

A Halting Spiritual Quest, Three Affirmations, and Restorative Justice, M2/W2 CORE Training: Spirituality

This was given as a talk to a Mennonite Fellowship, and to a group of prison visitation volunteers; both sometime in the early 2000's.

Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 42:1 – 7

Matthew 22:34 – 40

Romans 5:1 – 11

Introduction: Faith Affirmations and Jörg Salaquarda

As a Christian, I affirm three things in my work with prisoners. I think all Christians should! The burden of this meditation is to discuss these three affirmations in the context of Restorative Justice, my vocational and theological passion for 30 years.

In an earlier version of this talk, I punched into my “Google Search” the word “Salaquarda”. From 1972 to 1974 I had done evangelism with a short-term mission agency in what was then West Berlin. I wrote a novel based upon that experience, which I’m in the process of trying to get published. I have never forgotten the name, “Herr Salaquarda”. For one day, evangelizing door-to-door, I encountered a most fascinating man by that name. He engagingly took me into his study where we discussed theology, philosophy, and life’s meaning. I was an eager evangelist then. He was older (by ten years I now discover) and much wiser. He showed me on a bookshelf his 13-volume collection of Karl Barth’s *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (“Church Dogmatics”), and told me he had been for a long time a Barth scholar. I knew little of Karl Barth, though subsequently took a semester course on him, and now proudly own the complete set of the English translation. I consciously decided not to offer *Herrn* Salaquarda any of the evangelistic tracts I carried around then.

Herr Salaquarda told me he had lost his faith, though was still into “spirituality”. He smiled knowingly at various times in our conversation at my responses, a discussion which lasted a half hour to an hour. He told me finally I was doing some good thinking, and to keep it up as he eventually showed me to the door. I never saw nor talked to him again.

Now, over 30 years later, after looking him up on the Internet one night, (http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/s/s1/salaquarda_j.shtml), I discover that “Herr Salaquarda” in my memory was “Dr. Jörg Salaquarda” a former Barthian scholar, longstanding resident of West Berlin, prolific author on many topics, Editor of a publication series of Friedrich Nietzsche’s works, and a Nietzschean scholar. Without realizing it then, Dr. Salaquarda set me on a spiritual quest I and most of us are still pursuing: affirming Christian faith in a postmodern, violent world. I was so taken with “meeting him” again after all these years, I thought immediately to e-mail him. Then I read further: Dr. Salaquarda had died five years ago this month. I instead dedicate these ruminations to him. I recognize a significant debt to him for robust challenges to my then naïve Christian faith.

I have entitled my talk: “A Halting Spiritual Quest, Three Minorities, and Restorative Justice”.

The First Affirmation: Salvation in Jesus Christ

The first affirmation I find myself making is nonetheless numerically very significant! Christians of all persuasions represent about 33% of the world's population (<http://www.religioustolerance.org/worldrel.htm>), with some 34,000 separate groups worldwide (consequence largely of what Ron Dart dubs the “DNA of Protestant schism” – though the Orthodox and Roman Catholics had their problems too!) About 75% of adults in the US and Canada call themselves Christian. In America, about 35% would take on the self-designation, “Evangelical”. This represents about 100 million people. In Canada about 19% claim to be “Evangelical” (<http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/pdf/CWwint04.pdf>), or close to 6 million people.

I find myself, on my best days, amongst those who believe in and in some ways practise or act on:

- Forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ
- That Jesus is the Son of God/God Incarnate
- That God is not an old superstition
- That the Bible is to be taken seriously (though Jesus is the “Word of God” Incarnate.
- A commitment to follow or imitate Jesus
- Regular participation in church

I am, by these research standards, part of that sizeable group dubbed “Evangelical”, or orthodox, or traditional, etc. I am guessing so are many of you – on your best days!

Over against a surrounding culture of practical atheism, that has displaced God for all intents in our day-to-day living by pervasive technology and solipsistic lifestyle (a commitment to life that always loops back on the self), we Christians claim there to be a true transcendence in the cosmos, one to be found at two poles: *God and Neighbour*. The first pole, God revealed in Christ, leads to my first affirmation.

Gil Bailie says it well, with reference to the Gospel reading today:

The Jesus of Matthew's Gospel did not say that the greatest commandment was to *believe* in God and love humanity. He did not say that we should be nice to one another because that's the way God would like us to behave. He said the first and most essential thing is to *love God* with a paramount love. It is the most hackneyed notion in the world, but once or twice in a lifetime its dulling familiarity vanishes, and one feels for a moment the unfathomable significance and centrality of Jesus' suggestion for breaking the grip of sin and death: to *love* God (Bailie, 1995, p. 272).

At its best, adhering to this significant affirmation with those known variously as “Evangelical”, “Orthodox”, “Traditional”, “Catholic”, or simply “Christian”, is constantly living towards a vision of life and the cosmos that transcends every limiting category known to humanity, that fills one with intense longing (C.S. Lewis used the German word *Sehnsucht*; Augustine called it a “God-shaped vacuum”), that makes us profoundly resonate with the Negro spiritual, “This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through.”

a) John Wesley

This is the world of John Wesley's heart “strangely warmed”:

In the evening,” Wesley writes, “I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while

he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ... (“I Felt My Heart Strangely Warmed”, *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, no date, <http://www.ccel.org/w/wesley/journal/htm/vi.ii.xvi.htm>).

b) **St. Augustine**

This is Augustine’s amazing chance encounter while passing by kids at play:

While he was wrestling intensely in his heart with his desires, he heard the voice of a child nearby singing lyrics which sounded like ‘Take it, read it! Take it, read it!’ ... Augustine sensed in these words a personal invitation from God.

After going into his house, Augustine picked up the Scriptures and began to read what we now know as Romans 13:13-14: ‘... But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.’

Augustine says that from that moment forward his direction was set, conversion took hold (Zilonka, C.P., Father Paul, no date, <http://www.cpryion.org/compassion/spr96/read.html>).

c) **Blaise Pascal**

This is Blaise Pascal’s vision, of whom Albert Einstein said he possessed the most brilliant mathematical mind of the previous 1000 years:

When he was 31 years old, less than eight years before his death, Pascal had an overwhelming experience of the presence of God. He wrote of it in part:

“In the year of grace, 1654, on Monday, 23rd of November... From about half past ten in the evening until about half past twelve, FIRE!

“God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, (Ex 3:6; Mt 22:32) not of the philosophers and scholars.

“Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace.

“God of Jesus Christ.

“ ‘Thy God and my God.’ (Jn 20:17)

“Forgetfulness of the world and of everything, except God.

...

“Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy (Kiefer, James E., no date, “Blaise Pascal, Scientist, Religious Writer: 21 August, 1662”, *Biographical Sketches of Memorable Christians of the Past*,

<http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/233.html>)...

My heart also warms to this response to God in Christ, thereby having me firmly embrace this first affirmation.

The Second Affirmation: “Just Peacemaking”

In January, 1975, during my first year of studies at Regent College, I took a course from Clark Pinnock called “The Politics of Jesus”. (Later that year I also took his course on Karl Barth – to whom I shall yet

return.) Little did I know it would change forever my understanding and commitment to Christian ethics. Our main text for the course was something that felt alien to the Gospel I had earlier committed to, and in consequence of, had been on a two-year evangelistic mission in West Berlin. Its title too was *The Politics of Jesus*. I came out the other end of that experience committed to two entirely new understandings about the Gospel: that the Judeo-Christian story was centrally a *political, not a religious, story*. Further, the way of the cross, and therefore the way of doing politics, of living in this world, was quintessentially *nonviolent*. The Gospel's impact socially and politically was consequently subversion of all state violence, of dominant Empire ways recurrent throughout human history, not least today of the American Empire in its "Manifest Destiny" global expansionism and endless war against terror.

My dual conversion experience keeps company, not in this case with Wesley, Augustine, and Pascal, but with many others, including James McClendon and Stanley Hauerwas, both noted American theologians who trace the origins of their lifelong pacifism to reading that same book by John Howard Yoder.

Stanley Hauerwas, considered by *Time* magazine as "America's best theologian", writes:

... I am convinced that when Christians look back on this century of theology in America *The Politics of Jesus* will be seen as a new beginning...

He continues:

Yet Yoder also challenges those evangelicals who describe salvation in terms of personal fulfillment. 'The cross of Calvary was... the political, legally to be expected result of a moral clash with the powers ruling his society.' ...

"[Yoder] is trying to force us to recognize that in spite of what appears to be orthodox christological affirmations, *we are embedded in social practices that deny that Jesus's life, death and resurrection make any difference* (, italics added).

Ever since reading Yoder¹, I became committed to nonviolence.

This is not the majority position in the long history of the church and world! Mahatma Gandhi wryly observed:

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

In the summer of 1976, a recent Regent College graduate, I was looking for work in the UBC Job Placement files. I read there for the first time about the Mennonite Central Committee, and a new initiative in Kitchener, Ontario, called "Victim Offender Reconciliation Program" – or "VORP" for short – and for ill! What an awful acronym! In February, 1977, I became a Mennonite Central Committee Voluntary Service worker, and second Director of that program. Thus began my journey with "Restorative Justice".

¹ I must add a brief footnote – not in the original sermon. Yoder, tragically, sexually assaulted a great number of women. Though I give him still an historical due for my conversion to nonviolence, in my estimation, his personal theology is thoroughly discredited given this horrific life record. See ["Prison, Sexual Assault, and Editing John Howard Yoder: One Man's Story"](#). What a terribly hurtful life! I have therefore chosen not to include the book that led to my conversion to nonviolence in the "References" below. Academic censoring, to be sure – and censoring! – but the reader if so inclined may readily search out those details.

First Restorative Justice Case²

Three years earlier, two youths who had been drinking and had been “talked to” by the police already, took out their frustrations on the small community of Elmira, Ontario, by vandalizing to twenty-two different vehicles and homes. A novel “restorative justice” response was ordered by the judge, at the urgings of two peacemaking Mennonites. “The Elmira Case” led to the establishment of the first ever “VORP”. It also became the proverbial “shot that echoed around the world”. Over 200 mediation programs in North America alone trace their origins to the program that came into existence as a joint venture between Ontario Correctional Services and the Mennonite Central Committee. Several hundred similar programs now exist in Europe and elsewhere. There is now an international “Restorative Justice” movement impacting the globe with a peacemaking, as opposed to a warmaking, vision of criminal justice. In June, 2004, that first case was celebrated in Kitchener at a national conference of the largest mediation association in Canada, “Conflict Resolution Network Canada”.

The agency for which I work, M2/W2 – *Restorative Christian Ministries*, reflects that vision. First established in 1966, it offers friendship and reintegration resources to men and women in prison throughout B.C. We also do crime prevention through a “Parent to Parent” program (so far only in Chilliwack) where volunteers work with parents of children at risk in the zero to five years. I have more information at the back with me. Though all our work except at Surrey Pre-Trial Services Centre for Women is east of Abbotsford now!

Retributive Justice

Almost a millennium ago, in the late 11th century, European history underwent a significant upheaval some call “The Papal Revolution”. During this time, the Church moved to consolidate its power over all souls and kings of Europe; the great universities began to emerge; and the Western legal tradition started to take shape, as new law codes were formulated for study and promulgation throughout the Western world.

In a fateful interplay between Church and Society, secular states began to follow the lead of how the Church dealt with its religious heretics. These “social heretics” began to emerge under new state law codes as “criminals” whose victims were no longer the actual victims, but “Rex” or “Regina”, or later “We the People” under the United States Constitution.

So the evolution of the criminal justice system in the West was away from *community and victim centred justice* towards *state and offender centred justice*. The former had been a dominant approach in the ancient Hebrew culture, in Roman society when applied to its own citizens, and in many pre-colonial African, North American and worldwide indigenous cultures. In the Reconstruction of Japan following the Second World War, the Japanese became the first industrialized country nationally to embrace this more restoratively oriented way of justice.

A shift away from this approach for common law Western jurisdictions began with the Norman Conquest of Britain in 1066. The state began, as a criminologist said provocatively, to *steal the criminal conflict from the community*. It is still a shock for some victims to discover that they are not even named on the court docket, having a millennium ago been displaced by *Rex* or *Regina*. One victim of rape describes a

² In North America, this is generally accepted, though indigenous peoples across the planet have been practising such from time immemorial; though no one even knows when the term was first used – and widely used; though there are other stories of origin such as in Richards, 2007.

fantasy of phoning the Queen in Buckingham Palace on each anniversary of the assault to ask her how she is doing!

The purpose of the law shifted dramatically as well. Earlier, the emphasis had been upon making the victim whole again, what in the ancient Hebrew culture was called “restoring *shalom*”. With the rise of the king’s power, the purpose became to uphold the authority of the state.

There was dominant Western religious undergirding of this approach which led to a marriage of law and religion that placed, on the one hand, primary emphasis upon the offender’s violation of the law while dropping any concern for rehabilitation of the victim. On the other hand, it drew on Roman slave law and ancient Greek forms of justice as a model for meting out the worst of punishments imaginable upon the offender. This form of response to crime is known as “retributive justice”, and has dominated Western jurisprudence for a millennium.

Restorative Justice Theological Moorings

Perhaps the most troubling question Restorative Justice poses is:

Why harm people who harm people to teach people that harming people is wrong?

The Restorative Justice vision moves away from a warmaking, “stigmatizing shaming”, scapegoating response to crime, to a “reintegrative shaming”, peacemaking way of nonviolence in a bid to break definitively with the endless cycles of violence and counter-violence, terror and counter-terror, in our society and world.

The best single theological resource for this new movement is Chris Marshall’s *Beyond Retribution*, in which he presents “*A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment*”³ that represents rereading the Judeo-Christian founding texts to provide a basis, not for continued scapegoating violence in the Western secular state, but for a profound redirection of traditional interpretation of those texts away from violence, “beyond retribution”, towards *shalom*, reconciliation and forgiveness. This reading reflects what one scholar dubs

the *inner dynamic* of the biblical texts and traditions (Williams, 2000, p. 195).

Over against the long history of the church, over against wide Evangelical opinion today, this biblical political understanding of the centrality of the neighbour/enemy to salvation and spirituality is my second affirmation.

The Third Affirmation: The Way of Jesus: “With The Grain of the Universe”

I once received a phone call from a person writing up his personal memoirs. He was asking permission to include a letter to the editor I had written about capital punishment published in the *Vancouver Sun*. He was shocked in the conversation to hear I was a committed Christian; still more upset to learn I attempted to be faithful to a serious reading of Scripture. I don’t think my letter ever found its way into his memoirs, notwithstanding permission granted...

The third affirmation I make, over against some fellow Christians (and others!) who embrace social justice and nonviolence, I centre that commitment in Jesus Christ as known through the books of the Old and New Testaments, the Bible.

³ There is a review of this publication later in this *Volume*.

James McClendon writes in the second volume of his *Anabaptist Systematic Theology*:

We have the concept of Christian Scripture in its two volumes or Testaments. This does not mean, as the bare word “scripture” might suggest, only something written, a book or text. We have rather a text, a Book, that centers on that person in whom final authority rests, and by doing this acquires a delegated or proximate authority. This text is the chosen, written witness to Jesus Christ and to God in Christ.... [T]he Bible is for us the word of God written; it is that text in which the One who lays claim to our lives by the act of his life makes that claim afresh in acts of speech; it is for us God speaking; it is the word of God. Such a claim made by a book upon a people is radical and unsettling—an authority subversive of all sorts of competing, other, human authorities (McClendon Jr., 1994, p. 464).

McClendon goes on to outline three classic ways of diluting, or neutralizing the biblical text:

Not surprisingly, then, Christian history itself is replete with schemes that – though not consciously so intended – serve to limit or control this radically unsettling Book. Three such schemes [are]—(a) use of historical-critical exegesis in a way that keeps Scripture at a ‘suitably’ remote distance, (b) use of tradition so as to monopolize the interpretation of Scripture, and (c) use of inerrancy theories so as to confine the thrust of Scripture – ... (McClendon, *ibid*, p. 464).

Stanley Hauerwas in 2001 was invited to deliver the Gifford Lectures at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. It is a highly prestigious lecture series. The title of the talks and book was *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology*. It comes from a line in Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder’s writings,

... people who bear crosses are working *with the grain of the universe* (quoted in Hauerwas 2001, p. 17, italics added).

Hauerwas’ “hero of this book (Peter Ochs, *ibid*, back cover),” is Karl Barth, whom my teacher Clark Pinnock in the Karl Barth course I took constantly referred to as a “theological Mount Everest”. In sheer volume of writings, he dwarfed all contemporary 20th century theologians, having produced as mentioned an unfinished monumental theology in fourteen volumes with over 9,000 pages, entitled *Church Dogmatics*, besides other publications. And the quality matches the quantity. Many call him the greatest theologian since Thomas Aquinas.

Hauerwas writes that

Barth shows us the way theology must be done if the subject of theology, that is, the God of Jesus Christ, is to be more than just another piece of the metaphysical furniture in the universe (*ibid*, 2001, pp. 145 & 146).” His rediscovery of God in the Scriptures early in his career as a pastor led to a definitive break with the Liberalism of his time which made humans “the measure of all that is”, something Hauerwas dubs one “of the most cherished conceits of modernity (*ibid*, p. 145).

For Hauerwas,

The conceptual and moral implications of the claim that God is God and that we are not would occupy the rest of Barth’s life and work (*ibid*, p. 152).”

Hand in hand with this is

Barth’s extraordinary claim that Christ is the truth by which all other truth is to be judged... (*ibid*, p. 163).

Barth spent a lifetime living and writing about the implications of what he described as a shattering discovery of the ‘strange new world within the Bible’ (*ibid*, p. 150).

This is not unlike the “strangely warmed” heart of John Wesley, or Augustine’s discovery of how to fill his God-shaped vacuum, or the fire of Blaise Pascal’s vision.

Says Hauerwas,

Barth had a single concern: to use every resource at his disposal to show that our existence and the existence of the universe are unintelligible if the God found in Jesus Christ is not God (*ibid*, pp. 190 & 191).

Thus,

For Barth, to be a Christian, to anticipate here and now the future universal praise of God, *is to be a member of a limited and prophetic minority* (*ibid*, pp. 197 & 198, italics added).

In Hauerwas’ last lecture entitled, “The Necessity of Witness”, two persons are presented as examples of those who lived or live out and point to a reality first and foremost to be embraced by the “politics called church (*ibid*, p. 239).”, namely that

the cross and not the sword reveals to us the very grain of the universe (*ibid*, p. 230, italics added).

This third affirmation that would live out of biblical faithfulness to doing politics according to the nonviolent way of Jesus is as utterly overwhelming as it is captivating.

Conclusion: To Live These Three Affirmations Presupposes Grace

And the conclusion of this entire matter? I believe the Christian call to ministry is to three affirmations:

- over against those who would not see Jesus, we choose to see him as Saviour and Lord of the *kosmos*;
- over against those who would not follow Jesus in the costly discipleship of the nonviolent way of the cross, we try to live out the *then* of eschatological cosmic peace *now*, working towards “demonstration plots” of Kingdom Come like Restorative Justice practices worldwide;
- and over against those in a postmodern world who are suspicious of the biblical text, of all texts, with Jesus as its central hermeneutic or interpretative guide, we look to Jesus as the premier Exemplar to point us in the direction of “the grain of the universe”.

On that note I end as I began with a nod to Dr. Salaquarda for setting me out on a long spiritual quest, and open it up for some discussion.

Amen.

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