

## **The Way of the Cross, the Grain of the Universe, and Pacifist Epistemology**

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“Shoot me first, and leave the other ones loose.” These are the words of 13 year-old Marian Fisher just before Charles Roberts shot her along with nine other Amish girls at the Nickel Mines Amish school just a few miles from here. As we know, Roberts did not “leave the other ones loose.” Marian and four other girls were killed in that tragedy, while the remaining five girls were left with varying degrees of injury and disability. Yet, in the media accounts of this school shooting, Marian Fisher’s words are regarded as heroic and generous, alongside the immediate offer of forgiveness to the killer and his family by the Amish community, the attendance by Amish at the funeral of Roberts, and the insistence by the Amish that relief funds be extended to the killer’s widow.

By contrast, Roberts’ motives are typically recognized to involve a logic of retribution and revenge. For example, Pennsylvania State Police Commissioner Col. Jeffrey Miller offered his theory about why Roberts committed this crime. According to one news account of Miller’s views:

He (Miller) thinks Roberts believed God punished him by taking his daughter shortly after she was born. It was retribution, Roberts believed, because he had allegedly molested young family members some 20 years ago. In his suicide note, Roberts wrote that he was angry with God and upset over the death of his daughter. So, Miller theorizes

that Roberts, in a final act, would have retribution on God by shooting the girls, then killing himself, thereby absolving himself of any further punishment.<sup>1</sup>

Colonel Miller's narrative evidences the deep-seated power of the model of retributive justice. It is as if Miller, while recognizing the perversity of Roberts' actions, is also able to rationalize them according to prominent assumptions about God, justice, and punishment that circulate in American culture and conservative versions of Christianity. In this model, the only way to achieve justice is to demand or make one more violent sacrifice in order to even the score.

At the same time, public accounts of Marian Fisher's response to Roberts and Amish forgiveness of Roberts after the tragedy recognized, almost intuitively it seemed, that a central truth of Christianity was being enacted, a truth that in its performance contrasted with the retributive justice that is much more commonly on demand.

The question that my paper seeks to answer is this: What did Marian Fisher know in those last few moments of her life and how did she know it? My working hypothesis is that she knew what John Howard Yoder knew when he wrote that "people who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe."<sup>2</sup> The self-giving, self-emptying, love of Christ makes a witness to the true direction of history—the way things really work—and is thus the ground for any honest confrontation with the darkness of sin and violence.

Put differently, following Jesus in discipleship even to the point of giving up your life willingly rather than clutching at it possessively is not simply a hard teaching or rule of faith that Christians should heroically follow no matter how absurd it may appear in the context of a natural world full of rivalry, competition, violence, and the survival of the fittest. Such self-

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<sup>1</sup> "Amish Killed After Asking Shooter to Pray." MSNBC.com. world wide web address: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15167024/print/1/displaymode/1098/> (accessed 10-20-06).

<sup>2</sup> John Howard Yoder, "Armaments and Eschatology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 1 (1988): 58.

offering discipleship springs rightly from what we can know to be true about the renewal of the creation that God is bringing about all around us, despite the blindness and disobedience that are also manifested. Yielding one's life to God in such a way is an alignment with truth and thereby an act of freedom in both the practical and actual sense.

### CROSS AND RESURRECTION

For me, one of the most provocative statements concerning the epistemological status of the cross is found in a well known passage from Yoder's *Politics of Jesus*. In the final chapter of the book, where Yoder is describing a nonviolent view of history and social change, he argues that patience trumps effectiveness as the criteria for Christian faithfulness. In extending this argument, Yoder makes the claim that "the relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection."<sup>3</sup>

What does this mean? More specifically what does it mean to identify obedience with the cross and triumph with the resurrection? What is the content of the obedience that can properly be called cross-bearing and what is the sort of triumph that can properly be called resurrection? And, of course, what is the relationship between the cross and the resurrection?

Rene Girard's work has emphasized the extent to which the work of Jesus on the cross exposes the scapegoating habits of societies that seek to save themselves from mimetic violence by forging a sacrificial solidarity against a victim. As he puts it, "The gospels only speak of sacrifices in order to reject them and to deny them any validity."<sup>4</sup> On this view, the cross represents what Mark Heim has called the end of sacrifice—that is the end of the persecution of

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<sup>3</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus; Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972), 238.

<sup>4</sup> René Girard, Jean-Michel Oughourlian, and Guy Lefort, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987), 180.

innocent victims in order to preserve social order.<sup>5</sup> Bearing the cross would thus not be understood to mean making a sacrifice, but rather to live a life that exposes the futility of sacrifice. Much discussion of Girard focuses around the meaning of sacrifice and of the extent to which Christ's death can properly be called a sacrifice.

While I do think the relationship of Jesus' death on the cross to the rituals associated with sacrifice and scapegoating is a significant issue, my own interest is in broadening the potential meaning of the cross beyond exposure of scapegoating or futile violence to demonstrate how the cross may offer a way of seeing the entire cosmos as well as the particular events taking place around us in our own time and space according to a cruciform narrative. Such a narrative refigures suffering neither as fearfully evil nor as intrinsically redemptive, but rather as a site of meaningful and potentially redemptive struggle toward the reconciliation of all things in Jesus Christ.

And here I will want to take issue with a section in Yoder's *Politics of Jesus* that has troubled me for some time. Yoder argues that "only at one point, only on one subject—but then consistently, universally—is Jesus our example: in his cross."<sup>6</sup> But this cross, for Yoder, is "no longer any and every kind of suffering, sickness, or tension, the bearing of which is demanded," rather, "the believer's cross must be, like his Lord's, the price of his social nonconformity."<sup>7</sup>

On the one hand, I sympathize with Yoder's apparent purpose here, to distinguish between suffering in general and suffering that results from obedience. But the discussion here ignores the possibility of obedience that may occur in the midst of any kind of suffering, an obedience that involves the adoption of a right posture toward the suffering, a willingness to

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<sup>5</sup> S. Mark Heim, "No More Scapegoats: How Jesus Put an End to Sacrifice," *The Christian Century*, September 5 2006, 22-29.

<sup>6</sup> Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus; Vicit Agnus Noster*, 97.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

discover in that suffering that which is aligned with the direction of history and the unfolding of God's reality.

One way to understand suffering, for example, is as loss: loss of stability, comfort, possession, even coherence. The story of the cross on this reading is about not needing to grasp or protect those features of our social and personal world that are generally assumed to be required for experiencing health and well-being: such as food, clothing, shelter, comfort, safety, a cell-phone with a calling plan, etc., even though these are gifts to be received with gratitude when they are available to us (except for possibly the cell phone). As Yoder puts it elsewhere quite succinctly, "if you follow the risen Jesus, *you don't have to* hate or kill. *You don't have to* defend yourself."<sup>8</sup> The liberation from self-possession and self-protection is not, according to this view, the experience of victimhood—the forceful destruction or dispossession of human beings against their will. It is rather an experience of agency, of relinquishing willingly that which is demanded by another, of making a gift of what was demanded, thus reconstituting the object of mimetic desire as a free-will offering—an excess of resources. Thus, we can read Marian Fisher's words "Shoot me first," as just such an act of impossible agency, of giving away what another sought to take, thus denying the killer ultimate control of the lives he destroyed.

Furthermore, the words of Marian Fisher provide a peaceable narrative leverage not just for settings of human conflict and violence, but also for our view of the natural world. Just as one example, I cite my colleague Angie Montel's critique of dominant war metaphors used by cell biologists to describe the relationship between white blood cells (named natural killer cells by scientists) and the so-called invading viruses and bacteria that threaten the life of the host. Montel challenges the idea that we need to understand the struggle between white blood cells

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<sup>8</sup> John Howard Yoder, "The Anabaptist Shape of Liberation," in *Why I Am a Mennonite*, ed. Harry Loewen (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1988).

and pathogens as a war taking place within the human body.<sup>9</sup> She argues that such a narrative frame has motivated an approach to treatment that emphasizes ridding the body and the environment of germs that are actually helpful in strengthening the immune system. She notes, for example, the increasingly high number of cases of asthma, hay fever, and other allergies associated with germ-free environments, compared with a much lower rate in contexts such as the more polluted countries of the former Eastern Bloc, on family farms, and in child care centers.<sup>10</sup> She points out how the excessive use of anti-bacterial products may be destroying a protective layer of nonpathogenic organisms on our bodies and strengthening treatment-resistant forms of harmful bacteria.<sup>11</sup>

Montel suggests replacing the war metaphors with images of dance and struggle in accounts of cell behavior. Emphasizing the “co-evolution of human hosts and microbial pathogens,” she emphasizes the mutual dependence of hosts and pathogens and argues, following the work of Nancey Murphy that we view the dance between microbes and their hosts as an occasion to appreciate the “sacrificial suffering through to something higher” that “binds us to all creation and to the nonviolent, suffering Redeemer himself.”<sup>12</sup>

When we recognize that the suffering encounter with natural and social forces that seem to threaten us with death provides an opportunity to bear the cross, we are enabled to face such struggles with the knowledge that we are “threatened with resurrection,” as Jim Amstutz puts it.<sup>13</sup> The most eloquent articulation of this principle that I know of is found in the Christological

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<sup>9</sup> Angela Horn Montel, "Violent Images in Cell Biology," in *Teaching Peace: Nonviolence and the Liberal Arts*, ed. J. Denny Weaver and Gerald Biesecker-Mast (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 224-25.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>13</sup> Jim S. Amstutz, *Threatened with Resurrection: Self Preservation and Christ's Way of Peace* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 2002), 18.

hymn of Philippians 2, where Christ is said to have become exalted as Lord precisely in his self-emptying obedience to death. It is to this kenotic principle that I now wish to turn.

### KENOSIS AND CONSUMPTION

In her book *Powers and Submissions*, Sarah Coakley offers an extensive discussion of the possible meanings of kenosis in light of developments in historical theology. Her account ranges from the biblical account itself through the church fathers to the present argument among feminist scholars about whether the injunction to empty yourself as Christ did is properly addressed to women—or to anyone for that matter whose full humanity has been stolen by force.<sup>14</sup>

This question of whether self-emptying is a practice of power or disempowerment is crucial. The way of the cross is easily misunderstood as an acceptance or enablement of violence and abuse. Coakley attributes the anxieties feminists have over kenosis to an assumption that Christ was giving up power that he had possessed as a member of the trinity when he accepted crucifixion. However, if the vulnerability associated with self-emptying is in fact an attribute of divinity, a feature or sign of divine power rather than a contradiction of the divine, then the vulnerability that women often exhibit is properly seen as a practice of power rather than an experience of victimage.<sup>15</sup> For example, when Marian Fisher said “Shoot me first,” was she exhibiting patriarchal training in oppressive self-effacement or was she in fact taking charge of the situation by asserting agency in the face of a man’s attempt to destroy her?

If we accept Coakley’s argument, then Fisher’s speech act can be seen as a “willed effacement to a gentle omnipotence which, far from complementing masculinity, acts as its

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<sup>14</sup> Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 3-25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

undoing.”<sup>16</sup> In fact, according to Coakley, if such vulnerability to enemies demonstrates our true humanity, then women’s tendency not to take up the privileged role of the Enlightenment “man of reason” gives women a particular and privileged location for realizing the empowerment associated with vulnerability.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, the spiritual and practical disciplines involved in giving up and letting go—what traditional Anabaptist conviction has named “gelassenheit” or yielding—are then to be seen as disciplines of empowerment, of receiving as gifts what others perhaps meant as harm. The practice of contemplative prayer, for example, should no longer be seen as a practice of passive withdrawal from the struggle of everyday life but rather the discovery of a renewed space within everyday life from which it is possible to live in a new way amidst the ruins of the world that is passing away. Such radical contemplative prayer in the service of yielding is aligned with the practice of revolutionary subordination as described by Yoder in the controversial ninth chapter of *The Politics of Jesus*: becoming a “free ethical agent” by voluntarily acceding to “subordination in the power of Christ instead of bowing to it either fatalistically or resentfully.”<sup>18</sup> This is because “the new world or regime under which we live is not a simple alternative to present experience but rather a renewed way of living within the present.”<sup>19</sup>

Because this renewed way of living is precisely not an absurd idealism amidst a tragic reality but rather a quite realistic alignment with the actual direction in which the cosmos is being renewed by God, the disciple of Jesus can yield rather than fight. Or as Yoder puts it: “it is precisely this attitude toward the structures of this world, this freedom from needing to smash them since they are about to crumble anyway, which Jesus had been the first to teach and in his

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>18</sup> Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus; Vicit Agnus Noster*, 191.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 190.

suffering to concretize.”<sup>20</sup> Radical contemplative prayer or revolutionary subordination is thus a spiritual discipline that puts the disciple into the flow of God’s purposes as they are being worked out. Or as Coakley argues, following the work of the early twentieth century Benedictine writer John Chapman, rather than being seen as the passive or apathetic acceptance of “everything that happens to one,” the contemplative stance “requires a positive and participative intention to will God’s will for one at this moment, and to accept (just for this one moment) that whatever is befalling one is indeed God’s will.”<sup>21</sup>

To say this yet another way: accepting God’s will means accepting the way that God works in the world—not by might or by power but by the spirit. If God does not impose God’s will on God’s world against the will of God’s disobedient creatures, then for the disciple of Jesus to willingly accept in any given moment the painful effects of disobedient practices or structures on the disciple without trying to crush them and without accepting their ultimate sovereignty is to accept the will of God, without God’s will being seen as the sovereign cause of the suffering caused by disobedience. It is only in this sense that it is right to understand Jesus’ crucifixion as the will of God—as a way of responding to enemies even unto death that comports most fully with the way in which God intervenes in history, with the way God brings about God’s purposes amidst disobedient creatures, and with the will of God for those of us who seek to pursue God’s purposes in our daily lives.

Just in order to be clear about what I am advocating here, I want to recall Martin Luther King’s speech in Memphis the day before he was assassinated where he reflected on the famous confrontation with Birmingham police chief Bull Connor. In the speech he stresses the extent to

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>21</sup> Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*, 49.

which that confrontation witnessed to the tactical alignment of the civil rights movement with God's will and with the "physics" of the cosmos:

We mean business now and we are determined to gain our rightful place in God's world. Bull Connor would tell them to send the dogs forth, and they did come. But we just went before the dogs singing, 'Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around.' Bull Connor next would say, "Turn the fire hoses on."...Bull Connor didn't know history. He knew a kind of physics that somehow didn't relate to the trans-physics that we knew about. And that was the fact that there was a certain kind of fire that no water could put out. And we went before the fire hoses....We knew water. That couldn't stop us.<sup>22</sup>

Arguably, the practices of nonviolence King advocated in the context of the civil rights movement illustrate an aggressive version of yieldedness—a public and visible and persistent witness against the disobedience of racist political and institutional life which endures the suffering involved in such a witness without retaliation or self-defense. To return to Yoder's helpful phrase, revolutionary subordination, one can imagine a range of tactical emphases which improvise on such a complex posture. King's activist stance arguably privileged the revolutionary aspect while other stances might privilege the subordinate aspect. Yet, when some measure of each emphasis is present in Christian witness—a revolutionary refusal to be defined by the fading social order and a subordinate yielding to the damaging blowback of such a refusal—then the will of God can be understood as being fulfilled. It is this sense in which Marian Fisher can be said to have known the same thing that Martin Luther King, Jr., knew: neither guns nor fire hoses are effectual against the "trans-physics" of the cross.

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in William F. Buckley, "The Voice of America: Two Volumes of Political Oratory, from James Otis to Bill Clinton," *The New York Times Book Review*, January 7 2007, 24.

How does a person come to see the world in this sort of a way? What is the source of strength and wisdom for managing the life of renewal amidst the corrupting and dehumanizing structures of the fading order? What concrete knowledge can infuse contemplative prayer with improvised combinations of revolutionary challenge and nonviolent subordination which flow with God's purposes?

As an Anabaptist, I will need to simply say: *the knowledge and practice of the Scriptures by the living body of Christ*. The texts of the Bible are a marvelous instantiation of the broken and renewed world that we seek to see and address rightly. Rather than function as contemporary self-help manuals, which tell us how adjust our lives to the functional realities of the blinded world, the Scriptures empower us to align our lives with those purposes of God which challenge the disobedience of the surrounding world. The Scriptures make us dysfunctional, but in a way that humanizes us, that makes us into the lovely and loving creatures God intended us to be when God created us. This humanizing dysfunctionality is precipitated in the biblical text through the discursive and performative momentum created by at least three kinds of tensions found in the Bible.

The first tension is the tension of generic and literary difference. Like a good library, the Bible contains texts that address a variety of different human situations and problems. As such, one finds in the Bible many contrasting methods of communication and artistic appeal. For those who want to discover who they are, the historical narratives of Israel and the church provide a background against which to live out the drama of one's own life as a member of God's people. For those who struggle with the extraordinary emotions of human experience—love, hate, delight, anger, desire, fear, etc., the Psalms provide poetry and music. For those who seek practical guidance amidst the recurring patterns of human failure, the wisdom literature of

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes offers rules for living and decision-making. For those who seek empowerment to challenge the sins of self and world, the prophetic texts offer judgment and hope. For those who seek spiritual counsel and admonition there are the pastoral epistles. For those who desire a perspective on how all of this going to turn out, there is the apocalyptic literature. The changing demands of human experience are addressed in all of these genres in concrete rather than general ways.

The second tension is one of perspective and conviction. The Hebrew Bible provides what Walter Brueggemann has called disputed testimony about the nature and purposes of God.<sup>23</sup> We find as we read that we have the experience of being in a jury box of the biblical courtroom, listening to competing arguments and being asked to decide which one to accept. Is the God of Israel an angry God who destroys the disobedient with water and fire or is Yahweh a God of mercy and love who refuses to revoke the covenant God has made with God's people? Should the alien be removed from the community or welcomed as a friend? Are we to pursue purity or hospitality? Should we fight for God or will God fight for us? These and a vast array of other disputes about God and humanity are not finally settled in the Scriptures. As James Barr has written, "the working out of the biblical model for the understanding of God was not an intellectual process so much as a personal conflict, in which men struggled with their God, and with each other about their God."<sup>24</sup>

Third, we discover in the biblical story changing circumstances of godly intervention and will-manifestation. At times God shows up in the earthquake and at other times through a still, small voice. In one moment, God sends plagues and in another he sends manna. God may

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<sup>23</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament : Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 82-83.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 105.

harden the Pharaoh's heart or he may remove the scales from the eyes of Saul. This God, in the testimony of Moses, both kills and makes alive, both wounds and heals (Deuteronomy 32:39). Perhaps most decisively, in the Christian inflection of Scripture, this God was revealed to the ancestors through the prophets, "but in these last days by a Son whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

It is against the backdrop of such difference, debate, and development in the Scriptures that we can find ourselves with the apocalyptic seer before the mighty angel wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, with a face like the sun, and with legs like pillars of fire—one foot planted in the sea and the other in the land—holding a scroll. We hear the voice from heaven: "Go take the scroll." We hear the angelic invitation, "Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth" (Revelation 10:1-11).

Eugene Peterson's riff on this text emphasizes how consuming the biblical text through contemplative and prayerful reading opens up the true world of God—a world that is beyond our control, without obvious relationships between causes and effects, and full of upsetting miracles. This world—the real world—disrupts the dream world of our adolescent expectations, where everything works out on our behalf. "For most of us it takes years and years and years to exchange our dream world for the real world of grace and mercy, sacrifice and love, freedom and joy."<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, the consumption of the scriptures can be seen as a kind of antidote to the sort of corrupting consumption that ravages our everyday lives amidst the empire of the market. The scroll appears before us as a kind of truth drug, like the red pill in *The Matrix* films. We are invited to eat it, taste its sweetness and be forewarned of the bitter feeling in our stomachs.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Doing scriptural drugs is dangerous, however, and not something to try out on one's own. The proper image of scriptural consumption is not so much the private dinner but the community potluck. Swallow the text whole, but make sure you are with others who can help you out if you get too sick on your stomach. When the gathered body of Christ consumes the Word of God, taking it up in discussion and taking it in through prayer, the Word becomes enfleshed again among us. The "real world" of God becomes visible once again before the blinded world.

Eugene Peterson emphasizes how the "real world" that is available to us in the consumption of Scripture is not imposed upon us: "God's word is personal address, inviting, commanding, challenging, rebuking, judging, comforting, directing. But not forcing. Not coercing. We are given space and freedom to answer, to enter into the conversation. From beginning to end, the word of God is a dialogical word, a word that invites participation."<sup>26</sup> Thus, the truth we discover in the consumption of the Scriptures is a truth that can only be received rightly as a gift, as good news, and only ever offered to others in the same way.

By definition, the good news cannot be offered at the point of a sword or the barrel of a gun or the threat of a lawsuit. The good news is subject to rejection, just as we must be if we are to become its body—its agency. To become aligned with the world that God is bringing about is also to yield to both the friendly and the hostile reception of that world by the worldly audience. Or, as Yoder puts it, "readiness to bear (the audience's) hostility is part of the message."<sup>27</sup>

## REMEMBRANCE, ANTICIPATION AND OBEDIENCE

The gospel epistemology that I have been describing here is a comprehensive experience of the world, even if it is as scandalously particular as a revelation of God in the life of a

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>27</sup> John Howard Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation," *Faith and Philosophy* 9 no. 3 (1992): 293.

particular (temporarily divided) people—Israel and the church. There is a past, a future, and a present dimension of gospel consciousness, discovered first of all in the reading of the scriptures with other believers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but then also instantiated in the way we come to see our places in the unfolding drama of God’s story in our own time and place.

The memory of the past—both that of the human societies and of our own personal histories—is for the believer embedded in the story of God’s people as found in the Bible. That story is one of failure, forgiveness, and faithfulness. God’s people fail God and one another while God both judges and forgives their failures.

Miroslav Volf has argued that in order for the injuries of the past to be rightly remembered, the gospel call urges both an accurate recall of such injury and a readiness to forget it.<sup>28</sup> Of course, the ability to forget is not unrelated to the severity of the injury. Some injuries are easier to forget than others. One aspect of injury is precisely a legacy of inerasable pain and suffering. Suppressing such memories makes forgiveness impossible. One cannot forgive what one cannot recall.

At the same time, as Derrida has argued, true forgiveness could only ever properly be offered in response to an unforgiveable offense. What is forgiveable by definition can be recuperated within an economy of exchange and justice. Derrida thus distinguishes between pure forgiveness, which is impossible, and transactional forgiveness, which occurs in human history, but is only given meaning by reference to the horizon of the impossible form of forgiveness—forgiving the unforgiveable. He writes: “Sometimes, forgiveness (given by God, or inspired by divine prescription) must be a gracious gift, without exchange and without condition; sometimes it requires, as its minimal condition, the repentance and transformation of

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<sup>28</sup> Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 204-05.

the sinner.” Furthermore, he argues, “It is between these two poles, *irreconcilable but indissociable*, that decisions and responsibilities are to be taken.”<sup>29</sup>

Stated another way, the memory of God’s gracious and impossible acts of forgiveness toward us provides a horizon against which it is possible to contemplate the offering of forgiveness to others—even when such forgiveness is flawed, limited, and conditional. And such a practice of both honest remembering and free forgetting is the condition of possibility for an anticipated future in which reconciled enemies make historically visible their already accomplished reconciliation in Christ. For Volf, the eucharistic body of Christ is the crucial location of such a realized future: “by remembering Christ’s Passion, we remember ourselves as what we shall be—members of one communion of love, comprised of wrongdoers and the wronged.”<sup>30</sup>

The astonishing presence of Amish families at the funeral of Charles Roberts is perhaps a most eucharistical instance of such practices of memory and anticipation, even though communion was not technically served. But in more ordinary contexts, the capacity of members of Christ’s broken body—alienated from one another as they might be—to gather in right relationship around the Lord’s table is indeed a practice that makes visible the cross-formed grain of the universe. And any such miraculous actions that yield one’s memories to God, in the hope of the world to come, whether they take place in the sanctuary or the marketplace, are evidence of the possible obedience to which right remembering and hopeful anticipation call us.

Mennonite missionary David Shank tells the story of attending one of Karl Barth’s seminars in the early 1950’s with John Howard Yoder. Barth was discussing with students the relationship between the memory of the cross and resurrection on the one hand and the

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<sup>29</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 44-45.

<sup>30</sup> Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, 119.

anticipation of the future coming of the Lord on the other hand as the basis for Christian hope. When a student asked what the task of the Christian is during the meanwhile, between the past event of the cross and the anticipation of the second coming, Barth responded: "In-between we look back and remember, and we look forward and hope. We remember...and hope." David Shank recalls, "I was sitting beside John Howard, and close enough to hear him mumble under his breath, "We obey!"<sup>31</sup> So be it.

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<sup>31</sup> David Shank, "Another Grandpa David Story...We Obey!."

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