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A TRAJECTORY TOWARDS PEACE:
AN EXPLORATION OF JESUS' (NONVIOLENT?) ETHIC

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE TEACHER AND THE STUDENTS OF FORT BEND
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This paper was not easy to write. A large portion of it was written on the winding mountain roads of Costa Rica, where I was crammed in a small van with 16 other people. As I concentrated on the nonviolence of Paul and desperately held my vomit in, I could only hope that I would write a coherent paper. This paper also proved challenging because of my own personal struggle with the use of violence. In times of utter despair, this paper was the annoying thorn in my side that, even when I was ready to use violence, somehow kept me from it.

This thesis is the product of four years of questions and research, finally allowed to reach its climax and temporary conclusion in this class. My quest in the study of Christian nonviolence began when I was just a freshman in high school. Now a senior, I consider it a tremendous privilege to have the opportunity to present this paper. This thesis is not my final definitive stance on Christian nonviolence, and I hope no one finds a definitive answer to the question of Christian nonviolence from this paper. I do hope that this paper raises questions and spurs on discussion as we try to become more like Christ and live in his Kingdom.

A special thanks is in order to those who spurred on my quest, and who forced me to ask questions that I could only hope to answer.

Mike- Thank you for your guidance on my quest for answers. The hours of research and discussion we've done together for the past 4 years has forever changed how I think about nonviolence and Christian praxis as a whole. Thank you for being there when I had questions, doubts, and rebuttals.

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Erich- Thank you for being my "yes" man and for letting me test ideas, theories, and queries on you.

Introduction

The ministry of Jesus is one that has been vehemently debated for centuries, and in light of recent scholarship, a beautiful picture of a Jewish Jesus has emerged and taken over the traditional academic silhouette of Jesus. Tedious investigation of the Historical Jesus has been conducted and subsequently led to several astounding conclusions. The one that will be most closely examined in this thesis is Jesus' ethic of nonviolence. The search for an ethic of Christian nonviolence in the Bible has often been conducted within the confines of Jesus' ministry, most commonly, the Sermon on the Mount. In this thesis however, the ministries of Paul and Peter will also be evaluated in order to confirm the notion that Christian nonviolence has its roots in the Historical Jesus and that Peter and Paul's nonviolent ethic is entirely consistent with that of the Historical Jesus.

Jesus: (Nonviolent?) Prophet, Priest and King

Introduction

Christianity is a religion, like all others, that is riddled with hundred of debates and issues. Various Christian denominations have historically emphasized certain aspects of Jesus' ministry just as they have emphasized certain Church doctrines, for example, Baptists emphasize adult baptism, while Catholics emphasize the Sacraments and the Eucharist. In the same way, from person to person, there are distinct differences in what one believes about Jesus. In a post-modern society, it is almost impossible to come to terms with one whole and complete image of Jesus that does not somehow subvert the understanding of another scholar or entire denomination. The nonviolence of Jesus is one of these hotly debated issues that has previously divided the Church and continues to be a pressing topic. Thanks to the extraordinary work of various

New Testament scholars such as N.T. Wright and John Howard Yoder, a compelling image of a Jewish, nonviolent Jesus, has emerged from the multi-faceted historical picture of Jesus. This thesis aims to explore the specific case for Jesus' nonviolence, the traces of nonviolence in the ministries of Peter and Paul, as well as the implications thereof.

A picture of a nonviolent, peace-loving, and enemy-loving Jesus is surprisingly repulsive to many Christians, as evidenced by the shocking words of pastor Mark Driscoll, "I cannot worship the hippie, diaper, halo Christ because I cannot worship a guy I can beat up".¹ This statement, although blunt, reflects the contemporary understanding of Jesus. This is understandable, considering the inherently violent nature of this world. One is incessantly bombarded with news of terror and strife throughout the world, and violence seems to be a natural response to these evils. What makes a person inherently Christian however, is how they interpret these evil events, and more importantly how they respond to them. This response, as this thesis will explore, is based on a complete understanding of the nonviolent nature and love of Christ, which is cross-shaped (cruciform). In light of such a Christianity, two questions are inevitably raised, how is one to understand the teachings of Jesus on nonviolence, much less put them into practice? This thesis will attempt to answer these two questions, the former in the present section, and the latter in a later one.

Jesus' ministry is inherently nonviolent. Not only does Jesus eschew violence, he commands his followers to do the same. This thesis will first explore various instances that point to Jesus' having a social ethic grounded in nonviolence, then on to several instances in which Jesus puts his nonviolent teachings into practice. Like almost all debates whose battlefield is the bible,

¹ "7 Big Questions: Seven Leaders on Where the Church Is Headed." Relevant Magazine. Accessed February 09, 2016. http://web.archive.org/web/20071013102203/http://relevantmagazine.com/god_article.php?id=7418.

there will be “problem” texts that will have to be explained in further detail. This section will be composed of three parts: (1) The announcement that Jesus is a political figure. (2) The revelation that Jesus’ political praxis is nonviolent. And (3) the examples wherein Jesus uses nonviolence as a means of Kingdom work.

The Importance of Jesus’ Judaism

Jesus’ ministry must be understood as a fulfillment of the promises of Judaism, as renowned New Testament scholar N.T. Wright is quick to point out when he says, “Historical study, I suggest, leads to the more complex result: a Jesus who engaged in that characteristically Jewish activity of subversively retelling the basic Jewish story, and adjusting the other world-view-elements accordingly”.² From Jesus’ revolutionary and apocalyptic announcement that YHWH’s Kingdom was now on earth, to his preaching of parables that were intended to subvert Second Temple Judaism, Jesus’ ministry was one that was inherently Jewish. Any attempt to draw the focus away from Jesus’ Judaism in favor of a more “timeless” approach runs the risk of reducing Jesus’ explicit instructions to mere aphorisms, posing no challenge or paradoxical truth to the listener. An attentive reader of the Torah and the Gospels, however, will note their numerous parallels and fulfillment of promises. In spite of attempts to separate Jesus from his culture, religion, and place, the truth remains that in order for Jesus to have had any sort of cultural relevance or sway, he must have had a political stance, since the Kingdom of God is in some sense “political.” Paradoxically, Jesus’ stance on the earthly political systems that he found himself a part of could not be pinned to one side or the other, despite the various attempts to make him one political party or the other, but it was through this very rejection of the political systems that

² Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Vol. 2. Christian Origins and the Question of God. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. 4 pages into 6th chapter

his own “Kingdom Ethic” was birthed. The Kingdom Ethic that Jesus espouses is the way for Christians to take their place in God’s Creation, the fulfillment of YHWH’s promises to Israel, and the only way for the People of God to restore their previous status as vice-regents in Creation. With the longing of Israel, as well as all of Creation’s groaning to be set right, Hellinghausen’s closing words to his paper precisely sum up where this thesis shall begin:

Humanity is a representative and a proponent of YHWH’s goal to bring creation to fruition by defeating chaos, and thus, evil. In the correct reading of Genesis exposed in this thesis, the idea that humanity is awaiting God to put the world to rights is fundamentally inaccurate by Biblical standards. Instead of idly waiting for God to banish the corruption and evil that plague creation, people are called to fight to establish order in the midst of this chaotic world. But if this is the case, then there is work to be done. There are places to be reached. There are things to be built. There is an enemy to be defeated... There is a kingdom to be established.³

It is precisely at this intersection between God’s coming reign and the world’s chaotic systems that one finds Jesus, the prophet, priest, and king of Israel. How he enacts God’s Kingdom on earth should not be ignored, as he is the model of love, self-sacrifice, and cruciformity. If Christians are to act as members of this Kingdom, they should model themselves after their King. But what is he like? This thesis shall explore in depth the model of nonviolence that he gave to his disciples and naturally, the entire world.

The Announcement

³ Hellinghausen 88.

Commonly known to Catholics as “Mary’s Magnificat”, the Song of Mary serves as the primary announcement for Jesus’ Ministry. The song takes on a peculiar ring however, as Mary says, “He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.”⁴ This announcement is not proclaiming the coming of a “timeless” Jesus whose only occupation is to invent clever wisdom sayings, but rather, a King whose policies will subvert the power of worldly leaders and provide for the basic needs of the common man. In the words of Scot McKnight, this song “cracks open the heavens and praises God for his promise to establish justice and rout unjust rulers”.⁵ John Howard Yoder makes a similar claim when he says in his famous work *The Politics of Jesus* that Luke had “no choice but to report that the pious hopes which awaited Jesus were those in which the suffering of Israel was discerned in all its social and political reality, and the work of the Awaited One was to be of the same stuff”.⁶ This, again, only foreshadows the coming King, and gives no insight into how exactly Jesus will establish his Kingdom or how it will operate. However, one can only imagine the excitement abounding in the hearts of the Jewish people who heard this announcement. The King is Coming! YHWH’s promises are coming true! God is becoming King! These are most certainly phrases that would have been exclaimed during this exciting time. The Zealots who heard such a proclamation would have been starting to take up arms, and preparing to revolt against Roman rule. They were ready, without

⁴ Luke 1:51-53 (ESV)

⁵ McKnight, Scot. *The Real Mary: Why Evangelical Christians Can Embrace the Mother of Jesus*. Brewster MA: Paraclete Press, 2007. 16

⁶ Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994. 23

question, to join in the fight against Israel's oppressors, just as Judas Maccabeus had done. The King was coming and he would finally take the throne, just as was promised to David.⁷ Everything was in place, Israel just needed to simply be obedient to YHWH and to their King and they might be delivered from exile and restored to their native land. As Wright rightly states,

The phrase 'kingdom of god', therefore, carried unambiguously the *hope* that YHWH would act thus, within history, to vindicate Israel; the *question*, why he was taking so long about doing so; and the *agenda*, for those with watchful hearts, not only to wait for him to act, but to work, in whatever way was deemed appropriate, towards that day. Furthermore, the idea of YHWH's being king carried the particular and definite revolutionary connotation that certain other people were due for demotion.⁸

With no indication as to how exactly the Kingdom was to come, the Jews could only be assured in the fact that YHWH was faithful. The irony, of course, occurs when Jesus receives the crown of thorns instead of a crown of gold, insults instead of praises, and violence instead of enacting it himself.

The Praxis

Assuming Jesus was announced as a political figure, and moreover, taught his disciples to be nonviolent, it is fitting that Jesus himself practiced nonviolence. One primary example of Jesus' nonviolence in practice occurs when Jesus eschews violence when tempted by Satan to become the ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth.⁹ This temptation narrative is not only a temptation to undermine the authority of YHWH, but also a temptation to become an earthly ruler. Earthly rulers are motivated by greed and self-glorification, and for them, violence is simply a

⁷ 2 Samuel 7

⁸ Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Vol. 2. Christian Origins and the Question of God. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. 203

⁹ Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13

means to an end. They give no thought to the effects or damages of their violence, but only that their own kingdom is furthered. This is not simply a temptation for Jesus to “rule the world”, but to enter into the cycle of violence and lose sight of humanity’s image-of-god-“ness”. Because of greed and self-gratification, kings easily forget the fact that all humans are created in the image of God. Once this is lost, violence is immanent.

Jesus refuses the devil’s offer, while quoting from the book of Deuteronomy which declares, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."¹⁰ Jesus here is enacting his kingdom and implying how it will come, which will be further revealed at the cross. For now, the story is just beginning. Jesus is refusing other offers to become a violent ruler, and is establishing that his reign as king will not rely on an army or a strong military, but on a kingdom full of nonviolent witnesses who will carry out his mission. He is creating a paradigm for a servant king, one who will not resort to violence in order to dominate others. Instead of using violence to gain power, Jesus will use nonviolence to overcome the greatest enemies of all: sin and death. At this point in Jesus’ life however, death has not yet been beaten, there is still work to do. The fulfillment of Israel’s exile and desperate longing for a king has not been enacted, so how will it happen?

Paradoxically, Jesus’ claiming authority comes on a Roman cross. What was never able to be accomplished by any ruler or prophet, is accomplished by a 33 year old Jewish peasant who claimed to be the King. As McKnight points out, “Jesus utterly deconstructed king and kingdom, the Messiah and his kingdom, by draping a cross over their necks.”¹¹ Jesus’ inauguration as king

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 6:13

¹¹ McKnight, Scot. *Christian Political Witness*. Edited by George Kalantzis and Gregory W. Lee. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014. 65

is defeating death and rising from the grave. His crown is not a crown of gold, but thorns. His kingdom policy, enacted in and through the cross, is one of radical nonviolence. Jesus' nonviolent politic is finalized on the cross, it is a concluding declaration of sorts, that seals the ethic of nonviolence into Christian praxis, left to be lead by the Holy Ghost. Jesus, by eschewing violence even unto death, gives Christians an alternative to the violent paradigms so familiar to them. Living as image-bearers of God's holiness became not only possible through Jesus' defeating of the powers and principalities of the world, but also by his outstanding example of a person who respected the image of God in others and refused to participate in the violence of the world.¹²

The Sermon

Now that one has heard and understood the definitive political announcement for Jesus' Ministry and the servant king paradigm announcement, one may turn their attention to the primary text where the Christian case for nonviolence is made, The Sermon on the Mount. Although Yoder makes his case for Christian nonviolence based on the book of Luke in *The Politics of Jesus*, he intentionally leaves out a detailed analysis of the Sermon on the Mount. Since the narrative of Jesus' entire ministry is nonviolent, Yoder "protests against those few chapters being singled out".¹³ It is fascinating then, to think that one of the most esteemed Christian ethicists derives his ethic of nonviolence from the book of Luke without even fully analyzing the Sermon on the Mount. While this thesis by no means takes Yoder's protest lightly, it does suffice to say that

¹² While this text can obviously be interpreted as Jesus' creating a servant king paradigm for his rule, this is not the only interpretation of the verse. This thesis by no means intends to overshadow any other theological importance from this text, but only to point out that this is one of several interpretations that fits within the context of the entirety of Jesus' ministry.

¹³ Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994. 18

the Sermon on the Mount is an excellent point for continuing a study on the nonviolence of Jesus.

The Sermon is the peak of Jesus' ministry, and is the culmination of his work on earth. The crowds are gathered and if there is any time that Jesus has the opportunity to say precisely what he wants, it is now, which is exactly what he does. He begins with the Beatitudes, which are yet another example that proves that Jesus was politically relevant. They are promises to a hurting and oppressed people that their reward for being faithful is great, and that YHWH has not forgotten them.¹⁴ Since they have not been forgotten, they are invited into the Kingdom community that Jesus is establishing. From this admonition of encouragement, Jesus moves to tackle several issues that will plague his people. Among these are anger, lust, divorce, oaths, and enemy love. Obviously, for the purpose of this thesis it will do to highlight Jesus' nonviolent teaching which takes place in the final verses of Matthew 5.

Retaliation

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

Love Your Enemies

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

¹⁴ Matthew 5:3-12; Luke 6:20-22

And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.¹⁵

The verses themselves are explicitly clear: violence and retaliation have no place in the Kingdom of God, moreover, when confronted with violence, members of the Kingdom are to respond with Christ-like love. Every other instruction in the Sermon leads to this apocalyptic conclusion: Christ is calling a people to himself, not to continue in the violent nature and cycle of the world, but to instead create new alternatives of living where communities thrive off of love and nonviolence.

Enemy love is not a command with a purpose—Jesus nowhere tells why we are to love the enemy. This is not Jesus’ strategy for conquering; it is not pragmatic. Nor is enemy love natural. This command, instead, confronts us with the one who is Lord and confronts from a world that is not yet ours: the kingdom.¹⁶

While anyone can read these verses and understand them, it becomes a daunting task to interpret and practice these commands.

A strenuous amount of effort has gone into making these instructions nothing but idealistic dreaming. For centuries, Christians have searched far and wide for loopholes in the Sermon. As Robert Brimlow remarks, “The idea of what what we are called to be is in part so distasteful and unnatural to us that it seems to me that through most of our history our theologians and philosophers have spent much of their time explaining why Jesus could not have meant what he most clearly said. At the very least, this is true with regard to war and violence”.¹⁷ A few rebuttals that attempt to undermine the authority of the Sermon are as follows:

¹⁵ Matthew 5:38-48. ESV (Similar to the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:27-36.)

¹⁶ McKnight, Scot. *Sermon on the Mount*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013. 147

¹⁷ Brimlow, Robert W. “What about Hitler?: Wrestling with Jesus's Call to Nonviolence in an Evil World.” (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006) 11.

1. The Sermon is only applicable to personal matters, and is not relevant or useful in public matters.
2. The Sermon is an extended metaphor that shows not how one should live, but how dependent humanity is on God's grace. This approach emphasizes humanity's fallen state and the impossibility of attaining "perfection".
3. The Sermon emphasizes that Christianity is a religion based upon extreme forgiveness, whereas Judaism was a religion based on the law. Therefore, the Sermon is a set of ideals that Christians will never be able to attain, and instead, makes humanity utterly dependent on God's forgiveness.

These approaches attempt to undermine the idea that Jesus meant what he said. These attempts, however, only serve to draw lines between the work and person of Jesus. If these conclusions are taken to their ends, Jesus becomes merely a wise-teacher, with no divinity or even a clear message and narrative for that matter.

The first objection fails, mainly because Jesus himself makes no distinction between personal and public life. The calling of the twelve disciples is the very proof that Jesus' ethic transcends any distinction between private and public life. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus calls out people from their homes, families, and religions, he calls them to act according to his purposes, that they might become members of the Kingdom.¹⁸ There is no line drawn between public and private life because a Kingdom ethic is best utilized in both. The Kingdom ethic that Jesus taught should not be applied arbitrarily to certain spheres of life all while assuming Jesus did the same. Jesus utilized a Kingdom ethic in every aspect of his life, both public and private; he nonviolent-

¹⁸ Matthew 4:18-22, Matthew 11:28.

ly loved those who persecuted him; he had pity on the crowds; and he rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocrisy.¹⁹ For this reason, it is best to assume that Jesus did not intend to draw a line between a private and public life, as both are vital to a faithful Kingdom witness.

The second objection fails also, because if it is taken to its implied conclusion, Jesus is essentially misleading the people. If this is true, Jesus spends an entire sermon simply exaggerating an ethic that the people will never be able to attain. This type of sermon is reminiscent of a “fire and brimstone” sermon that reminds people of their sinfulness. While this sermon is not necessarily bad, Jesus never reveals the punchline: that although one may never achieve this ethic, God’s grace covers it and everyone is forgiven. Unlike other parables and stories, there is no revelation of symbolism or imagery, which is why the Sermon on the Mount cannot be interpreted as an extended metaphor.

Finally, the third objection fails because it attempts to separate Jesus from his Judaism. It is important to note that Jesus was not breaking off from Judaism, he was fulfilling it and by doing so creating a beautiful story of redemptive grace. Israel’s God had not left her, he was coming in the form of a common man, a peasant who would claim to be the King. He would restore the exiled nation and bring his priestly Kingdom. Any attempt to separate Judaism and Christianity runs the risk of losing the historical significance of Israel, and in turn, the entire climax of the Gospel.

If none of these objections are valid, there remains a gaping hole in how one is to interpret the Sermon. How then, should one go about interpreting the Sermon on the Mount while balancing both its relevance historically and presently?

¹⁹ Matthew 9:36, Matthew 14:14, Matthew 20:34, Luke 11:37-54

The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' vision for a Kingdom that is ruled by YHWH. The Law of Moses is helpful for understanding YHWH's relationship with Israel, but it must be understood that the Law was given in preparation for Jesus' coming ethic and political proclamation. As Hauerwas comments,

Accordingly the sermon is not addressed to individuals but to the community that Jesus begins and portends through the calling of the disciples. The sermon is not a heroic ethic. It is the constitution of a people. You cannot live by the demands of the sermon on your own, but that is the point. The demands of the sermon are designed to make us dependent on God and one another.²⁰

As Jesus is making his political proclamation as to how his followers are to act, he is gathering around him a group of people. It is these people who will form the new community and subsequent nonviolent ways to live. Individually, the Sermon can only be a hopeless injunction, but it is through the lifestyle that Jesus offers that a community may emerge and flourish. The Sermon on the Mount, it is also helpful to note, lacks many of the legalistic overtones that the Law was known for. While the commands of retributive violence in the Old Testament (*lex talionis*) made sense, Jesus' commandment to end the cycle of violence altogether makes more sense for a people who are characterized by cruciform love. "Jesus' proposed alternative is a deliberate refusal to participate in the spiral of violence"²¹, remarks Gabrielson about the end of violence in the book of Matthew. Jesus' Sermon is less concerned with a strict application of the Law, and more concerned with the hearer's ability to become a part of the Kingdom and participate in the whole life that is offered.²²

²⁰ Hauerwas, Stanley. *Matthew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006. 61

²¹ Gabrielson, Jeremy. *Paul's Non-violent Gospel: The Theological Politics of Peace in Paul's Life and Letters*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2013. 27

²² Romans 7:4-7

It is also worthy to note that Jesus is not prescribing an ethic that is passive, as many suggest. They say that Jesus is simply telling his followers to do nothing in the face of evil, and to suffer without cause. This however, could not be further from Jesus' very active and political nonviolent ethic. The very action of turning one's cheek was not an offer to mindlessly suffer, but to stand up for oneself. The first slap most likely came from the back of the person's hand, which denoted disrespect in the ancient world. To turn one's cheek though, would force the attacker to strike with the inside of his/her hand, which would place the victim on the same "level" as the attacker. This is not simply a mindless ethic to be obeyed, but to take a strict stance for one's rights. Sticking up for one's rights is not the only thing that Jesus commands. Instead of returning evil for more evil, Jesus instructs his followers to return evil with good. This policy of "benevolent retaliation" is inherent to Jesus' ministry, and cannot be passed off as goodwill.²³ This practice instead constitutes the people of Jesus and defines their way of life. The Sermon is Kingdom praxis explicitly given by the leader. The true problem is not what Jesus said though, but what people have tried to make the Sermon mean.

This leads into a brief discussion over one word that often is the deciding factor in one's interpretation of Jesus' Sermon. It is the famous last verse in the nonviolence section, verse 48. "You therefore must be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect".²⁴ The entire phrase depends on one word: "perfect". A Greek understanding of the word is highly similar to the contemporary understanding: that something is as good as it possibly can be, and nothing added or subtracted can improve it. Thankfully, it is very unlikely that Jesus was speaking Greek. If humans were

²³ Skinner, Mike, "Enemy-Love: The Fundamental Praxis of the Kingdom in Luke's Gospel" (Unpublished paper, Houston Baptist University, Houston, 2011) 14.

²⁴ Matthew 5:48 ESV

actually commanded to be “perfect” in that sense of the word, they would obviously fall far below the bar. Fortunately, it *is* likely that Jesus was speaking either Hebrew or Aramaic, in which case a more appropriate definition for “perfect” would be “whole”. This would lead one to a fuller approach to the text. If God is in some sense “whole” and he calls his followers to be “whole” as well, is this not simply a call for the disciples to adamantly follow God?²⁵ It is no mistake that the disciples are given explicit instruction to act like the Father, which demonstrates that they are images of God, made to model his love and self-sacrifice.²⁶ The only way for this to be accomplished however, is for the disciples to act a certain way, which is the purpose of Jesus’ sermon. It enables the disciples to chase after their God, their King. As Hauerwas mentioned, this is not something designed to be chased after individually, but as a body of believers who desperately desire to follow Jesus’ commands. Referring to the word “perfect”, Hauerwas states, We are called, therefore, to be perfect, but perfection names our participation in Christ’s love of his enemies. Perfection does not mean that we are sinless or that we are free of anger or lust. Rather, to be perfect is to learn to be part of a people who take the time to live without resorting to violence to sustain their existence.²⁷

Perfect, in this sense, becomes a more beautiful way of describing one’s walk of faith. Instead of only loving those who one has no trouble loving, Jesus challenges his followers to love the Jew as well as the Roman, the friend as well as the enemy, the Jew as well as the Samaritan. Perfection, by a modern definition, cannot be attained, however, a God who desires his followers to perfectly or “wholly” love their enemies is perfectly applicable, but is not without its practical challenges.

²⁵ McKnight, Scot. *Sermon on the Mount*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013. 146-47

²⁶ Genesis 1:26, Luke 9:24

²⁷ Hauerwas, Stanley. *Matthew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006. 72

Jesus is making clear his hope to the disciples and all of Israel. “Jesus was announcing and fulfilling the Kingdom, the decisive moment of the new exodus, and that intrinsically involved a people, a covenant, and a praxis.”²⁸ The people had been chosen since the beginning, and the covenant was anxiously waiting to be fulfilled, but the praxis however, was still not complete. The Sermon on the Mount confirmed the Jewish hope for a King, one that would bring YHWH’s reign to earth and establish his nonviolent Kingdom, lead by their servant King.

Rebuttals

As stated above, the notion of a nonviolent Jesus is menacing and threatens the comfort enjoyed especially by American Christians. Naturally, the search for a “way out” of the obvious interpretation of Jesus’ ministry has been conducted large and wide. The rebuttals to this notion are often focused on two main texts Matthew 10:34, Matthew 21: 12-17, and Luke 22:36-37. Before exploring these texts, a warning is in order to those who desperately feel the need to escape from Jesus’ nonviolence. Before calling into question Jesus, it would be exponentially more beneficial to examine first the critic’s heart. Why is it that one seeks to disprove Jesus’ nonviolence? Is it because the critic seeks to protect him/herself from judgement, or is it because of an unwavering allegiance to the State? The motives of any such search must be inspected before it may commence. Such a search should be based on an unfaltering desire to know Jesus deeply and to understand how God operates in the world. With that stated, the analysis of the texts may begin.

Mathew 10:34-39

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For

I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law

²⁸ Skinner, Mike, “Enemy-Love: The Fundamental Praxis of the Kingdom in Luke’s Gospel” (Unpublished paper, Houston Baptist University, Houston, 2011) 7.

against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.²⁹

This is a passage of scripture that is incessantly misunderstood and misquoted by people of all sorts. Dualists use it to denote the forces of both good and evil battling against each other, while others interpret it literally to mean that Jesus did in fact bring a sword to earth. What remains to be learned is where exactly that sword is and how Jesus used it. There is however, a better way to interpret these verses, one that allows Jesus to retain his title of “Prince of Peace”.³⁰

When interpreted in their proper context, these verses become a powerful admonition to those followers of Jesus who are not prepared for the persecution that awaits them. Jesus here is anticipating the rejection of not only him, but his Kingdom politics. They don't make sense to unbelievers. Jesus however, tells his disciples that that even though they may be in tension with their families, communities, or even their children, that it is better for them to love Christ wholeheartedly than to fall away from him.³¹ Jeremy Gabrielson says that instead of Jesus viewing his disciples as the bearers of the sword, he envisages them at the tip of it.³² This is not a declaration of violence, but rather, the acceptance that the world will not accept Kingdom politics as a way of life.

Matthew 21: 12-17

²⁹ Matthew 10:34-39 ESV

³⁰ Isaiah 9:6

³¹ John 15: 1-17

³² Gabrielson, Jeremy. *Paul's Non-violent Gospel: The Theological Politics of Peace in Paul's Life and Letters*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2013. 53

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers." And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.³³

This text has been one of the deciding texts for a sceptic's dismissal of Jesus' nonviolence. Jesus literally flipped tables and whipped people, what more is there to say? Ironically, and thankfully, there is plenty left to say. This thesis shall submit, in the pattern of Wright, that this event must be understood in light of the prophetic drama of Israel that Jesus was acting out.

Jesus' prophetic role to Israel is often overlooked and replaced with a "wise-saying" Jesus who rather than speaking to the nation of Israel specifically, is speaking to all people at all times. Unfortunately, the test of history and basic theological study will not allow one to easily reach that conclusion. Instead, the entire bible may be explained as the progressing story of God and his people. Jesus' arrival on earth then, is not only a step to fix the cosmic problem of evil in the world, but also to restore the nation of Israel specifically, that she might fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant and be a light to all nations. With this specific worldview in mind, Jesus' entire ministry contains a prophetic element to it that cannot be ignored.

As Wright begins, "It is in this context that Jesus' dramatic action in the Temple makes perfect sense; it was an acted parable of judgement, of destruction."³⁴ Jesus was not simply dri-

³³ Matthew 21:12-17 ESV

³⁴ Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Vol. 2. Christian Origins and the Question of God. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. 334

ving out the merchants because they were bad people, in fact they were doing the Jewish people a great service. Those Jews who made a long pilgrimage to Jerusalem could not practically bring their animals for sacrifice, so instead, the merchants sold the animals in the Temple. The problem was not the act of the merchants specifically, but all of Israel. Jesus' judgement and act could also could not have been a prolonged spectacle. This area of the world, especially under Roman occupation, was a "powder-keg" area, meaning that at anytime war could break out. The Jews would have been under heavy suspicion and their place of worship would have been subject to heavy Roman security. With this in mind, there is no way that Roman guards would have allowed Jesus to fasten a whip and begin to terrorize everyone in the Temple. It is safe to assume, because of the heavy security, that Jesus' fastening of the whip and driving out the merchants was a very calculated event. It is probable that it took just a few seconds to complete the entire spectacle, since the Temple would have been very crowded. A whole interpretation of this text relies on two important points:

1. Jesus was acting out prophecy, and was not intending to hurt other people.
2. It is not likely or even possible that Jesus could have continued his "rampage" because of the tight Roman security that would have been stationed at the Temple.

With these two important things in mind, this text becomes a normative act in the bigger picture of Jesus' pronouncing warning to Israel. "The 'house' (Temple) had become a den of *lestai*, brigands, and Jesus, like Jeremiah whom he quoted, was declaring divine judgement upon it."³⁵ Jesus then, is not merely creating chaos, but exposing the Temple and "inaugurating a way

³⁵ Ibid. 334

of life which had no further need of the Temple.”³⁶ This way of life, which this thesis has already explored, is a nonviolent life based in an intimate church community. Jesus’ revolutionary act served to subvert the power of the Temple, and further declare himself as King.

Luke 22: 35-3

And he said to them, ‘When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?’ They said, ‘Nothing.’ He said to them, ‘But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment.” And they said, ‘Look, Lord, here are two swords.’ And he said to them, ‘It is enough.’³⁷

This verse, similar to the previous, has historically been taken out of context to mean that Jesus condones the violence of Christians. The “solution” to this verse however, is made explicit in the passage: “For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me.”³⁸ Jesus makes it clear that the action of buying swords is not normative for Jesus nor his disciples. He makes it clear that this is solely to fulfill scripture. The fulfillment of this scripture is attributed to Isaiah,

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.³⁹

The first line is an indicator that Jesus will be viewed as a common criminal. He will have a criminal’s accusation, a criminal’s trial, and a criminal’s death. As a fulfillment of this prophecy, Jesus must give the Romans and the priests some reason to arrest him, as they’ll take

³⁶ Ibid. 335

³⁷ Luke 22: 35-38

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Isaiah 53:12 ESV

any. Jesus' buying swords is strictly a fulfillment of prophecy, and does not carry any subliminal messages that could be interpreted as Jesus' condoning of violence. Jesus' transgressors will be many, and even his own disciple will betray him. The priests and the various Jewish groups want Jesus dead, and they do not care how it happens, whether it is legal or not. They did however, need a reason to arrest him. The swords were just another excuse to be arrested by a corrupt elite.

Besides that the text itself makes it clear that this is simply prophecy, what would two swords do anyway? Two swords for at least twelve men? In what world is this sufficient for a violent overthrowing of the entire Roman reign? Instead, this verse must strictly be seen as two things: 1) As a fulfillment of Scripture, as is stated in the passage, and 2) Highly impractical and inefficient.

Jesus is beautiful not because he perfects humanity's violent practices, but because he sets them aside altogether. Just because Jesus asked his disciples to buy swords does not mean this is a normative action. Instead, Jesus instructs them to buy swords simply as a fulfillment of prophecy, as he knows his time to die has come near, and death itself is closer than ever to being defeated.

Violent Language

One possibility of Jesus' violence that has not necessarily been fully explored in the scholarly world, but is worth stomping out beforehand is the objection that Jesus' language is violent, which constitutes a form of violence. As this thesis has not yet strictly defined violence, this objection is a valid one. Several passages in the gospels record Jesus' harsh statements to both people desiring to follow him and especially to the Pharisees and other religious elite.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ A few examples of these types of verses are Matthew 11:20-24, 24:27, 25:31-46, 25:46.

The theme of all of these passages is that Jesus, although angry, is acting out his prophetic role as the announcer of the Kingdom. His allusions to OT sources and the Law make it clear that Jesus is not simply condemning all people, but is rather, announcing the coming judgement that awaits those who continue to live in the current Jewish paradigm. Here Jesus is ushering out a traditional Jewish belief system and is replacing it with an intimate community. These sayings of Jesus are normal within the relationship between Israel and her prophets. The prophets warned of Israel's coming destruction and desperately desired for her to repent. To plead with the people, Jesus becomes Israel's prophet, that she might be swayed to his side, and he pronounces woe on all those who think they are a part of the restored Israel. Jesus' words, although violent if taken fully literally, are simply an acting out of prophecy. Similar to Elijah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, Jesus' ministry contained a prophetic role. The tempting ploy for someone who wants to destroy a nonviolent Jesus is to point out his "violent and harsh" words, however, this would be confusing Jesus' prophetic role with a universal, timeless, wise-sayer role (if he had one at all). These statements instead, are similar to those of the prophets of old: a dire warning for the nation of Israel to repent or be destroyed. As N.T. Wright states,

They are typically prophetic oracles, issuing, in the name of Israel's god, warnings to his rebellious people. And the judgement which was to come was conceived in classic scriptural terms: invasion and destruction by foreign armies, allowed to do what they are doing because YHWH, having warned his people beyond patience and beyond hope, has deliberately abandoned them to their fate. Assyria and Babylon had been the instruments of YHWH's wrath before; now it would be the turn of Rome.⁴¹

Conclusion

⁴¹ Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Vol. 2. Christian Origins and the Question of God. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. 336.

Jesus was nonviolent. As this thesis has explored Jesus' ministry, it has been observed that there is a revolutionary undertone of radical nonviolence, one that could shake the very foundations of the earth. As was announced by Mary herself, Jesus came into a violent world to restore justice and establish a Kingdom, the way that this Kingdom came, spoken by Jesus himself, was nonviolently.⁴² His praxis was entirely centered around a Kingdom life that defied any "normative" lifestyle and rejected the violence of the world. Jesus' calling to repentance and a subsequent life-change is inherent in his ministry. As Wright states,

The *story* of the kingdom thus generated an appropriate *praxis* among those who heard it and made it their own. Within the worldview model, stories not only reinforce and cohere with the praxis and symbol of the story-teller; they address other worldviews and mindsets, and seek to elicit response in terms of changed stories, symbols, and praxis. The appeal for the last of these-changed praxis- implicitly invites a change in the entire set.⁴³

Changed praxis on the part of two early church fathers, Paul and Peter, is the subject this thesis will now explore. Jesus' nonviolence by itself is one thing, however the change in praxis on the part of his followers is what makes Jesus' commands definitively authoritative. If it can be proved that based on the nonviolent praxis of Jesus, that the two possibly greatest figures of the Early Church were also nonviolent, it may be demonstrated that nonviolence is an inherently Christian position. Jesus has laid his groundwork for his Christians and invited them to join him on a path, one that will involve a rich community, enemy love, and self-sacrifice; the job of the Christians is to take Jesus' commands and model their own way of life after his. The question now becomes: Did Peter and Paul model their ministries after the foundational message of Jesus

⁴² Luke 1:26, Matthew 5 ESV

⁴³ Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Vol. 2. Christian Origins and the Question of God. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. 245

and is this message applicable to the modern world? Both of these questions will be answered below.

Peter: The (Nonviolent?) Upside-Down Disciple

One of the three inner disciples, Peter was one of the closest people on earth to Jesus. He travelled with him for three years observing, obeying, and eventually teaching the ways of Jesus. Although Peter was known for his rash and non-subtle tendencies, if it may be proven that Peter too was a proponent of a nonviolent ethic as a result of his newfound relationship with Jesus Christ, it may be assumed that since Paul and Jesus were both nonviolent as well, that nonviolence is a core feature of Christianity. Since material advocating Peter's nonviolence is virtually nonexistent, this thesis will be forging new ground on the study of a nonviolent Peter, and as such, the source material will largely be drawn from the bible and exegeting suspect passages.

To prove that Peter was a nonviolent follower of Jesus, it is necessary to first explore who Peter probably was prior to his following Jesus. Once this is done, this thesis will examine several passages in Peter's letters that advocate for a nonviolent stance. As there was with Jesus and Paul, there will also need to be an analysis of "problem passages".

Who is Peter?

Simon, as he was formerly called, was one of the first disciples Jesus called to follow him.⁴⁴ As such, he experienced firsthand the nonviolent praxis and teaching of Jesus.⁴⁵ Although

⁴⁴ Matthew 10:2

⁴⁵ Matthew 5

there is less than adequate material in the bible on Peter there is one particular passage that is useful in determining Peter's probable political views and aspirations.

John 18:10-11

Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear.

(The servant's name was Malchus.) So Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?'⁴⁶

While this text may have a multitude of theological implications for Jesus and his crucifixion, for the purpose of this thesis it will suffice to closely examine Peter's willingness to resort to violence. The sword likely came from when Jesus told his disciples to go out and buy two swords, that they might be suspected enough to be arrested. In Protestant circles, this text is often skipped over, and seen as a strange episode, however when one considers the likely possibility that Peter was to some degree a Zealot, this passage makes much more sense. If Peter was a Zealot, Jesus having a direct encounter with authorities would be the opportune time to revolt, and his chopping the ear of the priestly servant would make sense. This was not a random incident, but rather, a last push to essentially "tempt" Jesus into using divine violence to bring his Kingdom. Much to Peter's dismay, Jesus does not use his divine power to violently bring his Kingdom to earth.

If then, it is a likely possibility that Peter was in fact a Zealot, the question must be raised: Why did Jesus call the very people who wanted the opposite of what Jesus did? If this thesis has not made it explicitly clear already, Jesus defies definitions and paradoxically brings his Kingdom in just about every way, this being one of them. In a display of paradoxical enemy love, Jesus invites Peter to be his disciple, and more than that, one of his closest friends. Peter

⁴⁶ John 18:10-11

does not understand, for the most part, the radical call to nonviolence that Jesus beacons him. It is not until this explicit instruction from Jesus and after Peter denies Jesus three times that Peter realizes how Jesus brought the Kingdom. Instead of swords and severed ears, Jesus suffered. Although it took Peter's constant big mouth and misunderstanding the mission of Jesus on earth, he rose to become one of the greatest early church fathers. The question presently is: Did Peter conform to the radical example of nonviolence echoed by Paul and given by Jesus? To answer this pressing question, this thesis will examine key passages in which Peter supports a nonviolent ethic.

Textual Support

1 Peter 1:14-16

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'⁴⁷

These short verses, given to a body of believers by Peter may not seem like much. Their implicit meaning however, is proof that Peter knew (which is no surprise) and taught his followers the Jesus Tradition. Peter here quotes the Sermon on the Mount and references Jesus' admonition to be holy.⁴⁸ As discussed earlier in this thesis, holiness is often confused with a sense of perfection, which in the context of Israel, is not the case. Holiness refers to the believer's ability to join in the Kingdom praxis, the revolutionary way of Jesus.

Peter is drawing the line between the new Israel and everyone else. Those who are caught up in the powers and principalities of the world and are led by the flesh are not the new Israel,

⁴⁷ 1 Peter 1:14-16

⁴⁸ Matthew 5:48

but those who align themselves with the way of Jesus, which is inherently nonviolent, will be saved on the classic Jewish “Day of Judgement” or “Day of the LORD”. These “passions of former ignorance” are the violent ways of the world, and the never-ending desire for power only to be attained by violent coercion. By setting these aside, believers are able to focus on the mission given by Jesus and do advancing work for the Kingdom.

1 Peter 2:13-17

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.⁴⁹

Peter is directly referencing the Jesus Tradition. As was explicitly stated in the Sermon on the Mount, the response to evil-doers is not more evil, but a response of good. Peter is continuing Jesus' instruction of enemy-love, which is one of the foundations of Jesus' ministry. If believers are to truly act as believers, they are to return evil with good for it is God's own will.

A common accusation against these types of texts is that Peter is commanding the Christians to be loyal, often even unto death, to the empire. This accusation however, lacks a historical understanding of the Church's political stance in the first century. The Church was not, as many assume, a powerful political ally to the empire, but a group specifically targeted by the empire to persecute. This being said, Christians were not passive either, or the command to honor the emperor would be pointless. Christians knew their place in the first century society: it was the bottom of every social and economic chain. This meant that they were to use all of their social might

⁴⁹ 1 Peter 2:16-17

for God's will and any money they could to enact change for the Kingdom in their world. This naturally meant that the power given to the empire would be subverted in one way or another. The empire quickly caught on and immediately Christians became the victims of horrible violence. Peter's call is not a call to ally oneself with the emperor, but to remain firm in the nonviolence of Jesus. To do this was God's will, but to fight back was not. This text should not then be seen as proof of Peter's conformity to the government, but his radical call for Christians to remain faithful amidst severe violence and persecution.

These words, often misinterpreted as an unwavering allegiance to the state, instead serve as a hopeful reminder that Christians don't have to fight back, gain power, or be a part of the violent paradigms of the world.

1 Peter 3:13-17

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.⁵⁰

Suffering is what happens to Christians. Peter acknowledges this and encourages his people with the hope that death has been defeated and nothing can prevail against the believers who know that their King defeated death. Suffering itself implies a certain degree of nonviolence, for violence, even in the face of opposition, is always a possibility. Instead of Peter telling the Christians to fight the empire, or loathe it at the very least, he encourages his people to remain faithful to the call of Jesus, to serve, to love, and to be nonviolent.

⁵⁰ 1 Peter 1:13-17

Conclusion

Despite the scant sources for Peter's nonviolence, it suffices to say that the few verses in his letters offer a brief glimpse into a man's heart. One that had been previously awaiting the arrival of a mighty King, and the heart of a broken man, who upon realizing that this mighty King was nothing like he expected, cried.⁵¹ Once he realized he had been wrong about the way his King was coming, he radically changed his praxis, took on a nonviolent ethic, and encouraged his followers to do the same.⁵²

Paul: A Former (Nonviolent?) Zealous Persecutor

Introduction

Paul has been touted as the poster-boy for everything Protestant, from doctrines of grace to ecclesiology, Paul was the "Greek-Christian" and was tasked with evangelizing to the Gentile people, a people who had little to no grasp on Jewish history. He is most well-known for his sundry letters that are included in the New Testament canon. As an Early Church father, Paul ministered to various churches by either staying with them physically or writing letters. It is perplexing however, that one of the most influential Early Church leader's nonviolence has gone largely unnoticed by scholars. Thankfully, due to the renewed interest in the study of Paul among New Testament scholars, there has been a shift in the study of Paul's thinking, most notably, his thinking and interaction with Roman imperial politics. One of the avenues down this path which has only begun to be explored is Paul's nonviolence. Thanks to the excellent study of Paul's nonviolence by Jeremy Gabrielson in his book: *Paul's Non-Violent Gospel*, the study of Paul in

⁵¹ Matthew 26:75

⁵² 1 Peter 1:14-16, 2:13-17, 3:13-17

relation to the violent politics of Rome and his own Christian ethic has been more clearly stated than ever. This thesis will endeavor to show that Paul did in fact follow the nonviolent practices of Jesus immediately following his Damascus Road experience.⁵³ The goal of this endeavor is to further align Paul with the teachings of Jesus, which indirectly combats the argument that Paul was the founder of Christianity and ultimately goes to show that Paul was a faithful witness of the good news of Jesus Christ. As Gabrielson puts it: “adoption of a politics of non-violence was, for Paul and the communities that he established, a constitutive part of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁴ This thesis will examine Paul’s radical transformation, from a zealous persecutor of the Church, to one of its most prominent members. This transformation, a paradoxical display of gospel, was inherently nonviolent, and predicated on Jesus’ ministry as a nonviolent prophet, priest, and king.

Understanding Rome

Before diving straight into Paul’s ministry and his several letters, it would do well to first review the context in which Paul is writing. As Gorman points out, Paul writes at the intersection of three distinct but cohesive cultures: Second Temple Judaism, Ancient Mediterranean, and Imperial Rome.⁵⁵ While a whole volume of writing on these cultures would not be sufficient to cover the topic, a brief discussion of the Imperial Roman empire will suffice to provide a simple introduction to the violent context in which Paul is writing.

⁵³ Acts 9:1-19 ESV

⁵⁴ Gabrielson, Jeremy. *Paul's Non-Violent Gospel: The Theological Politics of Peace in Paul's Life and Letters*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2013. 2

⁵⁵ Gorman, Michael. *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and his Letters*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2004. 1

Rome, the savior nation of the Near East, was strategically masked as a nation that brought peace, but the qualification, or the means to that peace was almost always violence. *Pax Romana*, as it became to be known, carried the specific connotation of a nation whose ends justified the means. Peace would certainly be brought, but it would be through the mediums of violence, manipulation, coercion, and severe brutality and punishment. Any attempt to interfere with the establishment of peace in this empire would result in the swift and humiliating death of the perpetrator (ex. Jesus). Jesus did not die after all, simply because he preached a message to individuals that they might now receive salvation, but because he was constituting the entire nation of the renewed Israel around himself, and claimed to be its king.

The nation of Rome had a cult-like following. The citizens referred to their kings as “Sons of God”, and considered them divine. Kings expected worship from Roman citizens, although estranged people groups such as the Jews were excluded from such expectations. Regardless, the Imperial Cult was not a secret society, but a nationwide phenomenon that affected every aspect of Roman life. The political life of the upper class revolved around pleasing the emperor, bringing glory to the state, and bringing glory to their own names. In spite of the idolatrous empire, one finds Paul, declaring that Jesus is Lord, and Caesar is not.⁵⁶ This theme runs throughout the letters and ministry of Paul and forms one of the core tenets of his ministry.

With such a violent and political world to write to, it would be foolish for Paul to only talk about the gospel in terms of timeless truths, as some suppose. Instead, Paul uses these inherently political terms known worldwide and makes them not only relevant, but necessary for

⁵⁶ Wright, N. T. *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005. 69.

Christian life. As Paul uses these political terms, it becomes clear that Paul has a specific view of the Church:

Paul's vision of the church is of a covenant community of Jews and Gentiles, one set apart and 'holy', or distinct from its host culture. It thereby exists in continuity with Israel and in contrast to the pagan Roman Empire and all its religious and social subcultures. Within the church there is to be an ethos of harmony, humility, and above all love- not only toward siblings in the faith but towards outsiders and enemies as well.⁵⁷

For Paul, the Church must be an organization entirely different than any of those that use violence as a means of power. The Church is not a nation, and does not operate within the same framework as the nations do, but as a divinely inspired community of people who choose to suffer rather than gain power, who choose to uphold the precious image of God in people rather than to tear it down foolishly like the nations do, who choose to "beat swords into plowshares" instead of continuing the never-ending cycle of meaningless violence.⁵⁸ Paul's vision for the Church must be a nonviolent vision, for it follows after the example of a nonviolent Messiah who died on a cross. Any attempt to make Paul, as they do Jesus, a teller of timeless advice misunderstands the serious political implications of a *theopolitical* gospel. That is, good news that has divine implications while also affecting the inherently political systems of human interaction.

With this more accurate view of Roman politics and Paul's interaction with them, one may now turn their attention to the very nonviolent gospel of Paul, which begins with an incredible story of radical transformation.

A Violent Past

⁵⁷ Ibid 141.

⁵⁸ Isaiah 2:4, Joel 3:10, Micah 4:3

Prior to Paul's fruitful ministry, Paul served as a scourge to the newly founded Christian Church. The first mention of him occurs in the canon in the book of Acts, as he gives approval of Stephen's stoning.⁵⁹ While the specific extent of Paul's violence remains debated, it is a general consensus among scholars that Paul condoned, and quite possibly participated in the violence against the Christian Church. It is interesting to note that Paul's anger, or zeal, was, in his mind, divinely inspired. To Paul, the Church was a threat to all things Jewish. A group of people who claimed to worship YHWH and also disobeyed the common commandments of the Law was an unbearable affront to Jewish traditions. The Church was seen as a heretical, fanatical, and ultimately ungodly institution that needed to be stopped.⁶⁰ Paul was one of the men assigned to destroy the Church, and he did so with "zeal"⁶¹. This zeal was not simply a misplaced desire for violence, but a very genuine attempt to grow closer to YHWH by purging the Church of an ungodly institution.

A Cataclysmic Event

Paul's conversion is recorded in both his letters and the book of Acts.⁶² Paul, while carrying out his mission to persecute the Church, is suddenly confronted by the very one who his victims call Lord. Their King, the one who was supposed to be dead, is now conversing with a zealous Jew who, out of religious obedience, is destroying a God-ordained Kingdom. In an awkward exchange, Paul finds himself blinded with scales over his eyes, which is possibly a metaphor for

⁵⁹ Acts 7:58

⁶⁰ Gabrielson, Jeremy. *Paul's Non-Violent Gospel: The Theological Politics of Peace in Paul's Life and Letters*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2013. 90

⁶¹ Zeal is the word Paul often uses to describe his persecuting the church. *Philippians* 3:6

⁶² *Galatians* 1:11-16, *Acts* 9, *1 Cor.* 15:3-8

his inability to recognize the coming of the Messiah. Because of his blindness, Paul is forced to obey the Christ and go to the house of Ananias, where he is given his sight and told that he will be God's servant.⁶³ As paradoxically cataclysmic it can get, the herald for everything anti-Christian has, in one exchange, become a Christ follower.

If then, it can be proven that a once zealous and probably violent persecutor of Christians who later converted was a nonviolent follower of Jesus, it may be shown that for Paul, nonviolence was a necessary characteristic for Christians.

What is now set right in Paul's life is not that he has overcome his inner resistances and he has become able to trust God for his right status before God; it is rather that through the inexplicable intervention of God on the Damascus Road and in later experiences, Paul has become the agent of the action of God for the right cause. He has become the privileged bearer of the cause of the ingathering of the Gentiles.⁶⁴

What exactly this right cause is and how Paul plans to seek it shall now become the topic of this thesis.

Traces of Nonviolence in Paul's Gospel

Paul, now a Christian, describes his old-self as being "crucified with Christ".⁶⁵ This phrase is the crux of his radical transformation, that the once violent persecutor of the Church was crucified on the road to Damascus has been co-crucified with Christ, and that because of this humiliating and humbling death intended for revolutionaries and slaves, Paul may now live as a nonviolent follower of Jesus who realizes that the violent tendencies that previously ruled over his life have been crucified on the cross with his old-self. This thinking runs throughout Paul's

⁶³ Acts 9

⁶⁴ Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994. 217

⁶⁵ Galatians 2:20

letters, and this thesis will explore a few traces of this nonviolent thought in the letters of Paul. While Gabrielson includes a detailed analysis of all of the various nonviolent texts in the letters of Paul, this thesis will cover only a few of them.

Galatians 2:19-20

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.⁶⁶

While Paul's nonviolent ethic is never explicitly disclosed, it is verses like these that form the nonviolent heart of his gospel. It is not Paul himself that was crucified, but rather, the things about Paul that were not conducive to a Kingdom oriented life such as his zeal and violent persecuting. The powers and principalities such as violence and corruption are crucified and Paul is allowed to live without their constant grip over his life. Now, through his faith in Christ, he is made a member of a body of believers, an alternative Kingdom who worship a crucified lamb instead of a lion, who suffer instead of conquering, and who turn their cheeks when they're hit instead of perpetuating the violent cycle of retribution. Once these powers are defeated in Paul's life, he is now able to "live by faith in the Son of God". This faith lived out, at least for Paul, in the way of Jesus Christ, is nonviolent. His violent tendencies and heart for anger have been crucified, and now Paul may rejoice and live the way Jesus did, nonviolently. In the words of N.T. Wright:

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Thus the point of human beings being called by the gospel to turn from idolatry and sin to worship the true and living God is *both* that they might themselves be rescued and that through their rescue, and the new community which they then form, God's purposes to rescue the whole world might be advanced.⁶⁷

Paul seems to be referring to what is called "kenosis" (self-emptying), which is the primarily Eastern Orthodox belief that the nature of God is self-emptying. In turn, throughout the testament of Paul's life, it becomes obvious that Paul not only believed God to be a self-emptying God, but that his followers were to empty themselves as well. As proclaimer of the new King and Kingdom, Paul encounters imperial resistance. This resistance however, is overcome, not only by Paul but by anyone who proclaims Jesus as King. The appropriate response to the imperial resistance is to suffer it, and as is a theme in Paul's letters: suffering for Christ nonviolently is just one of many marks of a believer. A life lived by the flesh is a violent, power-hungry one, but a life lived by faith in the Son of God is a gentle and nonviolent life that suffers, just as Jesus did on the cross.

2 Corinthians 11:21-29

But whatever anyone else dares you to boast of, I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one, with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart

⁶⁷ Wright, N. T. *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005. 122

from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?⁶⁸

Obviously, Paul had a very extensive record of his persecution, and while Paul's original intent for this passage was as pastoral care to the Corinthian Church, this text tells a story, one that is riddled with violence, and of the constant stance of a man committed to eschewing it. Knowing and recognizing that the violent systems of the world were conquered by the Christ is one thing, but succumbing to their power in order to follow the crucified lamb is an entirely other thing. Only through his faith is Paul able to take the 39 lashes, and only with the knowledge that upholding the image of God is somehow more important than destroying it in others that Paul is able to be stoned. Gabrielson remarks that Paul's physical scars "serve as the physical confirmation of the trajectory of violence in Paul's biography"⁶⁹. Paul's scars represent his transformation from his old life of inflicting such wounds to a slave that is "yoked to the Son of God"⁷⁰. Paul's entire existence is wrapped up in the Kingdom of God and doing his work. As a slave, these marks are proof that Paul is devoted to the Kingdom's cause.

The fact that Paul never once resisted the violence against him with more violence demonstrates that a servant's heart is something that comes along with a life in the Kingdom. Suffering without resisting is not a suicide wish, but a realization that adding violence to situations is without meaning or purpose. This does not mean, as many assume, that nonviolence is a

⁶⁸ 2 Corinthians 11:21-29

⁶⁹ Gabrielson, Jeremy. *Paul's Non-Violent Gospel: The Theological Politics of Peace in Paul's Life and Letters*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2013. 100

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 101

passive act, for even Paul escaped violence that was directed at him.⁷¹ Nonviolence is instead, suffering when necessary, and finding solutions to situations that do not involve the use of violent measures. Suffering comes as a result of declaring Jesus as Lord, for the empire is quick to use its earthly power to rout out subversive groups, and Christians have historically been one of these. Paul is evidence that the empire, while powerful on earth, cannot prevail against the Kingdom of Heaven, which rises against the earthly powers and paradoxically battles against them. As Gorman states: “The revelatory character of the cross means that when we see it we are shown something not only about Christ but about God; we discover that God is vulnerable, powerful in weakness. We discover that God is faithful and loving beyond measure, even towards enemies.”⁷²

Paul and Slavery

Some suggest that Paul’s acceptance of the institution of slavery is proof or at least a blemish on his accepting of nonviolence. Since Paul did not advocate against slavery, they say, he must have supported it fully. This view however, has several problems.

Slavery was not based on the mistreatment of an entire race, as was American slavery, but by various reasons such as: a child who had been abandoned, the conquering of another nation, or someone selling oneself into slavery. While these reasons do not make the institution itself any purer, it is worthy to note that anyone could potentially be a slave, and was not limited to a certain race or ethnicity. With this said, it does not make sense to compare the Greco-Roman institution of slavery in every sense to that of the American version of slavery.

⁷¹ 2 Corinthians 11:32-33

⁷² Gorman, Michael. *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and his Letters*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2004. 119

Slavery was not considered a necessarily “bad” system in an ancient mindset. Slavery, it may further be argued, was not even sufficiently questioned by the authorities or even the common man, instead, it just was. While some may still object that the degradation of human rights with Paul’s knowledge is proof that he condoned or at least did not care whether it existed or not. This thesis submits however, that to make this claim about Paul seriously misunderstands his book of Philemon.

The letter is about a runaway slave, Onesimus, who after running from his master, Philemon, becomes a Christian and assists Paul in his ministry. The letter is a short plea for Philemon, a Christian himself, to receive Onesimus “no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother”⁷³. The letter makes it clear that while Paul may not have been seeking Onesimus’s full freedom, he was advocating for a restored relationship between the bondservant and master. “This new relationship would defy all of the ingrained status distinctions of the surrounding Greek and Roman culture. It would have been difficult for the kind of servitude practiced by Rome to survive in the atmosphere of Christian love exemplified by the letter”.⁷⁴ If one were to be truly Christian and own slaves, it could no longer be called slavery, but a whole new system altogether. Naturally, slaves would have rights; they would be properly fed, and would never be mistreated. Paul’s letter is tearing down the giant brick wall between servant and master and in doing so, is purifying a corrupt system with the intimate community offered by Jesus Christ. Onesimus, if accepted by Philemon in the way Paul desires, would be a brother in Christ, and not just a servant. This letter goes hand in hand with the concept of powers and principalities.

⁷³ Philemon 1:16

⁷⁴ ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011. 1633.

ties. Slavery and all its evils, including the violence within it, was crucified with Jesus on the cross, and the entire system became forever enslaved to King Jesus, and subject to his radical love. Now subject to radical Christian love, the reader finds Paul urging his brother in Christ to lovingly accept back his runaway slave. The system of slavery cannot be excluded from Christ's radical love and inclusive community but rather, must be re-thought and doused in more than enough Christian love and charity. This model of radical love in difficult places to Christians by Paul is not a pious hope that being nice to people will one day afford one a trip to heaven, but more powerfully, that the Kingdom of God is on earth, and nothing in the world can stop its arrival.

By using the book of Philemon as a case study for Paul's opinion on slavery, one realizes that simply because Paul did not do everything in his power to rid the world of slavery does not inherently mean that Paul was for slavery. Instead, Paul recognized an evil system of the world, and in the case of Onesimus, attempted to make it right, by applying the boundary-less love of Christ and tearing down walls intending to separate and divide the people of God. If Paul "approved" of slavery or not was not a question that could have been asked in a first century mind, instead, the question is "How did Paul deal with the inherently unjust system of slavery?" The answer to this question, following the brief study of the letter to Philemon, is that Paul used the transforming power of the love of Christ to subvert the very underpinnings of slavery. At the very least, Paul recognized the value of human life and intended to foster the growth of a relationship that would stun an ancient world.

Conclusion

In spite of many preconceived notions regarding Paul, this thesis has attempted to prove that along with the many other doctrines Paul supported, that nonviolence was one of them. This nonviolence was not simply a pragmatic matter, but a way for believers to experience the radical, intimate, and beautiful community offered by the Church. Everything about Paul's instruction to the churches he wrote to was his urging them to become people of peace, naturally, a nonviolent people. His call was a call to drop one's weapons, and to experience the boundary-less community offered by Jesus Christ, the rightful Lord over all the earth.⁷⁵ Paul's very own personal testimony is an example of the inner workings of Christ's love, that a man once plagued by the overwhelming urgings of violence and retaliation would be restored as a member of God's Kingdom; as he went from violent persecutor to nonviolent follower. Paul's transformation from a violent to nonviolent man, along with his subsequent ministry that taught his followers to experience the subversive way of Jesus, the nonviolent way, is proof that Paul was in fact a proponent of nonviolence.

The Old Testament: In Need of a (Nonviolent?) Retelling?

There is a hidden picture. It hides behind pious hopes and goodwill. It is tucked away by laymen and pastors alike. It is avoided by Christians of all kinds, and for a variety of reasons. The picture is a scary one. It creeps around to haunt its victims. The peaceful followers of Christ are forever haunted by the picture. The hidden picture is of YHWH destroying his enemies. The hidden picture is of YHWH commanding violence from his followers. This is the image that the Church has hidden away- made it inaccessible. Here is the Church, caught in the middle of a violent picture of God, and a loving Jesus. Historical attempts to combine the two have ranged from

⁷⁵ Wright, N. T. *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005. 157

Marcion's heresy to the acceptance of a vengeful, wrathful, and violent God. If Jesus' ethic of nonviolence is to be taken seriously, the texts must be dealt with. As Jenkins makes clear, Christians must deal with the problems in their own texts before promptly declaring other faiths, such as Islam, "violent and dangerous".⁷⁶ This thesis will approach the topic of Old Testament through the revelation of God through the person and work of Jesus, and the basic theme throughout will be that to read the Old Testament and not recognize a pattern of radical love and nonviolence is to read the Old Testament wrong. The violent texts will obviously need to be dealt with, and they will. The picture must be explained, must be brought out of the shadows and into the light. This thesis will seek a reconciliation between this violent picture and a nonviolent Jesus.

The Nature of Scripture

Faiths of every sort hold their religious texts to a higher standard than other literature. They are considered "divinely inspired" and with the help of religious fundamentalism, these ancient texts eventually become to be viewed as "inerrant", meaning "incapable of being wrong". Christians are guilty of doing the same thing. Inerrancy has become a necessary view of Scripture for certain Christian groups, and anything other than this is not orthodox, they claim. This view of Scripture however, as Hellinghausen makes clear, only raises more questions and serves to confuse the reader. Scripture is "the product of the literature of many generations and, therefore, many cultures."⁷⁷ Although his thesis specifically dealt with the intersection of science and Scripture, the implications of his thesis remain true for the present study, that is, the Old Testament does not have a single interpretive lens that can adequately navigate its entirety. With re-

⁷⁶ Jenkins, Philip. *Laying down the Sword: Why We Can't Ignore the Bible's Violent Verses*. New York: HarperOne, 2011.

⁷⁷ Hellinghausen 82

gard to the several different cultures writing in the OT, it may be assumed that Scripture is certainly not inerrant, for the question quickly becomes: “Inerrant to whom?”. To the ancient people, their cosmology made sense, however, to modern science, their cosmology is worthless. Scripture cannot be inerrant because of the very subjective nature of worldviews. With this in mind, a better term, infallible, has been used to describe the nature of Scripture. This means that ultimately, Scripture is unable to err when teaching revealed truth about Christianity. In this sense, God, knowing he is dealing with erroneous humans, will not allow them or their Scripture to be entirely wrong on a certain issue. While this term does not solve all of Scripture’s problems, it gives a good starting point for understanding the nature of Scripture and its role in human existence.

There is one last important note to be made specifically with respect to violence in Scripture which is: If one must seek justification for violence from the bible, regardless whether or not such justifications are warranted, one can and will. As Jenkins says, “if the circumstances in which you live make you seek such justifications, then you will find them”⁷⁸. The bible has been used to justify all kinds of violence. From Constantine’s bible verse engraved helmets, to the Crusades, all the way to modern warfare, where snipers have bible verses on their vests, the bible has been used as a sort of “well” for drawing up justifications for violence. To be clear, this thesis is not seeking a justification for violence, nor an easy solution to the problem of OT violence, but rather, a way to hold both texts in the same hand, to view both pictures in the same frame.

A Path to Peace

⁷⁸ Jenkins, Philip. *Laying down the Sword: Why We Can't Ignore the Bible's Violent Verses*. New York: HarperOne, 2011.

The basic contention argued by this thesis is that to read the OT without recognizing its trajectory towards total peace, i.e. Jesus, then one has misread the OT. To support this contention, a brief analysis of several points throughout Israel's history will be in order to show that YHWH was slowly leading his people towards a radical definition of peace.

Radical Protection: Genesis 4:15

Then the Lord said to him, 'Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.⁷⁹

Cain has just committed the first murder in creation, and YHWH surely should give Cain what was coming to him. Cain was the bad one, the one with unworthy sacrifice, and the jealous heart. Instead of "justly" executing Cain, YHWH protects him. This is the first instance of murder and YHWH is already seen showing grace and forgiveness. The path to peace starts slowly with a radical display of grace, and ironically, ends with one of an apocalyptic magnitude.

Radical Socioeconomics: Leviticus 25

'Count off seven sabbath years—seven times seven years— so that the seven sabbath years amount to a period of forty nine years. Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan. The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. For it is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly from the fields. In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return their own property. If you sell land to any of your own people or buy land from them, do not take advantage of each other. You are to buy from your own people on the basis of the number of years since the Jubilee. And they are to sell to you on the basis of the number of years left for harvesting crops. When the years are many, you are to increase the price, and when the years are few, you are to decrease the price, because what is

⁷⁹ Genesis 4:15

really being sold to you is the number of crops. Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God. I am the LORD your God.’⁸⁰

This is the law regarding the Jubilee, one of the most humane texts in the book of Leviticus, and also one of the most overlooked. As stated above, the Jubilee was once every fifty years, and consisted of the returning of property to the original owners, setting slaves free, leaving the soil untended, and the remission of debts. The Jubilee was intended to be a grand celebration, where once every fifty years things were set right. The Jubilee practice was not simply an arbitrary command by YHWH for Israel to show compassion, but a way of life for Israel that would set herself apart from her surrounding nations. Just as the Law did, the Jubilee functioned to separate Israel from her neighbors and tie YHWH even closer to his people and make them utterly reliant upon his grace. Whether the Jubilee was actually put into practice every fifty years is uncertain, but the idea that God desired economic and social peace for his people is worth noting. Here one does not find a greedy system of capitalism that Americans are so familiar with, but something closer to the Church: a group of people dependent on each other, helping each other, and doing right by one another, all for the glory of YHWH. While Yoder goes on to make the argument that Jesus’ ministry is announcing the beginning of the Jubilee, it suffices for this thesis to conclude here, with the words of Yoder’s solemn warning ringing in one’s ears; “Many bloody revolutions would have been avoided if the Christian church had shown herself more respectful than Israel was of the Jubilee dispositions conceived in the law of Moses.”⁸¹

⁸⁰ Leviticus 25:14-17.

⁸¹ Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972. 70-1

Radical Warfare: God Will Fight for Us⁸²

One hinderance suppressing modern thought is the notion that somehow Israelites, especially with respect to the issue of violence, must be able to answer modern questions such as, “Were the Israelites’ wars justified?” These questions, although asked with good intentions, only serve to distract from the radical warfare of Israel’s history, and create an unnecessary obstacle that must be avoided before even launching into the question of Israel’s method of warfare. Yoder remarks that the story of Israel “may include a moral implication or presuppose moral judgements, but it does not necessarily begin at that point.”⁸³ This being considered, this thesis will examine the history of Israel’s warfare, with special attention to YHWH’s stipulation that he will fight for Israel.

Exodus 14:13

Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD; for the Egyptians who you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be still.⁸⁴

YHWH’s last sentence is chilling. While the wars and conquests of Israel could fill the pages of several hundred theses, it suffices for the purpose of this thesis to recognize that Israel was deeply involved in an ancient culture. The determining factor for a god’s superiority was if his people could win wars and gain territory. The winner of the ancient wars did not just have a superior military, but a superior god. In this culture that YHWH entered, he made it clear to Israel that it was not even necessary for Israel to have a superior army, but only the power of YHWH. In the same way that Jesus took aspects of culture and radically enhanced them in his

⁸² This title is taken from the 4th chapter of *The Politics of Jesus* and the majority of this section’s argument will follow Yoder’s line of thinking.

⁸³ Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972. 76.

⁸⁴ Exodus 14:13

Sermon on the Mount, YHWH does a similar thing by taking the expectations of the Israelites and surrounding nations, and blowing them to pieces. YHWH will fight for his people. They need not fight, worry, or build up their army but instead, wait on YHWH to fulfill his covenant duty to them. It is ironic then, to witness that when Israel strays from this path or tries to fight her own wars is when they lose dreadfully. This is a theme not just in the Exodus story, but throughout the OT. Time and time again, YHWH fights for his people, and their faith in him can only grow, for he is their way to victory. Israel is learning not how to fight, but how to participate in the covenant with YHWH.

Joshua 6:2-5

And the Lord said to Joshua, ‘See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him.’⁸⁵

YHWH makes clear that it is not by the might of the army, nor the ferocity of the warriors that the Israelites will win, but by faith in YHWH. This faith was not comprised of forlorn hopes of a better tomorrow, but a trusted and tested obedience in the covenantal love of YHWH. The battle of Jericho is just one of many examples where YHWH requires faith, as opposed to might, to win battles. This battle fits right into the pattern of YHWH fighting for Israel. Israel will win the battle, but only because she first trusted YHWH. Neither strength nor power comes before a unfaltering trust in YHWH’s providence. Creating this system of radical trust, even in

⁸⁵ Joshua 6:2-5

the face of grave danger, serves to equip the Israelites with an outstanding trust of YHWH and pre-condition them for a radical prophet who would command them to trust his way, even unto death.

Radical Kingship: 1 Samuel 8:19-22

But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, ‘No! But there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.’ And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Obey their voice and make them a king.’ Samuel then said to the men of Israel, ‘Go every man to his city.’⁸⁶

YHWH pleaded with his people. He told them what would happen if they boasted of an earthly king. They didn't listen, and in one of the most saddening texts in all of Scripture, YHWH gives Israel her king, and lets Israel choose her demise. YHWH knew that a king would probably lead to more wars, storage of chariots and other war materials, and the loss of dependency on YHWH. Nonetheless, YHWH gives Israel her king, and watches as his people stray from his guidance. While the historical and theological implications of Israel receiving a king are many, this thesis will focus on the implied bitterness that YHWH shows throughout this text.

While it is not explicitly stated, the reader may use context clues to deduce that YHWH is grieved by his people's decision. Once this is realized, the implications regarding Israel's path to peace are many. YHWH did not want his people to have a king because of the violence and celebration of worldly power that came with it. This was not YHWH's giving in to the systems of the world, but his acceptance that Israel had rejected his sovereignty. YHWH's hope was for Israel to be separate from the worldly systems of power, violence, and greed. By accepting a human king,

⁸⁶ 1 Samuel 8:19-22

Israel accepted these values as core to their national identity. YHWH, the constant God, stood back and watched his nation take a small step off of the path to peace.

Radical Call: The Prophets

Isaiah 2:4

He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.⁸⁷

When Israel could not find YHWH on her own, he sent prophets to help direct her path. Throughout Israel's history, there were a number of prophets sent by YHWH to Israel. Their job was simply to be YHWH's mouthpiece, and to make his words of warning, judgement, or encouragement heard. In many cases they were severely persecuted. Their words however, were YHWH inspired and held truths for Israel's present situation, as well as the Kingdom that was to come.

In this case, Isaiah is speaking of God's future establishment of a Kingdom on earth. This Kingdom, as Isaiah writes, will not be based on the paradigms of power and violence, but something else. The tools of destruction commonly used by man to destroy will be turned into tools. These tools, along with the Spirit, will cultivate a new community, one not based on greed and power paradigms, but an entirely new one, as evidenced by Jesus.

Not surprisingly, two other prophets, Joel and Micah, both echo the same phrase used by Isaiah to describe what will eventually happen to weapons of destruction. This is not simply a chance happening, but YHWH's hinting at his Kingdom that is coming.

The Conquests: Explained

⁸⁷ Isaiah 2:4

While there is no easy explanation to the issue of OT violence, especially the Canaan conquests, one must remember that the road to peace does not begin with peace, but ends with it in the fullest sense. Knowing the full story of the redemptive work of Christ is a precursor to understanding the story of Israel, for modern thinkers are not able to grasp the violent culture that was the Ancient Near East. Once one has understood the implications of Jesus' ministry, using Jesus as a sort of "lens", one may begin to examine the work of YHWH in and through his people. While the story of Israel is a tempting narrative to pull moral implications from, one must always keep in mind that if one's view of God is not soaked in Jesus, that view is likely skewed. With this in mind, the stories of conquest in Israel's history are what they are, as attempts to make them allegories do not account for Jesus' acceptance of the entire Torah. Instead, these texts must primarily be read as YHWH's faithfulness to Israel. The entire Torah is the story of God making a covenant with Israel, her straying from him, and his constant willingness to drag her back to himself.

If these wars are in fact literal, there must be some explaining to be done. Yoder's view is that while the true nature of YHWH is loving and nonviolent, his *responses* to evil may range. His successor, Nugent, asks a few important questions,

Does Jesus full divinity necessitate his revealing the fullness of God's response to evil? Could it be that Jesus reveals God's *ultimate* means of triumphing over evil but not the full range of his responses to it? Could not part of what it means for empty himself and become fully human entail renouncing the exclusive divine right to take life? Does not Scripture also teach that God routinely works through fallen powers to contain evil and has on multiple occasions destroyed the wicked altogether? Is it not the case that Scripture teaches us *not* to imitate God's full response to evil, but only to imitate God's particular response in Jesus?⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Nugent, John C. *The Politics of Yahweh: John Howard Yoder, the Old Testament, and the People of God*. Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2011. 112

It is not until these questions can be fully answered that the thesis that Yoder presents can be dismissed. In the meantime, it suffices to view the conquests of Israel, not as moral guidance, but as YHWH's response to evil, and his drawn out attempt to reconcile his people to himself.

A Hopeful Alternative

In his book *Violence in Scripture*, Siebert explores an alternative view to the conquests and violence that riddle the OT.⁸⁹ His thesis, while repulsive to many fundamentalists, fits quite nicely into Yoder's canonical-directional approach to Scripture. His approach basically reads the OT with respect to the nonviolent message of Jesus. While doing this faithfully, Siebert denies that many of the wars and conquests recorded by Israel were actually sanctioned by YHWH. He proposes that these texts need to be read with the keen understanding that they are biased and one-sided in the favor of Israel. For the sake of time, this thesis will not attempt to validate Siebert's claim, but only acknowledge that there remain several hopeful alternatives for a nonviolent reading of the OT. These readings, interpreted through the dense, nonviolent, and subversive lens of Jesus Christ, lead to the conclusion that YHWH was at the very least intending for his people to eventually be a nonviolent blessing to the world as a fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.

Conclusion

The wars of Israel were in line with ancient tradition and align perfectly with Ancient Near Eastern culture and history. The wars themselves and YHWH's involvement in them are evidence that YHWH works through, not around, violent cultures. Through the nation of Israel, YHWH planned a path to peace. The path was not revealed all at once, but slowly, with upmost

⁸⁹ Siebert, Eric A. *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.

respect to a violent culture. To read the OT without recognizing the nonviolent themes is to misread the OT, and YHWH's ultimate plan for peace.

Interpreting Romans 13: A (Nonviolent?) Solution?

Romans 13:1-7

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.⁹⁰

Never has there been a text used to support such opposite conclusions more often than Romans 13. It has been argued extensively by those who seek justifications for just war and the State's right to enact capital punishment. By the same token, it has also been used to advocate a position of Christian nonviolence.

The main reason that Romans 13 is such a monstrous issue is because its direct relationship to the question of "Is it ever permissible for a Christian to go to war, or even be involved in the government?" While answers to this question vary from person to person and from denomination to denomination, this thesis aims to interpret Romans 13 with both the King (Jesus) and

⁹⁰ Romans 13:1-7

the formerly violent disciple (Paul) in mind. This thesis shall first examine several points that would lead one towards a nonviolent reading of Romans 13.⁹¹

1. The text makes no distinction between a “good” or “bad” government, and does not give Christians the right to judge them by arbitrarily given conditions.

The text, as some would like, does not give Christians, or anyone for that matter, the authority to determine whether or not a government is “just”. Instead, the text would lead one to believe that God “ordains” all governments. For those who interpret the word “ordain” as God’s approval of a government, this lack of conditions becomes a big issue. One extreme example of this interpretation worked to its logical and grammatical conclusions would be the assertion that Hitler’s regime, since God “ordains” all governments, would be a God-instituted government. Since the genocide of millions of Jews is irreconcilable with the image of a nonviolent Jesus, the text becomes ignored in this instance. At this point, the promoter of a violent reading of the text generally will put arbitrary restrictions of what makes a government “good” and claim that there is such thing as a “normal” functioning government and those that cross indisputable lines. Ironically it is up to the Christians to determine whether this government is acceptable but as Yoder inquires, “Who is to judge how bad a government can be and still be good? How much deviation from the norm is justifiable on the grounds of human frailty?”⁹² Since obviously no man can rightly and objectively judge a government, this cannot be what the text means. Instead, a better interpretive lens is to enter the culture of the early Roman Christians.

⁹¹ This argument is adapted from Mike Skinner’s blog post on Romans 13. Skinner, Mike D. "The 5 Most Common Myths About Romans 13:1-7." *Cruciform Theology*. January 15, 2014. Accessed May 01, 2016. <https://cruciformtheology.net/2014/01/15/the-5-most-common-myths-about-romans-131-7/>.

⁹² Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. 200

In favor of a more historical and nonviolent picture of God, this thesis will support Yoder's claim that these verses do not claim that God names a government "just" or "unjust" but instead, *orders* the governments into existence. Just as a librarian does not morally judge the books on the shelves, God does not judge the governments that are in power, but only organizes them so that they might have some sense of functionality. As Yoder contends, "Nor is it that by ordering this realm God specifically, morally approves of what a government does."⁹³ God's ordering of the human systems of organization does not equal God's moral approval. Just as God did not morally approve of Roman crucifixion, God worked through, not around the evil practice of crucifixion to bring his nonviolent Kingdom. In the same way, God works through evil powers to bring his Kingdom to earth. To align God's will with a certain government, often for political gain, is not only a severe misuse of Romans 13, but also a misunderstanding of God's role in government.

Paul is not speaking of a timeless political reality, nor an utopian ethic, but an encouraging word to a group of local Christians.⁹⁴ Instead of the "end all be all" to the discussion on the issue of Christians participating in the violence of the State, Romans 13 becomes a profoundly more important text; a text that is specific to a people group and cannot be taken from its original context and isolated from its intentions. It is a word of both warning and encouragement. Christians are not given the exclusive power to judge governments, but are told to remain faithful in their witness to Jesus Christ. As part of this witness, armed rebellion against the obvious evil powers of the world is not the correct witness of the Kingdom of God.

⁹³ Ibid. 201

⁹⁴ Ibid. 201

2. The positions of early Roman Christians were not positions of power, so the assumption that this text can answer modern questions is misguided.

The earliest Christians were peasants, not political leaders, nor people holding any sort of power. With this very historical fact in mind, one should realize that this text cannot be used to prove whether or not modern Christians may be involved the the government/military/etc., for this was not an issue that could have been dealt with at the time. Instead of forcing the ancient text to answer modern questions, the reader should instead seek an informed response from the story of the nation of Israel and her participation and rejection of the political systems around her, which has been fully examined in the Old Testament section.

3. The fact that God orders the governments and powers does not by any means imply that God approves of their violent means of gaining power.

It is ironic that Christians frequently use Romans 13 as a guide to the government's role in humanity and God's approval of it, because Scripture as a whole, especially the NT, is full of writings that contradict this very contention. In Revelation 13, a text that is often juxtaposed with Romans 13, the beast is not sin or death, but the empire. As stated in the Paul section, his writing consisted of a constant theme of the battle between the powers of the world and the powers of God.⁹⁵ At this point it is worthy to note that God has historically used evil powers and people to bring his love to the world. This is not, as many would assert, Calvin's God who Calvinists assert participated in events such as the Crusades and the Holocaust to bring love and mercy to the world, but a realization that God is ultimately and infinitely more powerful than the violent and evil systems of the world. His role in these systems is not to condone them, but using them to

⁹⁵ Colossians 1:13-14, Colossians 3: 5-11, Ephesians 2: 1-3.

further his Kingdom. While evil events and wars wage on, God does not sit above it all, hoping for it to get better, but instead enlists a group of people to do his work, a work that was started by Jesus and should continue to the modern Church. If Christians participated in the wars and violence of the State, it would be acknowledging their supremacy in the world. This thankfully, has never been the role of the Church, for “the place of government in the providential designs of God is not such that our duty would be simply to do whatever it says.”⁹⁶ Instead, Christians are to do what is right, and at whatever cost that may entail.

4. Christians are not told to fully support or endorse their governments, but to *submit* to them.

There is a distinct difference between submitting to a power and endorsing one. Unfortunately this distinction has been lost in the comprehensive argument for Just War. In this argument, scholars argue that war should only be supported in certain cases and argues extensively for certain conditions in which war should take place. This entire view however, ignores the revolutionary call of Jesus to seek alternatives to violent situations in favor of peaceful alternatives. His calls may not and should not be undermined by an ulterior motive to seek power and domination over others. At any rate, whether or not a war is “just” only complicates the issue, for as Yoder asks: Who’s place is it to judge a war?⁹⁷

To assert that it is an inherently “Christian” position to support the government is to undermine the civil disobedience that has for centuries been a Christian practice. Epitomized by the groundbreaking work of Martin Luther King Jr., the Church, but more specifically certain sects

⁹⁶ Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. 208

⁹⁷ While this point is the earlier reference to Yoder’s question, these issues overlap. *Ibid.* 200

of it, have been historically involved in civil disobedience. This need not go unnoticed, for even Paul had to make such a decision between the Church and the State.⁹⁸ His response should be one that is modeled by all Christians. If serving the State directly conflicts with a Christian witness, God must come first. Even with the text of Romans 13, proponents who claim that there is such a thing as justified national violence, and that it is a Christian responsibility to partake in said violence are unable to produce an argument that does not undermine not only the radical story of warfare and providence in the OT, but also the radical call of Jesus to live as a peaceful people.

Conclusion

With this new interpretation of Romans 13 in mind, one is now able to read the text the way Paul intended for it to be read, nonviolently. The letters of Paul cannot be isolated from his renewed nonviolent worldview, and in the same way Jesus' message cannot be isolated from Paul's letters and his view of the empire. Romans 13, a historically misread verse, now becomes encouragement to Christians to remain faithful to their God and submit to their authorities, however difficult or radical it may be. Taxes are to be paid not because Christians are to support the State's war efforts or because the State comes before God, but because Jesus, Paul, and Peter have something to say about it.⁹⁹ Classically used to defend some of the most violent Christian actions on the planet, Romans 13 deserves at least a reexamination, for maybe there is an alternate reading, one that will change Christian praxis and subsequently one's entire worldview.

What Would You Do? ***A nonviolent answer to a violent question***

⁹⁸ Acts 4:1-22

⁹⁹ Matthew 17:24-27, Romans 13: 2,

It is at this point it becomes not only useful, but imperative, for one to define violence. For the purposes of this thesis, and to bridge the gap between both the violent and nonviolent camps, violence shall be defined as follows: Violence is any physical, emotional, or psychological force intended to cause serious, long-term, and/or lethal consequences to another person or group of people. This broad definition allows for the acknowledgment that violence is not only physical, but emotional and psychological as well. This definition has been largely overlooked in the debate of violence simply because physical violence is more extreme than its counterparts. This however, does not mean that one should forget or ignore the other types of violence that can have even more devastating effects on others. With this extended definition in mind, one may begin to analyze the classic hypothetical question “What would you do if someone attacked you or someone you love?” while also realizing the devastating effects of other forms of violence. This question, when raised in its usual accusatory light, attempts to back the pacifist into a corner. This corner is a self-made pit of emotions, not reasoning based on the commands of Jesus. The corner has been established with the specific intent to emotionally charge and disorient people from the nonviolent radical love of Jesus.¹⁰⁰ While the scenarios that are proposed are not fantasy, they do not do justice to the endless possibilities of a nonviolent approach, and often come down to a legalistic decision: kill or be killed, which is almost never the question.

What this thesis will now attempt to do has been done many times before. Approaching the question “Is violence ever acceptable?” has never proved an easy task, as theologians and lay people alike have wrestled with the question in their own ways. In order to fully analyze the question, one must first understand, based on the previous sections, that Jesus, Paul, and Peter

¹⁰⁰ Yoder, John Howard. *What Would You Do?: A Serious Answer to a Standard Question*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983.

were nonviolent. The King's reign on earth is a nonviolent reigning. Too often the way that the Kingdom is established is confused and even isolated from the teachings of Jesus. It is important then to remember and recognize that any answer to this question cannot ignore the teachings of Jesus. One must also bear in mind that the answer to this question should not be a universal one. The ethics of Jesus are not an "end all be all" to the question of whether or not violence is unacceptable, but the revelation that the Kingdom comes ultimately through nonviolent love and sacrifice. The question then becomes a question asked in a specific *place*, as opposed to a question answered out of a deontological sense of duty. Violence should always be avoided, but the answer and response to evil should never be the same, as the *place* of the response is different. Christians in the war-torn Middle East should and do have a different nonviolent response to evil, as opposed to Christians in Ferguson, Missouri have a different response to evil done in their place. The underlying implication of this assertion is that Christians should not be expected to respond the same exact way as other Christians because the first thing that must be understood is the culture, connotation, and confrontations facing the specific group of people. Jesus' commands to live nonviolently must not be taken as a command to live by an arbitrary ethic, but as a creative, confident, and nonviolent people.

Before specific questions and examples are analyzed, it is necessary for this thesis to make a simple statement regarding a Christian's use of violence. Since Jesus, Paul, and Peter were all nonviolent Christian figures, it follows that Christians should be nonviolent as well. This is no easy task for a new Christian, which is why this thesis shall assert that a Christian's acceptance and use of any type of violence is directly related to one's spiritual health. A new Christian familiar with the violent paradigms of the world may struggle with the use of violence more than

a seasoned Christian who for decades has eschewed the use of violence and the powers and principalities of the world. The process of sanctification then, involves a redirection of one's view and use of violence. Young Christians may not be able to completely eschew violence completely at first, for as Paul says, "for the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."¹⁰¹ The act of being a Christian is to be becoming. To be a nonviolent Christian is not to be a Christian never struggling to eschew violence, for who is the stronger Christian: the man who, when an intruder invades his house, shoots the man upon entrance, or the man who greets the intruder with a gun in his pocket and attempts to have a discourse with the man before firing the gun? The call to be nonviolent then, is not a call to stubbornly refuse violence, but to struggle with the reality of Jesus' teachings in a violent world. If one is striving towards peace in Christ's spirit, they are living in the path of Christ, but if they are a Christian enslaved by the violence of the world, they have work to do. At whatever point on this spectrum one finds themselves, this thesis invites the reader to explore several types of violence, and to determine once and for all whether they are acceptable.

Types of Violence

Since there are varying types of violence, it would first do well to review the different types of violence and explain the specific reasons why these types of violence are wrong or justifiable. This thesis, along with an explanation of the type of violence, will also provide three examples of this type of violence in the real world, with varying levels of Christian commitment to nonviolence. The purpose of these examples is not to condemn certain Christians who are accept-

¹⁰¹ 2 Corinthians 12:10

ing of certain types of violence, but to point down the path towards total peace that goes along with the Kingdom.

Cruelty/Malice

The first type of violence is cruelty/malice. Cruelty shall be herein defined as “an indifferent attitude resulting in the pain or suffering of another”. This type of violence obviously falls outside of the nonviolent command to love one’s enemies. Under no circumstances should one have enough cruelty or malice in one’s heart to commit violence simply based on an indifferent attitude towards human life. If one is to take the image of god in others seriously, cruelty cannot be an appropriate attitude or response to a situation under any circumstances.

Example A

The battlefield is often a place where extreme cruelty is enacted.¹⁰² The morals of the homeland are swiftly forgotten as the struggles of war take precedent. A young Christian soldier finds himself on this battlefield with his depleting morals, and is confronted with a pressing situation: their unit has just captured a high-profile target and they decide instead of following protocol, to beat, defile, and torture the man before handing him over to their superiors. The young Christian, despite the aching feeling in his gut, chooses to participate. He feels guilty afterwards, but attributes this feeling to the “grey-ness” of war.

Example B

The Christian soldier, instead of participating, decides to hold the weapons of those participating as they beat, defile, and torture the individual. While everyone participating shouts and

¹⁰² This example is strictly a hypothetical, although is a situation that has and will occur again. This thesis’ choosing this example in no way expresses its position on a Christian in the military. In any case, regardless of this thesis’ position on the topic, there are Christians in the military, whether or not the inherent responsibilities that go along with being in the military are reconcilable with Jesus’ teachings.

laughs, the Christian soldier winces with compassion and empathy for the enemy, but chooses not to say anything for fear of retaliation or harassment from his fellow soldiers.

Example C

The Christian soldier, upon realizing the intentions of his fellow soldiers, feels empathy and compassion for the victim, as well as an overwhelming duty to Jesus' commands to love one's enemies. He attempts to dissuade his unit from engaging in the evil act and encourages them to turn the man over to their superiors. Despite his desperate pleas, the unit proceeds to beat, defile, and torture the man. The Christian soldier hesitantly reports the event to his superiors to prevent similar happenings despite the harassment and bullying that is bound to follow.

Revenge

If man could only forgive as quickly as he took revenge, violence would not be nearly as big of a problem as it is today. This fact could very well be why instead of instituting a policy of revenge for wrongdoing, Jesus commands his followers to return evil with good.¹⁰³

Whether or not it is logical, the Kingdom comes through praying for persecutors and loving enemies. The implications of this are immediately apparent: violent revenge is no longer a viable response to evil, as it only serves to continue a vicious cycle of violent retribution. Since revenge, by definition, is not returning evil with good, but with evil, it must be eschewed because Jesus commands his followers to return evil with good.

Example A

A husband has a duty to protect his spouse, even to the point of death. This duty is put to the ultimate test however, when an intruder threatens the husband's spouse and despite his des-

¹⁰³ 1 Peter 3:9, Romans 12:17-21.

perate pleas, kills his wife. The husband, left with nothing, decides to make it his life mission to locate the intruder with the full intention of turning him in. After doing locating him, the husband attempts to turn him into the authorities, only to be told that there is not sufficient evidence to convict him. The husband is left broken and alone to his own devices. He knows the name and address of the intruder, and as a result of his overwhelming pain and suffering, he kills the man. He knows he has reached an all-time low in his life and feels remorse for his action, but is mostly devastated by the consequences of his action.

Example B

The husband finds the intruder, and attempts to turn him in. Unfortunately the legal system is unable to convict the man and the husband is told that nothing more can be done. Desiring to live the rest of his life as a free man, the husband moves to a different place only to be constantly tormented by pain because of his inability to forgive the intruder.

Example C

After an appropriate amount of grieving, the husband seeks reconciliation with the attacker. Once the husband finds the man, he forgives him, allowing whatever response the intruder chooses. Although the pain from the murder never fully disappears, the reconciliation puts the husband's heart at ease, and allows him to move on.

Vigilante Justice

In a world full of violence and hatred and evil acts of terror, vigilante justice in many circles is seen as a noble deed. A storeowner who violently defends his/her business and property from a robber is often praised for his/her courage. As these occurrences become more and more common, it is necessary for this thesis to first define vigilante justice, and point out a few exam-

ples of varying degrees of a Christian's use of it (if there is to be any use at all). Vigilante justice shall be defined as "any use of physical force that is intentioned to cause serious harm to another person based on the perceived wrongdoing of another". This perceived wrongdoing is usually generally understood. Whether it be a robber taking from a store, a man trying to start a fight in public, or even a mass shooter, there are certain things that are inherently evil and wrong, and by some standards, require violent retribution to restore justice. While this type of retribution may appear justified, it clearly ignores Jesus' teachings on repaying evil with good in the most basic way. Christians have generally been able to ignore this as they continue to participate in the violent cycles of retribution and systems of violence that enslave the world.

Example A

Mass shootings have been on the rise in the United States, as there were a reported 372 in the U.S. in 2015.¹⁰⁴ This staggering number represents the general state of violent culture in America. In response, gun activists from both camps have pushed for their respective legislation. Meanwhile, the Christian caught in a mass shooting situation has been left throughly unequipped to handle and respond in a Christianly manner.

So suppose a Christian man is in a public place, a mall for example. A suspicious man enters the food court, automatic rifle in hand, and begins shooting everyone in sight. The man ducks for cover behind a table he flips over and draws his handgun. In a fluid moment, he rises to his knees, sets his sights on the shooter, and fires three quick rounds into his chest. The shooter hits the floor immediately and there is only silence. The man cowers back down behind the table in shock. Slowly, the miserable cries of children and adults alike can be heard throughout.

¹⁰⁴ Oldham, Abbey. "2015: The Year of Mass Shootings." PBS. January 1, 2016. Accessed April 22, 2016. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2015-the-year-of-mass-shootings/>.

Praised as a hero, the man is told by his society that all is well, that he did the noble and Christian thing. Much to his dismay, he cannot shake the feeling that there could have been a better solution.

Example B

Disenchanted with frequent gun violence, the man does not own a gun, but would never call himself a pacifist. When the shooter opens fire, he cowers behind an overturned table. Without a gun or any other type of weapon, he quickly visualizes a clear path that would place him within feet of the shooter. As the adrenaline kicks in, the man makes his way behind the shooter and pauses before leaping into his frame. The gun is knocked a few feet away and the man proceeds to beat the man unconscious as other survivors join in. The shooter is restrained and given to the authorities. The man is praised as a hero, and as traumatizing as the experience was, the man is satisfied with his actions and encourages others to do the same.

Example C

As the man ducks behind the table he is faced with his nonviolent theories and beliefs all at once. He realizes that he has reached the point where belief meets action, and as a man committed to Christian nonviolence, he is obligated to act in such a way. As the gunshots are going off the man confidently stands from behind the table. As he turns to meet the gaze of the shooter, the man sees the fiery eyes of a hurt and angry man. The man slowly raises his hands in surrender as their gazes meet. In what cannot be described as anything but a pure human moment, the shooter and the man lock eyes as he begins to slowly walk towards the shooter. When he is close enough, he gently reaches for the gun and removes it from his hands. As survivors crowd to restrain the shooter, the man slowly steps away and hands the weapon over to the authorities.

Hypotheticals

Admittedly, these hypothetical situations all have positive endings, but it is worth noting that death is a real possibility in each example. As controlled as one may think a situation is, no one should underestimate the instability and volatility of humans under pressure. It is also important to bear in mind that hypothetical situations are easily manipulated into becoming situations that are not only impossible, but leaves the person being questioned from wholly answering the question. Hypothetical situations directed at pacifists mainly seek to determine at what point a pacifist gives up, where laying down and dying is his only response to evil. This approach, while intentioned to find this line, ignores the totality of nonviolent and loving pacifist responses in the process. Since people are only concerned with associating pacifism with non-action, they choose to ignore the pacifist responses to injustice, poverty, and oppression. Instead of choosing to participate in the cycles of violence that only perpetuate the violent systems of the world, pacifists choose to peacefully resist these powers in hope that one day these powers will be used for good, rather than evil. To ignore a pacifist's multi-faceted spectrum of responses to violence (especially non-lethal violence) is to look over a history of a nonviolent people attempting to grow closer to Jesus, the prince of Peace.

(Nonviolent?) Policing

Once the basic premise that Christian nonviolence should be at least debated or contemplated by all Christians, the debate generally brings up specific examples of jobs that would by definition interfere with a Christian's ability to be nonviolent. One of the most pressing topics in this debate is the job of a police officer and whether or not a Christian may rightly serve in this

position. In addition to a brief “biography” of a nonviolent Christian police officer, this thesis shall also discuss what it means to live as a nonviolent Christian in a fallen world.

Police officers are required to carry guns. They are trained to pull the trigger. This however, does not mean that they are told where and when to pull the trigger in every situation, in fact, a police officer’s job is overwhelmingly difficult because of the sheer stress of analyzing situations. Police officers decide when to pull the trigger, at which point it becomes difficult to assert that a Christian may not be a police officer simply because they, in certain situations, are required to use lethal force. The nonviolent Christian camp is guilty of declaring blanket statements that often too quickly alienate people from the commands of Jesus, and build walls between brothers and sisters in Christ. A better approach, as this thesis shall submit, is that if a police officer can use lethal violence only as a last resort and is gracious, humble, and like Jesus, then he may be a police officer.

To declare that a Christian may not be a police officer is to declare an entire mission field off limits. This would potentially be an appropriate response if a police officer’s job was to wake up every morning, kill someone, and then go home. This is not however, what being a police officer is like. The majority of a police officer’s work is settling disturbances and domestic disputes in which case, a Christian who is able to help people talk through problems is the best man for the job, not an old trigger-happy man who is unstable.

Christianity is not about a strict application of laws to one’s life, but an alternative community formed out of a rebellion against the evil powers and systems of the world. As such, it is important to recognize that there is beauty in subjectivity. The life of an urban missionary in Toronto is just as beautiful as a suburban police officer, working to settle domestic disputes and

to stop illicit and immoral activity from happening. To demonstrate how a Christian police officer may live a life different and according to the commands of Jesus, two “biographies” of police officers shall be analyzed.

Police Officer #1

He is angry. Every morning is just another battle with his bitterness and distain for the system. Years of being on the police force are beginning to appear on his face. As he dons his uniform he wonders how much longer he will be able to stand the job. It wasn't long ago he spoke of good intentions for the community and the disadvantaged youth. Now it is mundane. The low-lives were all the same. He gave them chances, and they let him down almost every time. The rare joyous stories of redemption no longer matter. He has grown calloused to the routine and desensitized to the plight of those who he had once attempted to pull from their misery. Now a seasoned veteran, the job is simply a means of letting out anger. His victims are those he was formerly tasked to help. Those he pulls over are for a few minutes are locked in a cage and are subject to his rage at the system and the laws he is forced to enforce. His sudden fits of anger have grown more frequent and the strict protocol doesn't have the same urgency it did when he began his career.

Police Officer #2

He life is lived serving. From the time he was a boy, to his long career as a police officer, serving others has been his ultimate goal. He gets up each morning, tired like any other stressed cop, but with a glow that can only be attributed to his faith. The community adores him, as his frequent presence in their violent city is calming. He is gracious and kind to those he assists. In the few events when he's been threatened, he has diffused the situation with a certain grace that

only comes with training and practice. He takes such pride in his job and has such a value for human life that he spends hours practicing shooting his weapon. After years of concentrated practice, he is confident that even if he is forced to discharge his weapon, it will be a non-lethal shot that will immobilize the suspect. When he speaks to people it is never with a violent or harsh tone, but with a respect for their dignity that is drastically uncommon among law enforcement officers. After years of dedicated service he looks back on his career with pleasant memories of success stories.

Conclusion

The lives of these two officers are completely different, from the way they view the people they help to the attitude they have towards the system. One officer is good, the other bad. The difference between the two can be narrowed to each's ability to love those they serve. For the first officer, there is no point in lovingly serving, but for the second, his humility and love is an extension of his faith. It makes sense that a Christian officer would naturally be more kind, loving, and nonviolent than other officers. While the Christian officer is able to competently do his job without resorting to drawing his weapon, the other officers allow the power given to them by the State to define how they treat others, regardless of their objective standing with the law. Police brutality, racism, and dissent occur not because the perfected love of Christ has transformed the police department and the cities they serve in, but because the power given to the police is easily manipulated into an uncontrollable dictatorship that terrorizes citizens. While tempting, this destructive power may be avoided by a Christian attitude towards service and humility. So while police officer is a difficult job for a Christian to perform faithfully, this thesis submits that it is possible to be a police officer while having a commitment first to God.

Hope for a Nonviolent Tomorrow

Peace is not some idealistic expectation for everyone to get along and love one another, but an approachable reality achieved by love of enemies and returning evil with good. However utopian this idea may sound, the believer's firm hope is in the redeeming power of the gospel: the genesis of an alternative lifestyle contrary to the violent powers and principalities of the world. This paper is not suggesting that everyone drop their weapons immediately, for as close as that may be to the heart of Jesus' ministry, it is not practical and even YHWH himself realizes this. The redemptive story of Israel, reaching its climax at Jesus, is not the story of a people growing to learn and master how to war, fight, and kill, but a people learning to be a holy community characterized by their love, especially of their enemies.

In the same way, the Church is called to be set apart, known not for its hatred and what it is against, but for the quality of love the most undeserving people receive. The first step on this trajectory towards peace is to slowly do away with the violence that the world uses to oppress and abuse other people. A quick "end all be all" approach to peace is simply irreconcilable with a trajectory towards peace. Fast is the way consumer society works, it is not personal and it is not human. The trajectory in reality is a long winding road, full of bumps and detours, and at some points not seeming to have any certain end goal. The people called to walk this path are tired, they are weary, and they are losing hope. They have walked this road for some time, and have seen unspeakable evils and injustices. The faithful who are currently walking the path are experiencing a detour, and it is the immense hope of the author that this thesis has helped people walking this path, as well as people who do not know this path exists, or even people who have cho-

sen to ignore it, to realize that the Kingdom of Jesus is not reliant on the sword, but on the subversive calling of Jesus Christ.

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