space prevents me from exploring possible explanations for this dreary situation. I can only suggest that it represents a serious impairment of our democracy, and that it arises from a potent confluence of political and economic power concentrated in the hands of a wealthy elite, whose interests are not necessarily those of the majority, whether in this country or in the Third World.⁵⁵ What I wish to underscore in reply to MacEoin, however, is two-fold. First, I think he is quite right to insist that in spite of everything the ideological system is still porous enough to allow the truth to get through. Among others, religious journals of opinion — like *Christianity and Crisis*, *Sojourners*, and *The National Catholic Reporter* — leave us little excuse for not knowing the basic situation in the world. Second, however, I would emphasize more strongly than he does the potential costliness of breaking with the ideological system. Religious leaders are not likely to heed his pertinent appeal unless they can overcome their fear of losing respectability. One of the enduring lessons from the Church struggle fifty years ago is the extent to which the Confessing Church was immobilized precisely by such fear. Respectability is jeopardized whenever the interests of wealthy elites and their government counterparts are seriously challenged. Those who offend against such interests will be branded as "radicals," "communists," or worse. No truly Confessing Church can hope to avoid causing precisely such offense (cf. Matthew 5:11).

⁵³Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality, The Politics of the Mass Media* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 23-24.

⁵⁴George Kennan, *The Nuclear Delusion* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), p. 197.

⁵⁵Two essays might be of special interest here, especially in conjunction. Robert A. Dahl, "On Removing Certain Impediments to Democracy in the United States," *Dissent*, Vol. 25 (1978-79), pp. 310-324. I.F. Stone, "A New Solution for the CIA," *The New York Review of Books* (Feb. 20, 1975), p. 6.



Instead of a Reply to Neuhaus

O Lord, the house of my soul is narrow;
enlarge it, that you may enter in.
It is in ruins, please repair it.
It is displeasing to you; I know and acknowledge it.
But to whom can I call for help, to clear and
repair it, but you?
Cleanse me from my secret faults, O Lord,
and spare your servant.

—St. Augustine of Hippo⁵⁶

To Osborn: The Church Is Political

Although the Church was at stake in Germany fifty years ago, it is not, according to Robert Osborn, at stake for us today. No internal take-over by a "politicized theology" threatens the essence of the Church. A two-fold crisis, however real in theology and politics, is not enough to implicate the Church confessionally. Utilitarian religion and political crimes do not, by themselves, place us in a confessional situation. Protestantism indeed needs reformation, and the State needs opposition. Yet without a heretical "American Christian" party in the Church, my historical analogy breaks down. Not until the Church is faced with an internal crisis of faith will a *status confessionis* exist.

Contrary to Robert Osborn, the Church is no less at stake for us today than it was fifty years ago in Germany. Osborn not only underestimates the severity of the two-fold crisis, but also the extent to which the crisis is internal to the Church. His requirement of a direct parallel in the Church today to the "German Christians" of yesterday strikes me as excessively literal. The pathology of our nationalism has so insinuated itself into the internal life of the Church as to provide the functional equivalent of what Osborn seeks but does not find. Nuclear weapons and crimes against humanity, to the extent that they elicit our consent, place us in as much of a *status confessionis* as we are ever likely to see.

⁵⁶Augustine, *Confessions*, I, 5. Quoted in *The New Book of Christian Prayers*, Tony Castle, ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1986), p. 72.

"What Does *Status Confessionis* Mean?" by D.J. Smit, a South African theologian involved in the Church struggle against apartheid, is perhaps the fullest and most pertinent discussion of our theme.⁵⁷ Four points in Smit's analysis are especially noteworthy. First, a *status confessionis* is a moment of special crisis. It cannot be calculated or planned but comes as a surprise to all. Yet it comes with the utmost urgency. No other course is available than an open confession of the Church's faith. Disagreement within the Church on the points at issue is no longer possible. Silence becomes an evasion of responsibility. Neutrality and nonalignment become betrayals of faith. A concrete word must be spoken to the situation. *In status confessionis nihil est adiaphron*.

Second, a *status confessionis* is a struggle for the truth. Nothing less is at stake, as Osborn rightly points out, than the credibility of the Gospel itself and therefore the very essence of the Church. Unbelief, heresy and superstition — those terms we do not like to mention in polite society — have so taken hold within the Church that they must be openly named and rejected. Alien authorities and strange powers holding the Church in thrall must be explicitly and conscientiously renounced. False absolutes must be desacralized within the Church. The integrity of the community itself is at stake through a serious corruption of the faith. That the virtue of tolerance should be superseded by the virtue of integrity is the very essence of the emergent crisis.⁵⁸

Third, a *status confessionis* is fraught with danger. Danger looms on more than one front. Miscalculation of the threat, loss of charity toward those who differ, ulterior motives behind the confessional protest, and schism within the community are possibilities which cannot be taken lightly. The threat must be specified as precisely as possible. The pain of differences must be borne in mutual compassion. Confession must be undertaken with no other goal than faithfulness to the crucified Christ. Schism must be resisted to the full. Annunciation of grace must always take precedence over denunciation of heresy, as unavoidable as both may be. Yet only then, when all these matters are in order, do the true costs and dangers emerge. "Witness to God," writes Karl Barth, "exists only where it brings suffering for the sake of this witness."⁵⁹ Witnessing not with the stream but against it, the endangered Church, for all these reasons, moves in fear and trembling.

⁵⁷D.J. Smit, "What Does *Status Confessionis* Mean?" *A Moment of Truth*, G.D. Cloete and D.J. Smit, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 7-32.

⁵⁸On the possibility and limits of the category "heresy," see G. Clarke Chapman, *Facing the Nuclear Heresy* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1986), pp. 68-70; John de Gruchy, "Towards a Confessing Church," *Apartheid Is a Heresy*, John de Gruchy and Charles Villavicencio, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 75-93; Richard Slenczka, "Die Lehre trennt, aber verbindet das Dienen?" (n. 23); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Question of the Boundaries of the Church and Church Union," in *The Way to Freedom*, Edwin H. Robertson, ed. (London: Fontana, 1972), pp. 75-106.

⁵⁹Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, Pt. 4 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), p. 81.

Finally, a *status confessionis* can pertain to political matters. Smit is quite clear on this (as it would seem that Osborn is not). Apartheid has been declared a heresy in the confessional situation from which Smit writes. Political issues, as South African Christians have realized, can attain the very gravity of confessional significance in which a clear yes and a clear no are unavoidable. This status is attained when it is disclosed that ideologies have taken root within the Church which could not more seriously contradict the Gospel. Political issues become the occasion which unmask the disastrous compromises and unwitting heresies of the Church's acculturation. Doctrine and ethics (center and periphery) are so united that ethical disorders can become the occasion for the most serious kind of doctrinal self-examination — that is, for a *status confessionis*.

A *status confessionis*, then, is a moment as urgent as it is unexpected in which nothing less than the truth of the Gospel and the essence of the Church are at stake. It is fraught with peril for the Church, both within and without, not least when it pertains to political affairs. Do we face such a situation in America today? Our long-standing and tacit consent to nuclear weapons and crimes against humanity suggests to me that we do. Three heresies in particular, it seems to me, need to be named and renounced.



1. American exceptionalism is a heresy. America is not a city set upon a hill. It is not a chosen nation. It is not a new Israel destined to play a special role in God's scheme of redemption. It is not the primary agent of divine activity in the world. It is not the primary society in terms of which American Christians are to discover their personal and communal identity. It has no hope of becoming the community of righteousness. The transfer of churchly attributes to the body politic has ceased to be quaint and touching. From the genocide of Native Americans to the incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the open veins of Central America, the myth of our exceptional virtue backed by the blasphemy of our national divine election has served again and again to make us tolerate the intolerable, accept the unacceptable and justify the unjustifiable. American exceptionalism is an ecclesiological heresy. America is not the Church and cannot be described in terms appropriate to the Church. Let us begin by quietly removing the American flag from our sanctuaries, where it does not belong, and from the sanctuaries of our hearts (cf. Exodus 20:3).⁶⁰

⁶⁰Cf. John E. Smylie, "National Ethos and the Church," *Theology Today*, Vol. 20 (1963-64), pp. 313-321. Rejecting "American exceptionalism" does not imply "anti-Americanism;" it implies a chastened patriotism (very chastened). I cannot agree with Sidney Mead's famous argument that our nationalism has been "prophetic." (See Mead, *The Nation With the Soul of a Church* [New York: Harper & Row, 1975]). H. Richard Niebuhr is more to the point when he describes "nationalism" as "a religion which, like most religion, is bad — an idolatrous faith which brings with it a train of moral consequences, destructive of the lives of its devotees and damning them to a hell of dissatisfaction, inner conflict, war and barbarism as lurid as any nether region which the imagination of the past has conceived" (*The Church Against the World* [Chicago: Willett, Clark & Co., 1935], p. 127). "All nations preach the ethic of national superiority," writes Richard J. Barnet, "but the United States has made a religion of it" (*Roots of War* [New York: Penguin, 1971], p. 251). "Since so much of the policy debate concerning strategic defense turns on questions of what is good or bad for the United States," writes Douglas P. Lackey, "I want simply to note for the record that what is good for the United States is not necessarily morally right and what is bad for the United States is not necessarily morally wrong" ("Moral Principles and Strategic Defense," *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol. 18 [1986-87], pp. 1-2). Mead tells a fascinating story which others may not find as encouraging as he does. He once met "a bright young student from Germany who, to improve his understanding of religion in America, had attended services in many different churches. He reported to me that what struck him most was that the only common symbol he found in all of them was the United States flag" (*Op. cit.*, p. 63).

2. Anticommunism is a heresy. Anticommunism is not the opposite of communism. It is the opposite of justice. It amplifies fear to the point of ideological distortion. It makes terrorism (or "counter-terrorism") seem moral and fascism (or subfascism) seem honorable. It makes land reform seem subversive and non-alignment seem unintelligible. It makes the CIA seem more necessary than the Peace Corps, repression seem preferable to democracy, and escalation seem better than disarmament. It exaggerates threats, understates weaknesses and discounts overtures for cooperation and peace. It redoubles our sense of exceptional virtue regardless of what enormities contradict it. Anticommunism is an anthropological heresy. It violates the doctrine of sin. It locates evil elsewhere than in the heart of every human being and therefore of every nation-state. It externalizes evil in the other and thereby exculpates the self. It mythicizes the world into Manichean camps, with exceptional virtue on the one side and extraordinary evil on the other. It euphemizes and demonizes by turns depending on the needs of the moment. It is incapable of sober judgement. The crimes of communism are bad enough and need not be enlarged in myth beyond what they are in life. Let us cease to bear false witness against our neighbors (Exodus 20:16).⁶¹

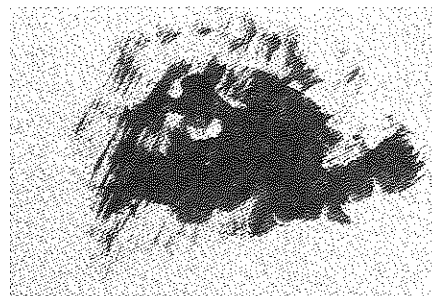
3. Nuclearism is a heresy. Nuclearism consents to potential omnicide, taking immoral threats to be moral, illicit risks to be licit, and unthinkable deeds to thinkable. It consents to the final solution. Forming an intention, however conditional, to commit genocide at the minimum and omnicide at the maximum is the salient point about nuclearism. It threatens mass extermination to the point of universal destruction. The nuclear weapon is not a weapon, and nuclear war is not war. The weapon is not a weapon, because its use can serve no rational purpose. The war is not war, because it trivializes the distinction between winning and losing. Nuclear "war" is not improbable; once initiated it is not likely to be controlled. Uncontrolled nuclear "war" means certain genocide and potential omnicide. No conceivable end can justify forming an intention, however conditional, to engage in

⁶¹See American Friends Service Committee, *Anatomy of Anti-Communism* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969). Rejecting "ideological anticommunism" does not preclude what Karl Barth liked to call "practical anticommunism," which eschews looking for monolithic causes and proceeds from case to case. Cf. Richard J. Barnet: "Dehumanizing the enemy is a psychological precondition for killing him because most human beings have been socialized against homicide. . . . It is essential to have an enemy worthy of your own weapons and your own war plans. A strategy based on nuclear annihilation of the Soviet Union is far easier to accept if that country is the embodiment of evil" (*Roots of War*, pp. 46-47, 123).

such a crime. Neither preventing the domination of one country by another nor deterring the potential use of nuclear weapons themselves is an end weighty enough to justify the threat to commit genocide and potentially omnicide. Some things must not be done, and therefore must not be planned and threatened to be done, no matter what good might accrue. The readiness to suffer harm rather than to commit massive evil (or to prepare and threaten to commit massive evil) is a condition for the possibility of morality itself. Nuclearism means that the threat to commit genocide and potentially omnicide is permissible. If omnicide is permissible, nothing is impermissible. If nothing is impermissible, God is dead. Nuclearism is a theological heresy. It violates the doctrine of God. It shows just how far unfettered human volition will go to invert the distinction between Creator and creature. The biblical witness to God's self-revelation as the Lord is inverted by pretense of the omniscient human will. Nuclearism is the ultimate idolatry. Like all forms of idolatry, it promises life — "living with nuclear weapons" — and delivers death. What does it profit if we gain the whole world and lose our souls? Let us break our allegiance to gods of metal (cf. Leviticus 19:4).⁶²

⁶²See above all the brilliant and sobering essay by Berel Lang, "Genocide and Omnicide: Technology at the Limits," *Nuclear Weapons and the Future of Humanity*, Avner Cohen and Steven Lee, eds. (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1986), pp. 115-130. Arguing that some things must be ruled out completely, Anthony Kenny writes: "For we know that certain means are evil much more clearly than we know that certain ends are good, and when we do evil that good may come, we are much more certain of the evil we do than the good we hope for. If we are told that a certain policy or course of action involves genocide, or murder, or torture, or enslavement, we should not ask: 'And what good will it do?' We should have nothing further to do with it" (*The Logic of Deterrence* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985], pp. 22-23). Lackey makes an important distinction: "As a student of ethics, I must confess that it is morally better to save lives rather than to lose lives, other things being equal. At the same time, we should recognize that the moral obligation to save lives is not the highest grade of moral obligation: the obligation to save lives is not nearly so powerful, for example, as the obligation not to kill people" (*Op. cit.* [n. 60], p. 2). Arguing against the doctrine of "double effect," which holds that we are not responsible for those consequences of our actions which we did not intend, Robert E. Goodin writes: "This, obviously, is an inviting doctrine. Provided you frame your intentions with sufficient care, it allows you to end up with responsibility for only the good you do and to evade all responsibility for any evil, however intimately and inextricably it might have been connected with the good. . . . 'It is nonsense to pretend that you do not intend to do what is the means you take to your chosen end' (Elizabeth Anscombe)" ("Disarming Nuclear Apologists," *Inquiry*, Vol. 28 [1985], pp. 153-176). "It does not condemn the abuse of atomic power because we have thereby imperiled our future but because we violated our own principles. . . . we are attacking the very son of God, or God himself, in our endeavor to escape suffering and to maintain our civilization at any cost" (H. Richard Niebuhr, "Utilitarian Christianity," *Witness to a Generation*, Wayne H. Cowan, ed. [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966], pp. 245, 244).

No deeper crisis, no greater acculturation, no worse captivity could be indicated than our consent as Christians to American exceptionalism, anticommunism, and nuclearism. These heresies are not benign. They are all but incomparably lethal. For the sake of Jesus Christ they need to be renounced. No less than the integrity of the Church and the heart of the Gospel are at stake. A Church compromised by these heresies cannot bear faithful witness to the Lord. It cannot speak the concrete word of faith, hope and love needed by the situation. To speak this word will be costly. It will mean disaffiliating from old loyalties and displacing others. It will mean hardship, ostracism and perhaps even persecution. It will mean paying the cost of moving against the stream. The Church has moved with the stream for too long. It is long since political, because falsely politicized from within. Osborn's condition has been met. We exist in a *status confessionis*.



To Stackhouse: Turtles All the Way Down

An implausible contrast structures the essay by Max Stackhouse. It is the contrast between "confessional" and "public" theology. Whereas the one is strapped with nothing but liabilities, the other brims over with nothing but assets. A tally may be helpful at the outset. Public theology is cosmopolitan. Confessional theology is sectarian. Public theology engages the world. It transforms culture, recasts options and restructures society. Confessional theology retreats from the world. It stands against culture, abandons politics to others, and languishes in self-absorption. Public theology can provide public warrants and give compelling reasons for its convictions. It can show that its claims are more valid than any competing options. Confessional theology, being a matter of arbitrary and subjective preferences, can do none of these admirable things. Finally, public theology offers a deity who is impressively present in the world's public and nonconfessional structures. Confessional theology offers a deity who is sadly confined to pious conventicles. From all this and more we are meant to draw the appropriate conclusion that confessional theology is not public and that public theology is not confessional.

The conclusion fails on both counts. If there are interesting differences between the two types of theology, they cannot emerge so long as the one type insists on tilting at a straw figure of the other. The discussion can only be advanced by recognizing that "public theology" is confessional and "confessional theology" public in ways that Stackhouse, in a moment of polemical overkill, disallows.

Public theology is confessional. Like any theology, at one level it is rooted purely in faith, as Stackhouse himself has acknowledged elsewhere.⁶³ The really important matter, for Stackhouse, is not to avoid confession entirely, but, in his own words, "to set forth the apologetic grounds for such confessional stances."⁶⁴ It is at this point that I think Stackhouse goes philosophically astray. The problem is not just that his own apologetic efforts seem less than compelling,⁶⁵ but that the apologetic enterprise itself is misconceived. Much of the best work in recent philosophy has been dedicated to showing that the situation of reflection cannot be left behind. Instead of questing for the grail of strictly public grounds open to all rational persons, we simply need to recognize that all reflection is context-dependent, that all thought depends upon tradition, and that all theology is grounded in interpretation rather than in rationally accessible transcendent foundations. Theological reflection is an ongoing process of conversation with partners inside and outside the discipline. In this conversation the point simply never comes for anyone when the important premises have all been examined and provided with independent support. The epistemological situation, in which theology is hermeneutical all the way down, may be illustrated parabolically by this anecdote from Clifford Geertz:

There is an Indian story — at least I heard it as an Indian story — about an Englishman who, having been told that the world rested on a platform which rested on the back of an elephant which rested in turn on the back of a turtle, asked (perhaps he was an ethnographer; it is the way they behave), what did the turtle rest on? Another turtle. And that turtle? "Ah, Sahib, after that it is turtles all the way down."⁶⁶

No theology can find a rock-bottom, universally accessible foundation on which to rest. The modern aspiration "to a universality freed from all particularity is," as Alasdair MacIntyre points out, "an illusion."⁶⁷

⁶³Max L. Stackhouse, "The Location of the Holy," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 4 (1976), p. 89.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁶⁵See Stackhouse, *Creeds, Society and Human Rights* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 270-275.

⁶⁶Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 28-29. Quoted by Jeffrey Stout, "The Voice of Theology in Contemporary Culture," *Religion and America*, Mary Douglas and Steven M. Tipton, eds. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), p. 261 n. 10. I am indebted to Stout throughout this section.

⁶⁷Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 119. A good sense for the complexities at stake in the question of "foundationalism" may be found in Mark Timmons, "Foundationalism and the Structure of Ethical Justification," *Ethics*, Vol. 97 (1987), pp. 595-609.

"Public theology" is also worrisome on other grounds. Most especially, I worry that it is ultimately instrumentalist, despite its best intentions. Although Stackhouse is capable of expressing excellent anti-instrumentalist convictions,⁶⁸ the logic of "public theology" is usually an instrumentalist logic. Whereas anti-instrumentalism is the declared policy, instrumentalism is, I'm afraid, the operational policy. How could it be otherwise when "God" is introduced into the argument only to legitimate, motivate and evaluate the transformation of culture?⁶⁹ How could it be otherwise when theological dogmas are to be corrected or ignored simply on ethical grounds?⁷⁰ How could it be otherwise when the theological "themes" which remain are systematically reduced at the same time merely to the status of moral symbols?⁷¹ Perhaps it is no accident that one commentator should complain about "easily manipulable" criteria, adding that "the content of Stackhouse's public theology is all but indistinguishable from the liberal democratic ethos of our day."⁷²



⁶⁸Stackhouse, "Location of the Holy" (n. 63), pp. 70, 76. *Idem*, "An Ecumenist's Plea for a Public Theology," *This World*, Vol. 8 (Spring/Summer 1984), p. 54.

⁶⁹Stackhouse, *Creeds* (n. 65), p. 274.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 21. Theology aside, the cultural analysis in this book is rightly regarded as exemplary.

⁷¹Stackhouse, "Ecumenist's Plea," *op. cit.*, pp. 58-60. Much of this material has now been reproduced in *idem*, *Public Theology and Political Economy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 17-34.

⁷²Ernest L. Fortin, "Public Theology? Some Comments," *This World*, Vol. 8 (Spring/Summer 1984), pp. 101-102.

What, then, of "confessional theology"? Confessional theology is public as the exponent of a tradition grounded in a historic community of faith. Although politically and philosophically independent by tradition, it is not beyond engagement in political and philosophical spheres, nor is it beyond being influenced by them. Secure in the relative autonomy of its own tradition, it is open to reciprocity in relation to others. It has no need to become a theology of nostalgia in the political sphere. It does not look back with longing to the bygone days of a unified Christendom never to return. It feels no responsibility to assume the impossible task of re-establishing this lost unity by theological contrivance. It views politics, in the words of Karl Barth, as

the realm in which Christians must mingle and work together with non-Christians and Christians of other confessions. In politics it has to show, without the use of explicitly drawn biblical and theological arguments, that Christians proceed on the basis of such arguments and for that reason, when it comes to the concrete and most urgent questions of common life, are called to think more clearly, speak more articulately, and offer better proposals than do their fellow citizens who proceed from elsewhere.⁷³

In a period of cultural disintegration, confessional theology will do what it can by aligning with the most progressive and humane forces in society. Yet not for one moment forgetting that the Church's highest form of social responsibility is truly to be the Church, confessional theology will give courage all the more to read the Bible, to preach, to pray, to bear witness and to make free decisions. It will call the Church, if need be, to move against the stream, warning with special insistence never to heed the voices which equate faithfulness with effectiveness. It will remind the Church as often as necessary that those who seek only effectiveness will lose it, but that those who lose effectiveness for the sake of faithfulness will find it.

Apologetics in confessional theology can proceed only on an *ad hoc* basis. Faith, it believes, is a gift which comes in no other way than by hearing and therefore in no other way than by the miracle of divine grace. The self-attestation of God's Word need only be repeated and confirmed by the Church. Apologetics, therefore, plays no role at all in establishing a neutral point of contact between belief and unbelief. If points of contact exist, and they do, they are not neutral but situational and are themselves events of divine grace. Points of conflict between theology and other disciplines are also situational. Either way, whether in situations of conflict or contact, theological apologetics proceeds in criticism and self-criticism strictly on the basis of

⁷³Barth, *Offene Briefe 1945-1968*, Diether Koch, ed. (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1984), p. 106. Quoted by Ernst-Heinz Amberg, "Barmen 1934-1984," *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, Vol. 111 (March 1986), p. 166.

a "wide reflective equilibrium" which seeks coherence with the internal logic of faith itself. Confessional theology thus knows the difference between apologetics and dogmatics. For example, although acknowledging that ethical disorders can become the occasion for doctrinal reconsiderations, it will unswervingly insist that doctrinal matters are doctrinal and are to be decided on doctrinal grounds. *Ad hoc* apologetics has recently found excellent representation in work on the doctrine of revelation by Ronald Thiemann, Chalcedonian christology by Thomas Morris, and various ethical conundrums by William Werpehowski. Despite various differences among them, each of these writers proceeds with a coherentist rather than a foundationalist apologetic strategy. When it comes to epistemological justification, that is, such writers know, in contrast to others, that it's turtles all the way down.⁷⁴



⁷⁴Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985); Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); William Werpehowski, "Ad Hoc Apologetics," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 66 (1986), pp. 282-301. Three things should be noted. First, Morris understands his work in apologetics to be more nearly systematic than *ad hoc*; on the other hand, I believe he needs to re-think the status of his conclusions. Second, much of what Stackhouse presents in a foundationalist mode could be re-cast without too much difficulty in a coherentist framework; it would then be more convincing, but Stackhouse would have to abandon (or largely abandon) his onslaught against "confessionalism." Third, the modern master of *ad hoc* apologetics is Karl Barth in the *Church Dogmatics*.

To Temple: The Disarmed Heart

When Kathrine Temple writes that Confessing Church and Catholic Worker typically have more in common than anything that sets them apart, I think she is exactly right. In particular, she points to the common devotion displayed by each to "those early Christian sources." Devotion to those sources, she observes, gave each the power to say what needed to be said, to do what needed to be done, and to withstand what needed to be withstood. Devotion to those sources drove each in its own way to extraordinary combinations of the traditional and the radical. Indeed, devotion to those sources constrained each of them to find a radicalism grounded in tradition, because each variously came to see that the Christian tradition is radical.

If, as I have suggested, the great strength of the Confessing Church in Germany was focussed on the word, especially as expressed in the Barmen Declaration, then perhaps it might be said that the great strength of the Catholic Worker movement in America is focussed on the deed. "There must be a disarmament of the heart," wrote Dorothy Day (on whom I shall concentrate).⁷⁵ She showed above all what the disarmed heart means in practice. Disarmed by the love of God as she encountered it in Christ through the Church, she offered a new vision of what it might mean to be both Christian and American. Disarmed by God's love she knew what to oppose — nuclearism, anticommunism and national exceptionalism being high on the list — and she knew what to affirm — the family, the farm, the poor and the Church being especially dear to her heart. Is it too much to hope that any future American Confessing Church would strive to unite a theological sagacity worthy of Barmen with a practical political savvy worthy of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement? Is it worth hoping for anything less?

Dorothy Day was devoted to "those early Christian sources." The Bible, she taught, is to be read as an account of God's love for the world, especially for the poor. It is thus something to be treasured, not, as is common in some circles these days, to be trashed: "The best thing to do in the cause of our redemption and real freedom is to read the Scriptures. Then read what the canonized saints have to say." Or again:

The Church is very insistent that we read the Bible, especially the New Testament. Saint Jerome says that he who does not know the New Testament does not know Christ. Saint John Chrysostom: "The mind of Paul is the mind of Christ." Father Farina says that the New Testament is a love letter from the Holy Spirit to us. The more we read the Bible the more we grow in love.⁷⁶

⁷⁵Quoted by Jim Forest, *Love Is the Measure, A Biography of Dorothy Day* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), p. 100.

⁷⁶Quoted by William D. Miller, *All Is Grace, The Spirituality of Dorothy Day* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), pp. 117, 116.

Constancy in prayer, she explained, is in combination with Word and Sacrament, the staple of Christian life: "We can do nothing without prayer. We go backwards when we stop praying. . . . We must pray as regularly as we eat in order to grow." In the community's worship, to which prayer is central, we come to know more deeply that without Christ we are nothing, but that in him we can do all things. "I would not dare write or speak or try to follow the vocation God has given me to work for the poor and for peace if I did not have this constant reassurance of the Mass." "The purpose of prayer," she writes, "is to ask for grace, to let Christ grow in us. Prayer comes first. The reason we have so few saints is because we have not asked. The reason we do not have sanctity is because we do not ask. Prayer has the power to take you to sanctity." Sanctity, however, is not conceived as an end in itself: "We are praying constantly, but for the world."⁷⁷

Nourished by Scripture, worship and prayer, deepened in the sense of complete dependence on God and in the sense of empowerment that accompanies it, Dorothy Day found herself equipped to live in the radical insecurity and serendipity of faith. It was not only "those early Christian sources" of which the "canonized saints" were found to speak, but also of the practices those sources were meant to sustain. "But where do we get the money?" she was to ask Peter Maurin in the fateful encounter from which their later-to-be-famous newspaper, *The Catholic Worker*, was born. "In the history of the saints," replied Maurin with insouciance, "capital was raised by prayer. God sends you what you need when you need it. You will be able to pay the printer. Just read the lives of the saints."⁷⁸

It was a lesson repeatedly, almost monotonously to be applied. "But now our cash box is empty," Day would write of a later time. The printing bill, "which remains unpaid, confronts us and tries to intimidate us." Yet she refused to be afraid. "Dom Bosco," she remembered, "tells lots of stories about needing this sum or that sum to pay rent and other bills with and the money arriving miraculously on time. And he too was always in need, always asking, and always receiving."⁷⁹ Or again: "As I write this there is less than a hundred dollars in the bank, the line of men stretches to the corner, and our households . . . comprise seventy-five people or more. How can we go on? We are as sure as we ever were that God can multiply the loaves, as He has sheltered the homeless these many years."⁸⁰

⁷⁷Quoted by *ibid.*, pp. 108, 83, 109-110, 108.

⁷⁸Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness, An Autobiography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952, 1981), p. 173.

⁷⁹Day, *Meditations* (New York: Newman Press, 1970), p. 18.

⁸⁰Day, *Long Loneliness*, p. 284; cf. p. 252.

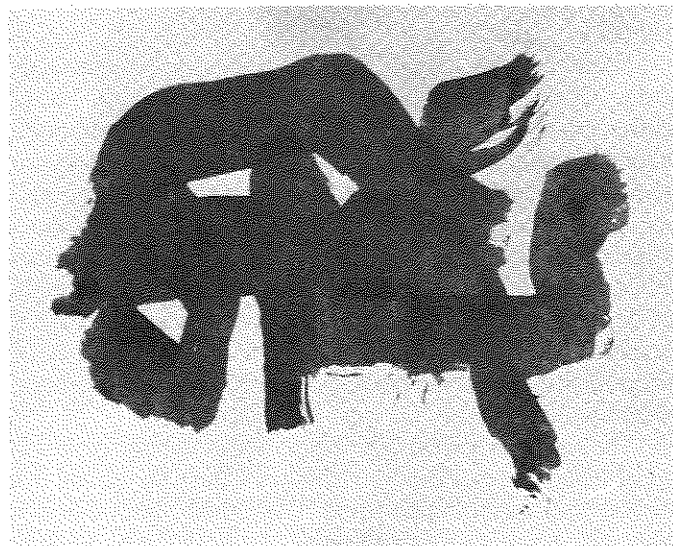
Finally, the precedence of Christ to the world may be said to transcend that of the Church. The witness of the Church mediates Christ to the world, but Christ's relationship to the world is not restricted to mediation by the Church. The witness of the Church is limited to the work of mediation. This limitation is filled with glory and agony, for it means that the power of actualizing the witness is not in the Church's hands. The Church is not (and thus cannot become) a savior, but is rather the witnessing community of those who have found (or been found by) the Savior. It cannot of itself avert the sorrow and suffering of the world. It cannot alter the human situation. It cannot accomplish the world's reconciliation with God. It can only witness, laying all things great and small in the hands of God. At the same time, it knows that apart from all its little work of witness, Christ is Lord of the world. It knows that somehow *extra muros ecclesiae* Christ is at large in the world in hidden ways. It is thus alive to the possibility of reciprocity with the world, and to the hope for grace to triumph in as yet unexpected ways, in this life and in the life to come.⁹⁷

When Church and world are seen to be related in this way — as an ordered and differentiated unity at whose center stands Jesus Christ — then certain recurrent errors are ruled out. The Church does not confront the world in absolute antithesis and mutual exclusion (sectarianism), nor does it simply surrender itself to the world's agenda, as if it were merely a valuable resource for the accomplishment of secular ends (acculturation). The Church's solidarity with the world allows it to seek valid forms of contextualization while guarding against flaccid conformism. Yet its precedence over the world requires it to maintain its essential distinctiveness without retreating into rigid isolation. Valid contextualization may mean that much of the time the Church pursues unspectacular courses of action which perhaps seem too ordinary for the world. Yet essential distinctiveness may mean that sometimes the Church "will appear to go quite contrary to what the world would deem wise, prudent, or even ethical."⁹⁸ Those theologians who find that their ecclesiology is constantly being criticized, whether rightly or wrongly, as "sectarian" might do well to ponder the clarifying possibilities of the "Chalcedonian" pattern. Be that as it may, our current ecclesiastical situation is, as I have argued, one of such thoroughgoing acculturation that it would take a Kierkegaard to do justice to the absurd accusations of "sectarianism" being voiced these days by so many academic (and acculturated?) theologians. What the Church needs to recover above all else today is the vitality of its essential distinctiveness.

⁹⁷CD IV/2, pp. 704, 723-725.

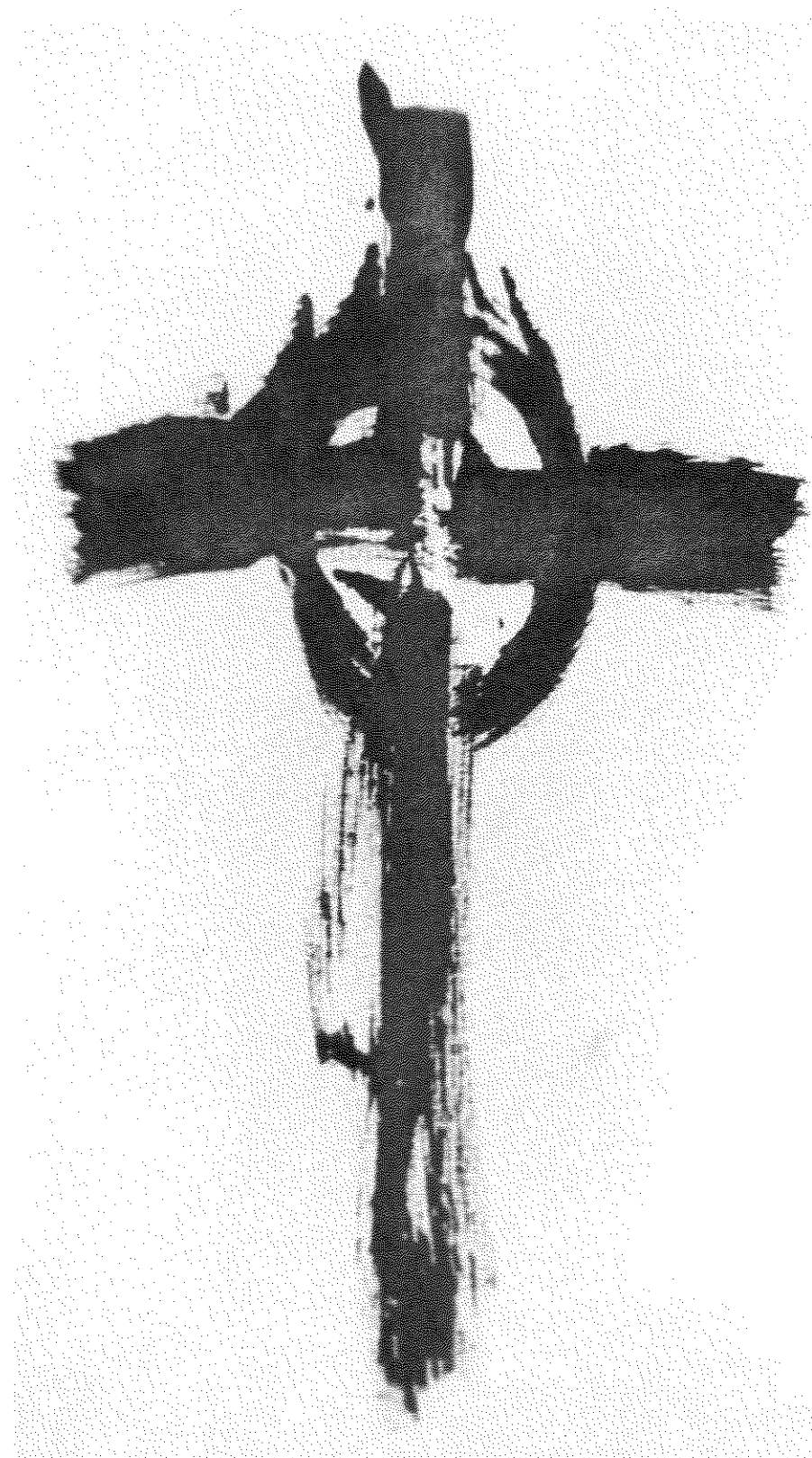
⁹⁸Gerhard O. Foerde, "The Christian Life," in *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), p. 441.

Whether this recovery could give rise to a "Confessing Church" remains an open question. The need, or so I have argued, is there, but the prospects seem less than bright. Perhaps, as some Lutheran theologians have asserted, a *status confessionis* cannot really arise except under conditions of persecution.⁹⁹ Perhaps history has simply led us to an impasse which cannot be transcended, but merely illumined (or partly illumined) by the impotence of symbolic gestures and the feebleness of words. We must hope, as Yoder says, without a recipe. A Confessing Church is not something that can be postulated, willed or planned. It is something which can only arise when Jesus Christ, in the freedom and power of the Holy Spirit, wills so to be represented before the world. Meanwhile, the stance I have been commending is indicated by the words of Reinhold Niebuhr, which I believe are truer today than when he first wrote them and are perhaps truer than he knew: "Adequate spiritual guidance can come only through a more radical political orientation and more conservative religious convictions than are comprehended in the culture of our era."¹⁰⁰



⁹⁹See Bertram, "Confessing the Faith of the Church" (n.1), p. 124; Martin Schloemann, "The Special Case for Confessing," *The Debate on Status Confessionis*, Ekehart Lorenz, ed. (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1983), pp. 52-53, 74; but cf. pp. 63, 65. I do not see why persecution should be the only possible occasion for a *status confessionis*. What if, for example, persecution were averted largely by the Church's failure to confess? Barth, at any rate, in the 1958 statement cited by Yoder, believed nuclear weapons placed the Church in a *status confessionis*. That persecution may actually be subsequent not prior to the emergence of a *status confessionis* has now been conceded by Bertram, "Confessionis: Self-Defense Becomes Subversive," *Dialog*, Vol. 26 (1987), pp. 201-208.

¹⁰⁰Reinhold Niebuhr, *Reflections on the End of an Era* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1934), p. ix.



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