

Two Conundrums and the Kingdom of God: TWU, November 14, 2005, 8:30 a.m.

Introduction

A Canadian evangelical theological student, suspicious of Karl Barth's neoorthodoxy, once asked him: "What do you think of reason?" Barth sharply retorted: "I use it!"

Eleventh century theologian St. Anselm of Canterbury coined the phrase, "Credo ut intelligam" – I believe in order to understand. That approach underlies all knowledge, all epistemologies. All knowledge in fact begins in a realm of irrationality in this sense: we assume several givens about life before reason kicks in.

In biblical faith, part of the conscious assumptions, the presuppositions, the prior faith commitments, is to Scripture as sure Guide. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path (Ps 119:105).", Scripture self-attests, and Christians affirm. But after that prior faith commitment, it is full throttle on use of reason.

While there are problems to be sure about that faith avowal, once made, we're only halfway home. We still have to figure out what the text actually *says*. It was W. C. Fields who read the Bible, he explained facetiously, "looking for the loopholes". Few of us are quite so candid. All of us are complicit at times in such an approach.

I know this is first thing on a Monday morning, and for those living on campus, short minutes ago you may have still been in bed. Nevertheless I want to call on your sound use of reason today to present to you two conundrums.

I grew up in a biblical tradition that claimed to take Jesus and the biblical text seriously. It was therefore a huge shock to me when I first attended Regent College in the fall of 1974, and took in Clark Pinnock's inter-term three-week course entitled, "The Politics of Jesus". He had lifted that title straight from a book published two years earlier by Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder. I was of the mind until that point that, in the words of Regent College's then vice-principal, Dr. William Martin, "there are no politics in the Bible". He said that to me with reference to Pinnock's semester course he taught the next fall by that same title. Dr. Martin like me was from that faith tradition that church historian Ernest Sandeen dubbed "quintessential fundamentalist", that until 30 years ago at least was almost purely a-political, centrally pietist and otherworldly in its *understanding* of God and mission, though practice on the mission field back then often transcended the disconnect to neighbour and created order.

Though I had "accepted Christ as Saviour" at the tender age of four, as I always told in giving my testimony, though I was baptized at 12 and studied the Bible religiously from that day onwards, making copious notes for years and winning the approbation of all the elders in my church and all our missionaries, I was still in for the shock of my life until then when I first sat down for that three-week course of Dr. Pinnock, January, 1975. On principle I refused to read Yoder's text, though it was the only one assigned, and we had to hand in a report on it. I passed the course somehow, but felt rather furious at the

“strange Gospel” Pinnock was peddling and many embraced that wet January three decades ago.

But Pinnock, and, I eventually conceded, Yoder, hooked me, and took me through two conversions. Stanley Hauerwas, “America’s finest theologian” according to *Time* magazine a few years ago, who likewise was converted by Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus*, believes that book is bar none *the most important theological watershed of the twentieth century*. Theologian James William McClendon Jr. wrote an outstanding three-volume *Systematic Theology* because he too was transformed by reading Yoder about “the politics of Jesus”. Yet Dr. Martin, whom I served as research assistant in my second year at Regent College, said there were no politics in the Bible, he who had read his Bible in the original even, most of his life, and ought to have known!

In the thirty years since I arrived an eager young theologian at Regent College, most pietistic traditions have undergone what I call my first post-Christian “conversion” experience: they became not only convinced that the Bible is about politics, in the United States their current representatives comprise the greatest block of supporters for President Bush and the Republican party. Evangelicals, largely of pietistic origin, have indeed discovered the centrality of politics in the Bible.

But I underwent a second conversion at Regent College that most of my fellow Evangelicals did not, thanks to my professor, Clark Pinnock, and also to John Howard Yoder’s book. So did Stanley Hauerwas and James William McClendon Jr., again thanks to Yoder’s book. That was to discover that *the biblical way of doing politics was the utterly counterintuitive way of the nonviolent cross*.

About 20 years after the publication of *The Politics of Jesus*, in private conversation at a conference, Yoder told me that he had not once ever been challenged by any biblical scholar about his *reading* of Jesus and the New Testament in that book on the issue of nonviolence. Rather, he had been dismissed because of the *sheer impracticality* of living out that reading.

So I come to my theme this morning: I find in response to Scripture, and in response to the experience of war, two fundamental conundrums about *violence*. I gave a title to my talk: “Two Conundrums and the Kingdom of God”.

Conundrum 1: Violence and Scripture

Help me reason this out, in the spirit of Karl Barth.

Richard Hays, an American New Testament theologian, has written the premier contemporary study on New Testament ethics. The massive tome is entitled *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation*. After spending the first few hundred pages meticulously presenting *how* to read the New Testament to excavate its ethics, he supplies several case studies to demonstrate the theory. One is the issue of violence. In a chapter entitled “Violence in Defense of Justice”, Hays leaves no

exegetical task unturned in sifting through the entire New Testament for its witness concerning violence. He begins with Matthew's Gospel, in particular the Sermon on the Mount. He writes:

The point is that the community of Jesus' disciples is summoned to the task of showing forth the character of God in the world. That character is nowhere more decisively manifest than in the practice of loving enemies (5:44—45), a practice incompatible with killing them.³² Those who are peacemakers are to be called "sons of God" (5:9) because, like God, they love their enemies (5:45, cf. 5:48).³³ Thus, the church's embodiment of nonviolence is—according to the Sermon on the Mount—its indispensable witness to the gospel (p. 329).

Then, under the title "Synthesis: Violence in Canonical Context", he gives an overview of the entire sweep of the New Testament:

Our exegetical illustration of Matthew 5:38—48 has led to the conclusion that the passage teaches a norm of nonviolent love of enemies. Within the context of Matthew's Gospel, the directive to "turn the other cheek" functions as more than a bare rule; instead, as a "focal instance" of discipleship, it functions metonymically [it stands for all responses to an enemy], illuminating the life of a covenant community that is called to live in radical faithfulness to the vision of the kingdom of God disclosed in Jesus' teaching and example. Taken alone, this text would certainly preclude any justification for Jesus' disciples to resort to violence. The question that we must now consider is how Matthew's vision of the peaceful community fits into the larger witness of the canonical New Testament. Do the other texts in the canon reinforce the Sermon on the Mount's teaching on nonviolence, or do they provide other options that might allow or require Christians to take up the sword?

When the question is posed this way, the immediate result—as [Karl] Barth observed³⁴— is to underscore how impressively univocal is the testimony of the New Testament writers on this point (p. 329)...

Hays then takes us on a tour of all the relevant passages buttressing this reading, concluding: "Thus, from Matthew to Revelation we find a consistent witness against violence and a calling to the community to follow the example of Jesus in *accepting* suffering rather than *inflicting* it (p. 332)."

Then Hays asks the one question most frequently posed in response to his summary of the New Testament: What about the Old Testament witness? He responds:

Taken on its own terms, the Old Testament obviously validates the legitimacy of armed violence by the people of God under some circumstances. This is the point at which one of the methodological guidelines proposed in Part III must come into play: the New Testament's witness is finally normative. If irreconcilable tensions exist between the moral vision of the New Testament and that of particular Old Testament texts, the New Testament vision trumps the Old Testament (p.336)...

He adds:

The vocation of nonviolence is not exclusively an option for exceptionally saintly individuals, nor is it a matter of individual conscience; it is fundamental to the church's identity and *raison d'être* [reason for existence]. Mainline Protestantism has usually treated this matter as though it were a question of individual moral preference, supporting the "right" of individual conscientious objection but also generally sanctioning Christian participation in war. In light of the New Testament's call to the community as a whole to embody the teaching of Jesus, however, this position is untenable and theologically incoherent. The church is called to live as a city set on a hill, a city that lives in light of another wisdom, as a sign of God's coming kingdom... [I]f we ask the larger question about the vocation of the community, the New Testament witness comes clearly into focus: the community is called to the work of reconciliation and—as a part of that vocation—suffering even in the face of great injustice. When the identity of the community is understood in these terms, the place of the soldier within the church can only be seen as anomalous (p. 337).

A little later, he speaks to the issue of *realpolitik*: or how *practical* is this, Mr. Yoder?:

To put this in theological shorthand, the New Testament's ethical teaching must always be situated within the context of eschatological hope. If we fail to read the New Testament texts on violence through the lens of *new creation*, we will fall into one of two opposing errors: either we will fall into a foolish utopianism that expects an evil world to receive our nice gestures with friendly smiles, or we will despair of the possibility of living under the "unrealistic" standards exemplified by Jesus. But if we do read the texts through the lens of *new creation*, we will see that the church is called to stand as God's sign of promise in a dark world. Once we see that, our way, however difficult, will be clear (pp. 338 & 339).

Hays notes further:

The *paradigm* mode is the preeminent mode of the New Testament canon's pervasive witness against violence. The Gospel passion narratives are at the center of that witness, along with Paul's kerygma that tells the story of how God has reconciled enemies through the death of his Son. The story of Jesus' exemplary renunciation of violence is in turn reflected in stories such as the death of Stephen and in the exhortation of Peter that believers should follow "in his steps." Nowhere does the New Testament provide any positive model of Jesus or his followers employing violence in defense of justice. (In this respect the New Testament is quite remarkable within the world's literature.) (pp. 339 & 340)

And again, in direct response to *realpolitik*:

The truth about reality is disclosed in the cross: God's power is disclosed in weakness. Thus, all who are granted to see the truth through Jesus Christ will perceive the world through the lenses of the Beatitudes and the strange narrative of the Apocalypse, in which the King of kings and Lord of lords is

the slaughtered Lamb. The power of violence is the illusory power of the Beast, which is unmasked by the faithful testimony of the saints (p. 340)...

Nonviolence, Hays argues, is ultimate *realpolitik*.

Finally, under the title, “OTHER AUTHORITIES”, Hays writes:

This is the place where New Testament ethics confronts a profound methodological challenge on the question of violence, because the tension is so severe between the unambiguous witness of the New Testament canon and the apparently countervailing forces of *tradition, reason, and experience* (p. 341).

In consideration of each of these three “countervailing forces”, the writer carefully nudges us back towards the New Testament text as normative.

Hays’ final words in the chapter, under the title, “Living the Text: The Church As Community of Peace”, are:

One reason that the world finds the New Testament’s message of peacemaking and love of enemies incredible is that the church is so massively faithless. On the question of violence, the church is deeply compromised and committed to nationalism, violence, and idolatry. (By comparison, our problems with sexual sin are trivial.)

Only when the church renounces the way of violence will people see what the Gospel means, because then they will see the way of Jesus reenacted in the church. Whenever God’s people give up the predictable ways of violence and self-defense, they are forced to formulate imaginative new responses in particular historical settings... If we live in obedience to Jesus’ command to renounce violence, the church will become the sphere where the future of God’s righteousness intersects—and challenges—the present tense of human existence. The meaning of the New Testament’s teaching on violence will become evident only in communities of Jesus’ followers who embody the costly way of peace (pp. 343 & 344).

I quoted Hays at such length, since I wanted to put the case home that there is *no biblical warrant for supporting Christian resort to violence at the personal level, or in support of the state’s doing our dirty work for us through war against our international enemies, or capital punishment against our domestic enemies*. There is, on the contrary, one New Testament response to our enemies that Jesus gives: “Love your enemies”. In Luke’s Gospel, the passage goes on, picked up by Saint Paul in Romans 13, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you (Luke 6:27 – 31).” Where are W.C. Fields’ loopholes in that? Where are the exception clauses anywhere else in the New Testament? And to put the point home, Jesus caps it off with a reprise: “But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great,

and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:35 – 36).” Negative and positive reciprocity are both rejected by Jesus. You have read René Girard, and know his whole inquiry turns on that reality.

The Templeton Prize in Religion winner for 2004 was theoretical cosmologist George F. R. Ellis who co-authored with theologian Nancey Murphy the book, *On The Moral Nature of the Universe*, in which they argue that a “particular moral vision – a ‘kenotic’ ethic – is supported ‘from below’ by the social sciences and ‘from above’ by theology. Contemporary cosmology, they argue, points ultimately to an ethic that centers on self-sacrifice and nonviolence (back cover).” This is consonant, argues Stanley Hauerwas in The 2001 Gifford Lectures, borrowing an expression from John Howard Yoder, “with the grain of the universe” (Hauerwas, 2001) – how God set up things and intended them to work. It is presented in theologian James Alison’s book, *Raising Abel* (1996) as “recovery of the eschatological imagination”, whose work as well interprets theologically that of René Girard, possibly the foremost living theorist on the origins of human violence. It is given ‘systematically’ in James Williams McClendon Jr.’s trilogy on *Systematic Theology* as the true starting point of all theology, all God-talk. What a different world, what a different history in the last two millennia, if that had only been dominantly true.

So the conundrum is: why? Why has majority Christian practice overwhelmingly been pro-violence? Dr. Ellis, whom I just mentioned, at a Trinity Western University lecture two years ago, in response to that very question posed by me, said: “Because it is just too hard otherwise.”

A character in my novel, *Chrysalis Crucible*, says:

My conclusion from simple observation is: Evangelicals routinely practise an under-your-breath ideologized “footnote theology” that reads repeatedly, “Except our enemies”, when quoting John 3:16 and all other similar New Testament ethical teachings. How could Billy Graham *tell* the North Vietnamese that God loves them, when he fully blesses his own country in *doing* the exact opposite; when Billy Graham is still praying with the President for victory in the War – which means massive carnage and widespread wanton destruction? When he apparently wills the utter inversion of *everything Gospel* in treatment of neighbour, enemy and creation?

In my novel, set in West Berlin during the Vietnam War in the early seventies, evangelist Andy Norton has time to kill outside the American army base, while waiting for his colleague to complete a visit inside with an officer. By this time, Andy has been challenged repeatedly about his pro-violence stance with which he had grown up as an Evangelical Christian. In a long soliloquy, his mind finally goes wild. I will read portions of it:

He had some serious thinking to do. Somehow the sight of this Compound, representing American power flung to the far corners of the world, was an inspiration. But not to sing *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

Andy's mind first turned to G.E.'s forceful missive about only "preaching the Gospel". He thought immediately of the Matthew 25 passage.

He felt again overwhelmed with the salvation message of the passage. It all turned upon good works performed in this lifetime. And yet he had been raised all his life to believe "*not by works, lest any man should boast*", Paul's teaching, which was all after-death oriented. So did Paul simply contradict Jesus? Did a choice have to be made of that sort? Or was James, in echoing Jesus with "*Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.*", simply out to lunch, author indeed of a "right strawy epistle", unaware that salvation was freely offered without good works?

Were James and Jesus in their teachings somehow heretics? Even though Jesus the icon saved us through His blood? But not through His words lived out? Then Andy remembered the startling discovery in Matthew's Gospel that the "wise man" was not the one who believed, and the "foolish man" not the unbeliever destined for hell fire. Rather, the wise man was "everyone who hears these words of mine and *puts them into practice*". And what was the immediate context for Jesus' "words" to discern what practice? The Sermon on the Mount, which is chock-a-block full of the call to treat the neighbour with justice, mercy and compassion. That was the purview of the wise man. That was the concrete actualization of salvation that is "today".

How had Andy missed, how had the entire Evangelical tradition misread, such evident biblical teaching? Could it be that Evangelicals, for all their protestations of biblical faithfulness, were instead after all most like the legalistic Pharisees, "of their father, the devil", murderers and liars from the beginning? Andy hated it when his mind took such turns. This could get a guy crucified he self-scolded with a chill.

Andy turned to the immense human capacity to inflict human suffering upon one's fellow, as he walked alongside the American Base. The American Army is the most capacitated in the entire world to do precisely that! Images of Agent Orange defoliating multiplied hundreds of thousands of hectares of pristine jungle, and doubtless deforming thousands of unborns for a whole new generation; gas ovens; massive bombings; scientific excising of "cancer" from the body politic; cluster bombs scattered by the millions, and jungle slaughter of soldiers, villagers, and anyone else caught in the crossfire; napalm sending an eight-year-old girl naked down the road, the searing pain all over her face, captured for the world by a happenstance photographer. He wondered at the enormous human capacity and lust for perpetrating overwhelming misery against others.

The thought struck, had he first heard it from Hans?, that this had to be the ultimate inversion of evangelism, when bombs and bullets, Agent Orange, and

God only knows what else in word and deed, not “the good seed”, were scattered indiscriminately upon the earth. Pain, death and devastation followed. Massively.

Then the terrifying reminder that Evangelicals *en masse* blessed all that! The ultimate world evangelist gave routine assent, as surely as Saul and those stoning Stephen persecuted the early Christians. Billy always prayed with the President during times of national crisis. And with Graham, the vast majority of Western Evangelicals nodded their approval, like the Nazis at Dachau and elsewhere in the white coats at the end of those one-way train trips. What utter perversion of the Good News. What Gospel travesty. What complete inversion of evangelism. By the world’s greatest evangelist, and amongst the world’s most virulent religion propagators: Evangelicals.

...

His horror turned to terror that his entire life he had worshipped God and had been formed in all his core beliefs in company with such sycophants of mass murder and mayhem. As if he had been born into a Mafia family, where killing and slaughter were simply routine, justified as what was needed to “get the job done”, to enable “normal” life to go on. “Just War” theory as Christians had always enunciated it, Andy suddenly understood, was equally the prerogative of the Mob and every vile tyrant known to humanity. No doubt Christians were more sophisticated than what a Mafia family godfather or dictator might articulate, but in the end, it all boiled down to exactly the same thing: terror and slaughter. People destroyed, the earth raped and pillaged, all for a “just” cause. How could he have been so duped, and not have seen the true face of Christendom, of Evangelicalism, viciously “red in tooth and claw”?

...

His mind moved inexorably to Evangelical, in general Christian, justification of every war fought in the entire history of the church. All had been blessed by the church on both sides of the conflict. Andy knew that over one hundred millions had been slaughtered in the twentieth century so far alone, mostly with the blessing of the church from every side. He knew from Hans the terrible recitation of mass butchery by Western Allies. These hundreds of thousands of immolated innocents just happened to be living in the wrong place at the wrong time, like the infants under two that Herod had destroyed to wipe out the Christ-Child.

Just like that!, Andy saw it with a start. Then: And they’re still aimed at murdering the Christ-Child! What was that Christian World War II slogan?: “Praise God and pass the bombs!”. Sick, and designedly destructive of the Christ-Child in every last one of “the least of these”! Herod’s decree marching orders ever since for virtually all Christendom, world without end;

world brought to a horrible end possibly in nuclear nightmare!; all enemies for sure consigned to a God-forsaken end, Amen and Amen, intoned by every military chaplain in the history of Christendom.

Why was such an obvious biblical association so out of step with virtually everyone else living in the West? Incredible! Astounding! The power of monstrous myth-making to perpetrate the Ultimate Lie: “Might is right. Violence is holy.” Isn’t that exactly what he was looking at? One clarion symbol of that very mythmaking? A two-millennia religious phenomenon, Christendom, including right up to its most vehement contemporary defenders, Evangelicals, utterly at odds with the most straightforward, most pervasive, most undeniably central Gospel ethical truth: *Love your neighbour; love your enemies*. The Core of the Gospel: *unbridled reconciliation*; the Core of Christendom: *endless violence*. Each in diametrically opposed stark juxtaposition.

...

When Gandhi once was asked what he thought of Western civilization, he paused, then replied: “I think it would be a *great* idea!” Freedom of the Western press for those who own one. Freedom from violence for those who own the biggest guns. Drop that first atomic bomb. Now the Russians will know who has the Biggest Gun! Stupid white men facing each other down on Main Street at High Noon. Little kids all; puerile; totally stunted growth; utter fools every last one, from President John down to Kinky Sex Dee and Christine and Marilyn... A great idea indeed, “civilization”, however foreign in the West.

Gandhi might have similarly responded to, ‘What do you think of Western Christianity?’ with, ‘I think it would be a great idea...’ Then he might have added, “*They could even start by following Jesus!*” What a novel thought. And for different reasons, but in the end with identical outcome, both believer and non-believer respond: “So what?” Billy Graham, the pagan, the lowly G.I. Private in Vietnam, latest evangelistic convert stroking his New Testament like a good luck charm, while proceeding to engage in routine acts utterly *anti-Christ*: blowing, not welcoming, the enemy to Kingdom Come! That, in the end, is the true measure of Evangelical evangelism. “Kingdom Come” all right, when all is said and done, at the point of the gun, the discharge of the bomb, the launch of the missile. Praise God and drop those bombs, toss those grenades, spew death from the automatic weaponry, fire those missiles. That’s God’s true Kingdom Come on earth for Western Christianity: all enemies be damned, God be praised forevermore.

...

He could not stop his mind’s stream of consciousness. He noticed absently

geese overhead. Presumably. He imagined American war planes about to once again drop deadly destruction upon all beneath, the good creation.

...

And who would be thanked for saying, “But the Emperor has no clothes!”? Certainly not the little boy crying out the sudden revelation in Andersen’s *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. “Crucify him!”, Andy suddenly heard the Evangelical hordes crescendo in response, as robustly, as resolutely, as incomprehensibly, as the mob in front of Pilate two thousand years before – or the soldiers doing Herod’s bidding to the two-and-under toddlers in Bethlehem so long ago. Why did Andy’s mind think this way? What was the matter with him? What had seized his troubled mind to arrive at conclusions that would get *him* crucified, and blacklisted by every Evangelical leader in the world? Who *did* he think he was?!

...

Had he somehow misunderstood? Did Evangelicals after all *really take Jesus seriously*? He thought immediately of all the “born-again” military personnel right in front of him. A real revival, the team had been told. He remembered what Hans Beutler had said, recalled his discussions with Dan, and reviewed his own awareness of church history. No. He was not wrong. The vast majority of Christians throughout history, and of his contemporary Evangelicals, best represented by Billy Graham at the White House in his constant blessing of U.S. military interventions, had always underwritten mass slaughter of America’s, the West’s, the “good guys” enemies, worldwide. Whenever it served American, or Western interests.

There was always justification for Western Holocaust. The “other justification” like Paul’s “other gospel” that was pure symmetrical inversion of biblical “justification by faith”. It was Evangelicals’ primary gospel; foremost kind of “justification”. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, of the Bible, was unknown or secondary.

There was no difference between Evangelical doctrine and Mafia belief in the end. Regrettably or not, in cold blood, or with a glimmer of conscience, *people must die, the good earth be wasted!* Whatever to get the job done. It was the logic of High Priest Caiaphas who said of Jesus that it was better that one man should die than that the whole nation perish. Evangelicals, all of Christendom, had simply repeated that scapegoating anti-Gospel dogma throughout their long, sick and desperately evil history, who can know it?; Andy’s mind echoed Jeremiah. The dynamics that had killed the Prince of Peace were identical to those theologized, endorsed, and perpetuated by *most* of Christendom *most* of history, by *most* everyone. Andy quoted to himself: *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know*

it? Evangelicals obviously did not. Did he?

...

So what about all the Germans, Japanese, Koreans and Vietnamese – enemies all within the past thirty-five years – murdered on a grand scale by the “Good Guys”, and blessed by all Christendom, except “enemy” Christendom, which of course identically called down God’s blessing on the slaughter of the “Good, really Bad, Guys”. Had God not made them in his image too? Had Christ not also died for them? Was there not Good News they were equally entitled to hear? Embrace? Live out? Does “love” mean in the end what the papal legate said centuries before, and Evangelicals explicitly follow in the present day, “Kill them all, God will sort out who are his own!”?

...

What kind of utter perversion, inversion, of biblical “love” had Christendom embraced, to permit the wholesale slaughter throughout the centuries of domestic and foreign “enemies”, who were “neighbours”, who were “God”, at least God’s image bearers, in whom, “the least of these”, Jesus was to be found? Why had seemingly so few in the history of the church *from within* screamed out: *The Emperor has no clothes!?*

Some of Andy’s earlier discussions were doing reruns.

...

Was not Martin Luther tragically misguided in *only* trying to find justification before a holy God, yet never likewise before God’s image-bearers, not least God’s chosen, the Jews? Luther who had instructed the German Nobility, “Smite, slay and kill” the peasant hordes, and had committed to writing some of the most vituperative anti-Semitic hate literature known to humanity. Which the Lutheran church officially rejected only *after* the Nazis, steeped in Martin Luther’s German Christianity, had slaughtered six million Jewish innocents.

Was not, come to think of it biblically, contrary to mainstream Protestant and Evangelical understandings, the *only* way to find a holy God *through loving embrace of neighbour and enemy*? Was not Jesus the Way, and that Way according to Jesus is living out the two Greatest Commandments, of which the second is the “royal law” and only way of actually performing the first – loving God – Whom one has not seen? How had Evangelicals, so adamant about following Jesus, sucked him utterly dry of all true content when it came to Jesus’ own central teachings and example about love of neighbour and enemy?

Andy's mind had built up such momentum that nothing seemed able to stop the ineluctable questions he was posing to himself. He felt immobilized, like a terrified mouse before the proverbial snake. Yet somehow the serpent, unlike in the Primordial Garden, *rightly* was about to swallow its prey. Wasn't the church, in light of its long and terrifying history of violence, *one of the most evil scourges on humanity the world had known?* Possibly *the most evil?* He remembered a line from a German poem, *Die Gerechtigkeit der Erde, O Herr, hat Dich getötet* – the righteousness of the earth, O Lord, has killed you. Only he would change *O Herr* to *O Kirche*. The church had self-imploded in light of all human standards of righteousness, which were far more vaunted than the church's. Or were they? Had the secular world simply imbibed the church's biblical teaching, despite Christendom's contrary example, and now was holding the church to account when it had so quickly and so long since turned faithless to its own founding texts?

Andy didn't know where to turn. Who had written on this stuff? Why didn't he know of it? When in church history, if at all, did at least a few lonely voices cry out about the Emperor's, Christendom's, Evangelicalism's stark and shameful, vile and unconscionably evil nakedness; unrepentant and endlessly repeated whoredoms? Were there at least seven thousand in the long history of the church who had not bowed the knee? Would he have to leave the church to find God? Would he have to turn to the secular thinkers and philosophers to discover true biblical religion? Was the church, in the end, the Mob; worse?

...

He wished he could somehow tear out that part of his brain that was causing so much offence, like Jesus had said one should do with an eye or a hand. But wasn't the church in fact *the primary offender?* He recalled a saying he had read by Simone Weil: *The church is that great totalitarian beast with an irreducible kernel of truth.* And Weil refused to join it throughout her lifetime. No wonder, Andy now reconsidered. And hadn't she also said the most fundamental act of forgiveness humans needed to undertake is towards God? Wasn't she right? Might it indeed have been better had Jesus never been born even, had the word "God" never first been uttered long ago amongst Semitic nomads? Given how the church and its precursors had desecrated so violently its content?

Andy felt wretched. It seemed like he was being thrust *inside* an Alfred Hitchcock horror movie, when all perspectives and norms were rendered kaleidoscopic. Where was he to turn when everything normal had convulsed into a thousand distortions? He had come over to Germany to propagate faith, and instead had found his faith buffeted and sent topsy-turvy, not by contrary intellectual argument from others, he had braced for that, but from his own experience and rethinking within the faith.

He was his own fifth columnist, his own desperate traitor, self-betrayed! How distressing. He had unwittingly been lying in wait to ambush his easy-believism cheap-grace Evangelical faith, so proud and cocky about having “the truth”, that he didn’t know that he was himself the hunted, not the hunter.

The tables had been turned. The shoe was on the other foot. *He* needed to be evangelized. *He* was that Emperor without any clothes. This was *his* moment of truth. Would he repent and turn, from what?, Evangelical faith?, or would he, like the Emperor, thrust his head a little higher, and strut stark-staring naked onwards to the beat of Christendom’s droning blood-drenched drums? He knew the sycophants who in that case would cheer him on. He knew the irony of a British gun boat “rescuing” the children in Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*. Out of the frying pan, into the fire. Was he, in his evangelistic zeal, only guilty of traversing the ocean to make his converts *twice the sons of hell* for his efforts? Was this the indictment of most Evangelical missionary and evangelistic efforts worldwide, of every Billy Graham evangelistic crusade he had so unthinkingly prayed for? How dare he think such thoughts? Wasn’t this ultimate heresy? *Who did he think he was?*

“O wretched man that I am!” he suddenly cried out audibly. No one heard.

Around the corner at which intersection he had arrived, there was a horrific thundering as Army vehicle upon army vehicle rolled down *Clayallee* to enter the Compound. There must have been twenty or more; tanks, armoured cars, and a fleet of others he could not identify. They must have been on some kind of training exercise. He was wrong, therefore. All the Christians were not at the Base. Some at least were training once again to kill. He felt sick. He felt like launching a rocket to wipe them all out. He felt wretched.

Jack came out after the last of the procession had turned in to the Compound.

Andy crossed over to the other side. Jack said he looked like he’s seen a ghost. Andy said he *had*, millions of them. But nowhere the Holy Ghost.

Jack did not even try to understand.

“Let’s head back. I’ll tell you about the visit on the way.”

Andy looked again at the Compound for the Holy Ghost, maybe Jesus. No such luck.

Jesus once said: “For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light (Luke 16:8).” Sometimes they see better, too. Mahatma Gandhi refused to accept Christ according to missionary understandings. Yet he was greatly attracted to Christ’s teachings, and sought to follow them. He once

observed: “The only people on earth who do not see Christ and His teachings as nonviolent are Christians.”

Conundrum number one, to repeat: How can Christians committed to the Prince of Peace and the authority of Scripture destroy their enemies, and support the State to do the same?

Conundrum II: Human Experience and Violence

In Canada we’ve just come through another Remembrance Day celebration. When last year Westerners, we good guys, were celebrating the 60th anniversary of D-Day, the *Calgary Herald* published this Op. Ed. piece by me, entitled *We Are Mansfield Park:*

Western culture is committed to a mass mythology of the righteousness of war. The latest 60th Anniversary D-Day commemorations are recent evidence.

Anthropologist René Girard defines “mythology” as that which camouflages violence to benefit its perpetrators.

I have lived through 55 Remembrance Day and D-Day commemorations. I have only heard officially about the sacrifice and bravery of our soldiers in both World Wars. No government ceremony however has recounted Allied savagery and brutality, nor commemorated the millions of Allied civilian victims. This is disingenuous mythology.

My dad fought on the Italian front in World War II. It was known that at its most savage, Allied soldiers did not take prisoners... A few years ago, my teen-age eldest burst into tears when this awareness sank in. His grandfather *never* talked about the War until his dying day. But silence like mythology only covers, does not exonerate, culpability.

Edgar L. Jones wrote in *The Atlantic Monthly* February 1946, “One War is Enough” (<http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/bookauth/battle/jones.htm>): “What kind of war do civilians suppose we fought, anyway? We shot prisoners in cold blood, wiped out hospitals, strafed lifeboats, killed or mistreated enemy civilians, finished off the enemy wounded, tossed the dying into a hole with the dead, and in the Pacific boiled the flesh off enemy skulls to make table ornaments for sweethearts, or carved their bones into letter openers. We topped off our saturation bombing and burning of enemy civilians by dropping atomic bombs on two nearly defenseless cities, thereby setting an all time record for instantaneous mass slaughter.” And again: “... we mutilated the bodies of enemy dead, cutting off their ears and kicking out their gold teeth for souvenirs, and buried them with their testicles in their mouths, but such flagrant violations of all moral codes reach into still-unexplored realms of battle psychology.”

Retired American Lt. Col. David Grossman has since done some of this study in a new area of research he has dubbed “killology”. He writes that modern

soldiers are trained in brutalization: “This brutalization is designed to break down your existing mores and norms and to accept a new set of values that embrace destruction, violence, and death as a way of life. In the end, you are desensitized to violence and accept it as a normal and essential survival skill in your brutal new world.” (See his website: www.killology.com.)

In October, 2003, *The Toledo Blade* ran a Pulitzer-Prize winning four-part series, “Buried Secrets, Brutal Truths”, on atrocities committed by an elite army unit, *Tiger Force*, in Vietnam, designated “a rogue unit”. During its reign of terror in the Central Highlands of Vietnam in 1967, hundreds of civilians were mercilessly tortured and murdered. The government investigation into these atrocities was intended to remain buried forever. There were no criminal charges laid. (See: <http://www.toledoblade.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20031022/SRTIGERFORCE/110190169>)

In a December 28, 2003 article, *The New York Times* quoted David Hackworth, creator of the Tiger Force unit: “Vietnam was an atrocity from the get-go. It was that kind of war, a frontless war of great frustration. There were hundreds of My Lais. You got your card punched by the numbers of bodies you counted.” The article adds: “But they [those from Tiger Force interviewed] wanted to make another point: that Tiger Force had not been a ‘rogue’ unit. Its members had done only what they were told, and their superiors knew what they were doing.” This “defence” was regularly heard at the Nuremberg Trials.

Former Democratic Presidential candidate John Kerry was also quoted giving evidence before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1971. He reported that American soldiers in Vietnam had “raped, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam in addition to the normal ravage of war, and the normal and very particular ravaging which is done by the applied bombing power of this country.” The full article may be found at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/28/national/28TIGE.html?ex=1073639319&ei=1&en=94ecfbb2e66368dd>. A similar reality is being revealed in the War on Terror.

In Tokyo, March 9 and 10, 1945 about 100,000 civilians died from incendiary bombing, as in Dresden a month earlier. General Curtis LeMay, highly decorated commander of the Japanese war theatre, boasted that “we scorched and boiled and baked to death more people in Tokyo on that night of March 9-10 than went up in vapor at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.” “I suppose if

I had lost the war,” LeMay later commented, “I would have been tried as a war criminal. Fortunately we were on the winning side.”

There were about 800,000 civilian casualties in bombings of 66 other Japanese cities, culminating in Hiroshima and Nagasaki with an instantaneous death toll in fact of over 200,000 civilians. There were also about one million civilian casualties in Germany from Allied carpet bombing of 42 cities.

In the movie adaptation of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, the central character, Fanny Price at age 10 goes to live at her relatives’ fairy-tale estate, Mansfield Park. Her new life is idyllic and genteel in every way. But eventually into her adulthood the awful truth emerges, adumbrated throughout the movie: the “civilized” opulence is underwritten by the putrid horror of New World slavery that her uncle, Sir Thomas, oversees business interests in, and (implied) also participates in rape with impunity of chattel black women, and worse.

Our cherished avowal of democracy and freedom, our protestations of inviolable international human rights, stand knee-deep in the blood of millions of civilian victims the world over. This unmitigated horror is the (officially) unacknowledged legacy of World War II, of all war.

We are Mansfield Park.

In response to the detailed weaponry of the current American military, I wrote a poem entitled: It’s All Fun and War Games at the Air Show! It starts out:

They’ve found body parts at a Coquitlam pig farm in BC
Disgusting, revolting, rightly wrenching.
How can a person be so perverse? Humanity reversed.

*But not us! Oh, no! Of course!
But not us! Of course! Oh, no!
It’s all fun and games at the Air Show!*

Just sex trade workers after all, titillation and obfuscation for many years.
But even sex trade workers get their (posthumous) day in court so it seems....

But not the victims of our bombs. Whose body parts to far-flung corners are strewn.

Take Scatmines for starters, let’s call them “Gators”:
One bomb spreads 564 mines out over a 200 by 650 metre area.
Shrapnel-loaded, they “produce a kill”
When the landmine is triggered by a trip wire.
Only a few millions around worldwide (failure to self-destruct)
A nasty little trip-up blessed by John Doe (taxpayer no?)

The US would not ban them – they might be needed in a fight...
Imagination from hell... a nice democratic university lab somewhere.

But not us! Oh, no! Of course?
But not us! Of course! Oh, no!
It's all fun and games at the Air Show!

Or the BLU-82 – a friendly 15,000 pound giant. (The kids would love its flash!)

Second biggest conventional money can buy! The Vietnamese loved it (NOT!).

One explosion kinda unmakes their (“them” not “us”) day
Though the kids below would never know... They call it “Daisy Cutter”
I call it “Widow, Widower, Fatherless, Motherless, Sibling-less Childless
Maker”

Doesn't matter really what it's named – leaves all around not just maimed...
Since it vapourizes up to 264,000 square metres. Everything/one.
(Makes the Oklahoma City Bomber, *that Devil Incarnate!*, look like an
amateur,

His detonation almost an innocuous love-in. Executed justly for his
misdemeanour!)

Not to worry though: only a few dozens ever used, and certainly NIMBY!
Instant helicopter landing pad! Likely a promotion for the inventors...
Why unlike Edison like its victims do we never know their names?
Are they ashamed to hold heads up high beside such diabolical engines of
death –
I wonder why?”

Then the MOAB, biggest conventional money can buy. (Soon for sale – don't
be shy!)

Though you can't buy used... “Daisy-Cutter” replaced by cruise...
*“The idea behind an ‘air burst’ weapon, as opposed to a weapon that explodes on
impact with the ground, is to increase its destructive range. A bomb that penetrates
the ground and then bursts tends to send all of its energy either down into the ground
or straight up into the air. An air burst weapon sends a great deal of its energy out to
the side.” Read “maximized death and destruction everywhere.”*

Where do they hatch these mini-fiends? Hitler clones. Timothy McVeigh
genes.

In America's democracy, it's hard to believe I know. “All men are created
equal”

Notwithstanding. Unless you live “over there” where our bombs are landing.
Then you are not human but guinea pig: democracy imploded, up the jig!
The MOAB – features 40% greater bang for the buck
(Not a thing below its life does not suck)

Than the measly BLU-82. New and just barely tested (you can see great
videos!)

(The US military calls it “Mother Of All Bombs” to parody Hussein.)

Everything incinerated below – only dead little children the videos don't show.
Chemically ignited, though chemical weapon of course not (NOT?!)
Only *they* have WMD's and *US*?: "Praise God and pass the bombs!"
So of course WMD-less, but not god-less no!
They have Billy Graham and myriad lesser lights to ever bless their show.
Terror just the same; US ultimate "rogue state" not. (NOT?!)
Such weapons from hell blow to same. For Americans though, just part of the
game.

It's all so surgically legal – like those Nazis in their white coats.
Six millions dead just the same – Holocaust deniers be damned!
But all victims of US and NATO bombs are well-deserved deaths –
Please, stop your wimpish bitching and complaining!
Besides, how dare they live over there with bombs and missiles raining?
Don't they know it's much safer here – in the eye of the storm no fear?
How can we help if those little kids, their mothers the elderly, innocent others
...
Incinerate beneath our fire? Wrong place, wrong time – don't they know?
"It's a tough job, killing the innocents, but somebody's gotta do it!"
Those brave young pilots at the Air Show! God bless 'em! Our henchmen!
God bless America! For democracy you know!
Herod's thugs in war planes stand tall, but "holocaust deniers" – not at all!

*No we're the "good" guys. Never in the way.
We're not the victims of our bombs. (Or are we?)
There are none, really, just "military targets and collateral damage"
But not us! Of course! Oh, no!
Not holocaust deniers no!
It's all fun and games at the Air Show!*

And so on. The poem is a few pages long. You get the idea!

Chris Hedges is the award-winning author of *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, first published in 2002. Reading it brought out the Hi-Liter for use on many pages. He wrote in the *Introduction* that "The enduring attraction of war is this: Even with its destruction and carnage it can give us what we long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living (p. 5)." In turn, Hedges claims. "War finds its meaning in death (p. 144)." This death is usually that of the innocent victim war must now be waged to avenge/protect. A little later in the *Introduction* we read: "Once we sign on for war's crusade, once we see ourselves on the side of angels, once we embrace a theological or ideological belief system that defines itself as the embodiment of goodness and light, it is only a matter of how we will carry out murder (p. 9)." Ever since World War I, when warfare became so much more technologized, in particular aerial warfare became the new staple in the warrior's arsenal, civilians have been its primary victims, Hedges informs us. He says: "The technological and depersonalized levels of organized killing begun in World War I have defined warfare ever since (p. 85)." In the past century, some 62

million innocents died simply because they were there where the bombs detonated, the missiles exploded, the bullets whizzed. The wrong place at the wrong time. Comparatively, *only* some 45 million military personnel were killed in last century's conflicts. Much safer to be a soldier! But just pause with me for a moment: 62 million civilian victims in a century of warfare. Canada's current population is about 32,000,000. Vancouver's population is about 2,000,000. This means that twice in the last century, war has eradicated every living soul in Canada, except the second time, it spared Vancouver. And these are just the civilians. Add the military personnel and Canada's population is wiped out a third time, and a fourth time, with half the population and Vancouver and the Fraser Valley the fourth time left to bury the dead.

So Hedges writes again: "In the world of war, perversion may become moral; guilt may be honor, and the gunning down of unarmed people, including children, may be defined as heroic. In this world the 'liquidation' of the enemy, with the enemy defined as simply the other, is part of the redemption of the nation (p. 139)."

Once in crossing the American border, I hesitated in answer to a question, and was immediately ordered out of the car, and told to open up my trunk. I had done nothing wrong but hesitate. In Iraq, American military, at checkpoints routinely "light up" vehicles, if even a hint of something wrong is there. And suddenly whole families are shot to death, on a whim. *New York Times* journalist Bob Herbert wrote a year ago: "Unofficial estimates of the number of Iraqis killed in the war have ranged from 10,000 to 30,000. But a survey conducted by scientists from Johns Hopkins University, Columbia University and Al Mustansiriya University in Baghdad compared the death rates of Iraqis before and after the American invasion. They estimated that 100,000 more Iraqis have died in the 18 months since the invasion than would have been expected based on Iraqi death rates before the war". Herbert adds: "Most of the widespread violent deaths, the scientists reported, were attributed to coalition forces. 'Most individuals reportedly killed by coalition forces,' the report said, 'were women and children.' "

Hedges goes on to explain that "Wars that lose their mythic stature for the public, such as Korea or Vietnam, are doomed to failure, for war is exposed for what it is – *organized murder* (italics added, p. 21)." The primary disseminators of this mythology are the state and the press. So Hedges tells us that war is the ultimate national drug as well, and "The myth of war sells and legitimizes the drug of war (p. 25)."

With reference to Jesus' call to "Love your enemies", Hedges writes: "A soldier who is able to see the humanity of the enemy makes a troubled and ineffective killer (p. 73)." This is why as mentioned killologist David Grossman writes that modern soldiers are trained in brutalization. So Hedges says of America: "We equip and train the most efficient killers on the planet (p. 85)." This of course should mean, Mennonite John Stoner suggests ironically, that when furloughed or discharged veterans kill at home, they should only be charged with poaching – killing out of season. For, after all, the government taught them in the first place to kill mercilessly. That in fact was the greatest good. So how can the government ever hold them responsible whenever they kill – except for the lesser misdemeanour of killing out of season?

Hedges says further: “The moral certitude of the state in wartime is a kind of fundamentalism. And this dangerous messianic brand of religion, one where self-doubt is minimal, has come increasingly to color the modern world of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam... There is a danger of a growing fusion between those in the state who wage war – both for and against modern states – and those who believe they understand and can act as agents of God (p. 147).”

In his final chapter, Hedges discusses “eros” and “thanatos” – love and death. He writes: “War is necrophilia [sexual attraction to the dead]. And this necrophilia is central to soldiering, just as it is central to the makeup of suicide bombers and terrorists. The necrophilia is hidden under platitudes about duty or comradeship. It waits, especially in moments when we seem to have little to live for and no hope, or in moments when the intoxication of war is at its pitch, to be unleashed. When we spend long enough in war it comes to us as a kind of release, a fatal and seductive embrace that can consummate the long flirtation with our own destruction. The ancient Greeks had a word for such a drive. They called it *ekpyrosis* – to be consumed by a ball of fire. They used the word to describe heroes (p. 166).”

In an observation that could have come straight from René Girard, though Hedges seems not to know of him, we read: “The lust for violence, the freedom to eradicate the world around them, even human lives, is seductive. And the line that divides us, who would like to see ourselves as civilized and compassionate, from such communal barbarity is razor-thin. In wartime it often seems to matter little where one came from or how well-schooled and moral one was before the war began. The frenzy of the crowd is overpowering (p. 172).” And of course a central teaching of Søren Kierkegaard was: “The crowd is untruth”.

So Hedges observes: “The myth of war and the drug of war wait to be tasted. The mythical heroes of the past loom over us. Those who can tell us the truth are silenced or prefer to forget. The state needs the myth, as much as it needs its soldiers and its machines of war, to survive (p. 173).”

Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote in *The Gulag Archipelago*: “It was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart, and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. Even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained; and even in the best of all hearts, there remains a small corner of evil.” I once heard a Catholic priest say, “Every saint has a past; every sinner has a future.” An American cartoon character, Pogo, whose home was a Florida swamp, used to say, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” The African understanding of *ubuntu* and the application to humans of the doctrine of the Trinity both tell us: *a person is a person through other persons*. The flip side or corollary is: *a person loses personhood when he or she destroys or degrades another person*.

So, almost at the end of the book, Hedges observes: “As long as we think abstractly, as long as we find in patriotism and the exuberance of war our fulfillment, we will never understand those who do battle against us, or how we are perceived by them, or finally those who do battle for us and how we should respond to it at all. We will never discover who we are. We will fail to confront the capacity we all have for violence. And we will court our own extermination. By accepting the facile cliché that the battle under way against terrorism is a battle against evil, by easily branding those who fight us the barbarians, we, like them, refuse to acknowledge our own culpability. We ignore real injustices that have led many of those arrayed against us to their rage and despair (p. 180).”

By the end of the book, there is not a shred of legitimation, whether moral, spiritual, pragmatic, historical, theological, psychological, sociological, or just plain *logical*, that is left to justify war. Every prop is kicked from under such would-be defenders’ feet.

But now I present conundrum two. For Hedges, who holds a Masters of Divinity degree from Harvard, writes in the Introduction: “And yet, despite all this, I am not a pacifist... Even as I detest the pestilence that is war and fear its deadly addiction, even as I see it lead states and groups towards self-immolation, even as I concede that it is war that has left millions of dead and maimed across the planet, I, like most reporters in Sarajevo and Kosovo, desperately hoped for armed intervention. The poison that is war does not free us from the ethics of responsibility... Force is and I suspect always will be part of the human condition. There are times when the force wielded by one immoral faction must be countered by a faction that, while never moral, is perhaps less immoral (p. 16).” He writes later: “Reinhold Niebuhr warned us that moral choice is not between the moral and the immoral, but between the immoral and the less immoral (p. 144).”

And there you have it. War, in the end, is a necessary force to give us, if not meaning, *justice*. And we’re right back to Richard Hays’ discussion of “violence in defense of justice”.

Conundrum number two: how can people knowing remotely the absolute horror and bankruptcy of war even for a moment continue to embrace it? How can this be? Who has the wisdom of Solomon to distinguish which side of a conflict is “less immoral”, when self-interest, nepotism, historical myopia, and numerous psychological and sociological factors impinge on all judgment as blinders? Theologian Lee Griffith wrote in a penetrating book, *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God*: “What would this mean if it were true that we love God only as much as the person we love least? Would it not mean that, when we have finally won the victory in our war on terrorism, when we have finally managed to exterminate all the thugs and Hitlers and terrorists, we will have expressed nothing so much as our total confidence in the death of God? (p. 263)” This is the heart of Griffith’s sustained thesis that “the biblical concept of ‘the terror of God’ stands as a renunciation of all violence – and of death itself (inside front jacket cover).”

Conclusion

So there you have it: two conundrums. How can a Christian read the Bible, then knowingly choose against Jesus, and blithely send others and go off to war still a believer? And how can a 15-year war correspondent veteran, also a Christian, write a brilliant and devastating book about the effects of war, and still send others and go off to war?

Please help me out.

Thank you.

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