

The Significance of Calvin's Tract
Against the Anabaptists for the Church Today
by
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Introduction

When Professor Leith invited me to give a paper on Calvin's BRIEF INSTRUCTION FOR ARMING ALL THE GOOD FAITHFUL AGAINST THE ERRORS OF THE COMMON SECT OF THE ANABAPTISTS (1544), he kindly delivered me from being responsible for the type of historical knowledge that experts on Calvin are expected to have. He asked me to speak about the significance of the tract for today, not to place it in historical context. Despite my amateur capabilities as a sixteenth century scholar, let me begin by mentioning some of the problems contemporary readers have in discerning who Calvin is speaking against. I am aided in this task not only by Professor Farley's clear translation and helpful introduction,¹ but also by the able and energetic book by Willem Balke.²

First, in the opening and largest section of this three-part treatise, Calvin responds point by point to the BROTHERLY UNION OF A NUMBER OF CHILDREN OF GOD CONCERNING SEVEN ARTICLES (1527), or, as it is more popularly known, THE SCHLEITHEIM CONFESSION. This text was probably written by Michael Sattler, a member of the Swiss Brethren, and has recently been translated with scholarly notes by John Howard Yoder.³ The problem is that Calvin did not have an original text, but a French translation which was not wholly accurate. The inaccuracies are a cause of disputes. For example, the second article refers to those who "slip and fall into error and sin, being inadvertently overtaken." Calvin jumps on the word "inadvertently" and argues that Anabaptists believe they sin only through ignorance and inattention, but not willingly. Yoder observes that Calvin's reading may have grounds in the French translation, but it is a misunderstanding to say that Anabaptists distinguish between forgivable and unforgivable sins and that only inadvertent sins are within the reconciling concern of the congregation. That is an example of one problem, namely, the accuracy of Calvin's view of the Anabaptists in light of the French translation.

A second problem concerns the style of Calvin's writing. Since the appearance of Francis M. Higman's book about Calvin's French polemical treatises, interpreters of Calvin have been keenly aware that Calvin

¹JOHN CALVIN'S TRACTS AGAINST THE ANABAPTISTS AND AGAINST THE LIBERTINES. Translation, Introduction, and Notes by Benjamin Wirt Farley (in press, Baker Book House).

²Willem Balke, CALVIN AND THE ANABAPTIST RADICALS, trans. William J. Heynen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 338 pp.

³John H. Yoder, ed. and trans., THE LEGACY OF MICHAEL SATTLER (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1973), pp. 34-43.

uses certain "persuasive techniques" to convince his readers of the truth of his views. For example, Calvin articulates his own position by using a pious and biblical vocabulary, but the views of his opponents are portrayed by use of colloquial and sometime vulgar language. In Higman's words, his adversaries "are not described, they are caricatured."⁴ They are stupid, confused, immoral, and blasphemous. Their teaching is like the vomit of a drunkard! Animals, if they could speak, would speak more wisely. Their departure from Calvin's views turns them into a people with fantasies or instruments of the devil. Thus again, in view of Calvin's style, there is a historical problem in ascertaining what Anabaptists actually thought and taught.

A third problem is that Calvin attributes theological beliefs to Anabaptists which all Anabaptists did not hold. In the second and shortest section of the tract, Calvin refutes those who deny the true humanity of Jesus. Professor Farley points out that the "celestial flesh" theory of Melchoir Hofmann is probably in mind (the writings of Menno Simons only came to Calvin's attention in 1545). Although Hofmann did teach a docetic theory, and though Menno Simons is not wholly orthodox in his Christology, it is not clear that all Anabaptists in the sixteenth century denied the humanity of Jesus. Calvin, however, declares the silence of The Seven Articles on this matter to be a ruse. Again, the third and final section of Calvin's tract, a reworking of a previous essay, refutes the doctrine of the sleep of souls, namely, the teaching that souls are separated at death from their bodies and sleep until the day of judgment without consciousness. However, modern historians attribute this view to Spiritualists, not Anabaptists.

In sum, it is clear that Calvin's polemic does not provide an historically accurate portrait of "the common sect of the Anabaptists." Franklin Littell claims that no major figure "understood less" about the Anabaptists than Calvin,⁵ a view which probably has some merit. In any event, twentieth century readers have a problem in discerning who Calvin is speaking against and whether these persons and their doctrines are in fact Anabaptist. In the face of these formidable historical problems, Willem Balke adopts an admirably devious strategy.

We will handle the concept "Anabaptism" the way Calvin himself did. Although there is some real question as to whether Calvin himself distinguished clearly between the various radical currents of the Reformation and whether he treated the Anabaptists properly, we plan to limit our⁶ treatment to the image of the Anabaptists that Calvin himself had.

⁴Francis M. Higman, THE STYLE OF JOHN CALVIN IN HIS FRENCH POLEMICAL TREATISES (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 191 pp. The quotation is from p. 131. The style of Calvin's rhetoric should be viewed in historical context; see Higman, pp. 170-176.

⁵Franklin H. Littell, THE ORIGINS OF SECTARIAN PROTESTANTISM (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 147.

⁶Balke, CALVIN AND THE ANABAPTIST RADICALS, pp. 10-11.

This sounds like a strategy of capitulation. However, if one's purpose is to get at the intentions of Calvin and to assess the significance of his major affirmations -- while foregoing the requirements of scholarly accuracy about the sixteenth century context -- Balke's strategy is not as bad as it sounds. Indeed, I shall adopt something very much like it myself.

My task is to talk about the relevance of this text for today. Because I know no contemporary Anabaptist writer who denies the humanity of Jesus or argues for the sleep of souls, I have chosen to focus on the first section of the treatise -- the largest section which is a response to Sattler's Seven Articles. I shall then attempt to state the significance of Calvin's affirmations by bringing them to bear on the writings of a twentieth century Mennonite, John Howard Yoder, who certainly cannot be characterized in the derogatory terms of the sixteenth century.

Part I

I hesitate to summarize Calvin's point by point consideration of The Seven Articles, which can be read, and all the more because no summary can capture the nuance of the original. Yet I also know that Professor Farley's translation is not yet available, and that many of you have not read the tract. Further, my summary gives a basis for the moves I will make later.⁸

First, on INFANT BAPTISM, Calvin agrees that instruction about God precedes baptism for adults who are not members of the household of faith (pagans). Reason and Scripture agree that a profession of faith and repentance precede baptism in this instance.

However, this practice is not an argument against infant baptism which is grounded in the covenant, the promise of salvation which God gives to believers and their children. Reason and Scripture agree that circumcision in the Old Testament is analogous to baptism in the New Testament. Infant baptism in the church is a sacramental sign of the covenant of mercy made in Jesus Christ with all of us as children of God. Pastorally, infant baptism is a visible sign which assures believers that God accepts their children into the fellowship of the church. If the New Testament does not explicitly state that infants are baptized, neither does it explicitly state that women are to receive the Lord's Supper.

⁷For a positive appraisal of Yoder, see Stanley Hauerwas, "The Nonresistant Church: The Theological Ethics of John Howard Yoder, VISION AND VIRTUE: ESSAYS IN CHRISTIAN ETHICAL REFLECTION (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, Inc., 1974), pp. 197-221.

⁸My summary draws upon the wording of Professor Farley's translation.

Second, on THE BAN, Calvin agrees that it is a necessary means for ordering the church. The church is disfigured if this form of church discipline is not practiced, but the existence of the church does not depend on the proper institution of the ban. The use of the ban by the Anabaptists -- those who inadvertently fall into error are warned twice in private, and on the third occasion are publicly banished -- implies that it is possible to have a perfect church.

However, it is not possible to have a perfect Christian community. The church is inevitably tainted. The New Testament community at Corinth is an example of this inevitable imperfection, with its diverse parties, corrupt morals, and doctrinal errors. The imperfections of the church include not only those hypocrites and contemptuous persons who lead scandalous lives, but also the impurities of the faithful. Still, though our sinful nature inclines us to be suspicious of others, it is very difficult to make human judgments on these matters with certainty. We must realize that the church contains both the good and the bad, the grain and the weeds. Therefore, though discipline belongs to the substance of the church, we should define the existence of the church by the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments.

This definition means it is lawful to receive the Lord's Supper even in a church not properly regulated by the ban. The sacrament is for people who need to be rescued from imperfection! Paul's statement that we should not partake unworthily (I Cor. 11:28) means we should examine ourselves. It does not mean that as private individuals we should examine others, for the office of the ban must be exercised with the consent of the people. Again, Paul's statement that we are not to commune with those who lead scandalous lives (I Cor. 5:11) means that it is in our power as individuals not to associate privately with the wicked. To receive the Lord's Supper, however, is not a matter to be based on our individual, private decisions.

Thus again it is clear that the Anabaptists are perfectionistic in their use of the ban. They believe that whoever sins inadvertently (out of ignorance, without intention) is to be rejected. This naive view of sin benumbs the Anabaptists into thinking that persons sin only out of ignorance. In fact, Anabaptists teach that it is unforgivable to sin willingly (a sin against the Holy Spirit). This would cast us into despair, for most everyone must confess, not only that s/he has sinned, but that s/he has sinned willingly. In sum, the Anabaptists are like the Donatists and the Cathari; they think it possible to have a church without sin. The comfort of the Christian, however, is that God has the sole authority to forgive sin, and God has promised to forgive both willing sins and sins of ignorance (Lev. 4-5).

Third, on the BREAKING OF BREAD, Calvin agrees that no one dares come to communion who is not truly of the body of Christ, worshipping one God along with all believers, and serving God in a good and lawful vocation.

Fourth, on SEPARATING FROM THE WORLD and its wickedness and evil, Sattler includes not only the renunciation of "popish" works and idolatry, but also the use of weapons of violence (the sword) against enemies or to protect friends. Calvin agrees that "popish" superstitions should be renounced, and he agrees that individual Christians should not use the sword to resist evil. Individual Christians should suffer patiently rather than use force or violence.

But it is blasphemous to condemn the public use of the sword. Calvin here spins out a large portion of what operates in his writings as a just-war theory. His theory, incidentally, is almost identical to what is found in the writings of St. Augustine. The magistrate is a minister of God for our benefit and on our behalf (Rom. 13:4) for the purpose of restraining and preventing the violence of the wicked (cf., "crime"). The sword is placed in the hand of the magistrate, not just to protect the public good by punishing domestic evil, but also (and by analogy) to repulse those who unjustly assail a country. Of course, the prince must pursue every means of peace, and may resort to the sword only when necessary (last resort). The Christian believer, when called to serve the prince in this context, does not offend God by taking up arms, but fulfills a holy vocation. The use of weapons is permissible, as necessary for the defense of a country, e.g., munitions, fortresses, and shoulder-arms.

Fifth, on SHEPHERDS IN THE CHURCH (the office of pastor), Calvin says little. He carefully states agreement with what he calls their present position, namely, that every congregation ought to have an ordained minister. Calvin also writes that the Anabaptists should agree with him that the laity should adhere to duly constituted ministers who faithfully exercise their office, and that Anabaptists should not be offended to hear a Reformed sermon.

Sixth, on the MAGISTRATE (he has already dealt with the sword), Calvin agrees that temporal power is an ordinance of God. He disagrees with the Anabaptists when they imply that this ordinance (the office of justice) stands outside the perfection of Christ and is an illicit or forbidden Christian calling. Calvin argues that it is illogical for the Anabaptists to have it both ways.

The crucial argument here is that the moral law of the Old Testament (elsewhere identified in Calvin as natural law⁹) provides a

⁹The secondary account of natural law in Calvin which I find most persuasive is David Little, RELIGION, ORDER, AND LAW: A STUDY IN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY ENGLAND (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Harper Torchbooks, 1969), pp. 33-56. See also, David Little, "Calvin and the Prospects for a Christian Theory of Natural Law," NORM AND CONTEXT IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS, ed. Gene H. Outka and Paul Ramsey (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), pp. 175-197. Cf., John T. McNeill, "Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers," JOURNAL OF RELIGION, vol. 26, no. 3 (July 1946), pp. 168-182; and Arthur C. Cochrane, "Natural Law in Calvin," CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE, ed. Elwyn A. Smith (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1966), pp. 176-217.

guideline or rule of life both for Jews of old and for Christians. Christ does not add to this law, but restores its true meaning. Of course, the proper office of Jesus is the forgiveness of sins. Jesus rejects the temptation to become a political king, not because it is an evil calling, but because it is not his calling. Again, Jesus refuses to divide property between brothers, not because it is unlawful to make judgments about property, but because it is not his calling. Thus Calvin rejects any understanding of the life and teachings of Jesus as a "higher" law which is incompatible with the ways of the world.

The office of the magistrate -- wielding the sword, administering civil disputes about property, etc. -- is a high and proper Christian vocation. Like the callings of the cobbler and the tailor, it serves the common good. Calvin willingly asks the question of consequences here. What would happen if there were no magistrate ordained by God to administer justice in the civil order and maintain the commonwealth of property? What would happen if the civil order were maintained only by "private" admonishments? What would happen would be disorder, wholesale robbery, and the ushering in of brigandage. Without civil government, the world would be ruined.

Seventh, and finally, on THE OATH, Calvin agrees it would be better not to swear than to take swearing too lightly. But just as we do not totally condemn the use of wine because of drunkards, we should not try to correct the abuse of oaths by altogether prohibiting them. That would miss their proper meaning and their proper use.

The proper meaning is associated with the commandment not to take the name of God in vain (Ex. 20:7), a commandment which implies a legitimate way to take God's name. This is (somehow) compatible with the statement of Jesus, "Do not swear at all" (Matt. 5:34), for again, Jesus does not add to the law a higher way. The teaching of the law in the Old Testament is a rule for right living, both then and now.

Scripture and sound reason agree that one may lawfully swear when it is a matter of rendering testimony to the truth, when it is expedient or profitable for preserving charity among ourselves, and when "necessity" requires it. This is lawful, provided that the intention (deliberation - motive, reason) and aim (la fin - purpose) are proper, and proceed from a proper "fear" (motive, reason) for sanctifying the name of God. Under these conditions, swearing is not an idolatrous reliance on human strength, but a proper invocation of God's aid.

On a first reading, many of the matters discussed in this tract seem largely irrelevant to the concerns of our day. What was worth dying for in the sixteenth century appears to be of greatly reduced significance today. Indeed, persons in Reformed circles seem now to have switched sides on several of the issues. For example, apart from an occasional exhortation, no one in the Reformed circle of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., talks about the ban or church discipline in the mode of Calvin. Indeed, the revisions for church order before the Presbyterian Church, U.S., include no provision for excommunication at

all, and the matter was not even debated on the floor of the General Assembly. The matter of infant baptism is not judged to be a crucial issue today. Indeed, some of those who call themselves Reformed, both in America and abroad, argue for believer's baptism. On the matter of war, the emphasis on "peacemaking" has apparently placed just-war theory on the back-burner. On the matter of the magistrate, we are all probably disenchanted with the political process, on the one side; and we see contemporary Anabaptists avowing the need to participate in the "principalities and powers" on the other side. In respect to courts of law, I suspect that each of us has at least some suspicions about their efficiency, if not their fairness; on the other hand, we live at a time when some Anabaptists are going to court as a form of protest on selected moral issues. On the matter of oaths, I have not heard a serious discussion of swearing since I was a sophomore at Washington and Lee.

So at first glance, it looks as if many of the issues dealt with in this tract have been passed by. My suspicion is that the issues between Anabaptists and Reformers today stand behind the explicit issues discussed in this tract. So I want briefly to characterize some of these issues, and on that basis I will enter into dialogue with the views of John Howard Yoder.

Part II

One disputed topic among students of Calvin is the relation of reason and revelation. I tend to agree with those who emphasize the Augustinian elements in his writings. To avoid credulity (as well as theological stupidity and moral error), faith seeks to understand itself, and faith uses reason to construe the world in a theological framework. Faith and knowledge of God, discerned on a confessional base, appropriately uses reason to interpret the world. Further, claims for the intelligibility of this interpretation can be addressed to those who do not share this confessional base. Indeed, pagans can be held accountable for some of the discernments of faith.

A major issue in Christian ethics concerns the appropriate sources of knowledge to use in moral argument. In the tract before us, I am struck by the variety of sources to which Calvin appeals. He refers to the Christian tradition, to sound reason, to moral or natural law, to humane learning, to common sense, and to the calculation of consequences. These appeals appear amid repeated reminders that Scripture is the authority for theology and ethics.

On occasion Calvin sounds like he adheres to a literal principle of sola Scriptura. For him, the Anabaptists are not as bad as the Libertines because they at least accept Scripture, and Calvin indicates he is more than willing to work on the basis of what Scripture really teaches. However, what Scripture teaches is not always clear, for even the devil (and the Anabaptists) quote the Bible. Calvin endeavors to arrive at the true significance of biblical texts and to harmonize the whole by using certain principles of interpretation, e.g., the relation of the Old to the New Testament is understood in a particular way, Jesus

does not annul but declares the true meaning of the moral law which is a guide for conduct, etc. This "hermeneutic" just does not function like a literal application of a sola Scriptura principle. Reason, humane learning, and all the rest, are appealed to without embarrassment.

The issue of the relation of reason and revelation stands "behind" the text before us. It is not directly addressed. Calvin's strategy is to appeal to the Anabaptists on the basis of their high regard for the authority of Scripture. He argues that their interpretation is not correct, that their doctrinal positions are not tenable exegetically. Even Balke's lengthy book does not confront the reason-revelation issue directly, but is content to observe that Calvin challenges their interpretation of Scripture.

This is ironical because, at least retrospectively, one of the classic disagreements between Anabaptists and "mainline" Christians in the sixteenth century is about natural law. Roman Catholics continue to articulate a theory of natural law. Natural law also appears in somewhat different guises in both Luther and Calvin, and later in Anglican theology. For Anabaptists, however, the natural moral law tradition is left behind. The one source of authority is Christ. In the words of Sattler, "Christ teaches and commands us to learn from him, for he is meek and lowly of heart and thus we shall find rest for our souls."¹⁰ The person of Christ and his teachings becomes a "new law" for Christians. In contrast to Calvin who stresses the continuities between the natural moral law, the Decalogue, and the moral teachings of Jesus, the Anabaptists stress the discontinuity between the "new law" and the "old law."

The role of natural moral law as a legitimate source of knowledge for Christian ethics is a problem addressed directly by John Howard Yoder. In the name of "biblical realism," Yoder argues that conformity to the teachings and life of Jesus make ethics Christian. Christian discipleship is following the way of Jesus to the cross; those who derive moral knowledge from non-Christian or natural sources do not follow this way. For example, categories like "the fitting" or "responsibility" (H. Richard Niebuhr) or "the realistic" (Reinhold Niebuhr) do not provide Christian guidance, but give counsel based on "common sense and the nature of things" which is rooted in "an epistemology for which the classic label is the theology of the natural."¹¹ Calvin's problem, Yoder observes in another context, is that "reason or nature cannot be the source of a different set of standards from those revealed in God's word."¹² -- that is, Christian ethics loses its radical distinctiveness.

¹⁰Yoder, ed., THE LEGACY OF MICHAEL SATTLER, pp. 39-40.

¹¹John Howard Yoder, THE POLITICS OF JESUS (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), p. 20.

¹²John Howard Yoder, THE CHRISTIAN WITNESS TO THE STATE (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1962), p. 65. There is merit to this observation.

Yoder is unwavering in his polemic against natural moral knowledge. For example, the Haustafeln or "household precepts" of the New Testament -- "wives be subject to your husbands" and the like; Col. 3:18-4:1; Eph. 5:21-6:9 -- are not teachings which the early church took over from the Hellenistic world, as many scholars would have it. Instead, they embody a distinctively Christian ethics of "revolutionary subordination" which derives its shape, its meaning, and its language "from the novelty of the teaching and the work and the triumph of Jesus."¹³ From Yoder's point of view, use of the social sciences as a positive aid to ethical reflection is suspect.¹⁴

Yoder's writings presuppose two primary audiences. One audience is mainline Christendom which he calls to radical discipleship. The other audience is his fellow Mennonites who misconceive the Christian life as withdrawal from the world. Withdrawal is wrong because the cross of Christ is understood best as a genuine political alternative to the "Essene option" of withdrawal. The cross is also understood as a political alternative to the option of the Sadducees who sought to be effective by cooperating with the governing authorities, and the option of the Zealots who resorted to violence in an attempt to control history.¹⁵ (Incidentally, these options, including the cross, are ways to "read the situation" which do not depend on the social sciences.) So Yoder calls both audiences to an aggressive but non-violent engagement with the principalities and powers.¹⁶

Decisive for this non-violent but aggressive engagement with the world is "the pacifism of the messianic community."¹⁷ This "negative intervention" is best defined not as "non-violence" (a term compatible with hatred or with passive resignation), but as "self-giving, nonresistant love" which refuses to use political means for self-defense, which seeks neither effectiveness nor justice, and which is willing¹⁸ to suffer any loss or seeming defeat for the sake of obedience. Self-giving, nonresistant love is decisive, and it obliges Christians to give a direct witness to the state by calling it to its proper task.

¹³Yoder, THE POLITICS OF JESUS, p. 183.

¹⁴See John H. Yoder, "Theological Perspectives on 'Growth with Equity'" and "Theological Reflections on Economic Realities," GROWTH WITH EQUITY: STRATEGIES FOR MEETING HUMAN NEEDS, ed. Mary Evelyn Jegen and Charles K. Wilbur (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), pp. 9-16, 211-220.

¹⁵John H. Yoder, THE ORIGINAL REVOLUTION: ESSAYS ON CHRISTIAN PACIFISM (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1971), pp. 13-33.

¹⁶Yoder, THE POLITICS OF JESUS, pp. 135-162.

¹⁷John H. Yoder, NEVERTHELESS (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1971), p. 123.

¹⁸Yoder, THE ORIGINAL REVOLUTION, p. 49 and p. 59.

How do Christians address a state which does not share its distinctive faith and vocabulary? Yoder's problem is to understand within a Christian framework how judgments may be formulated and addressed to officials in the political sphere who do not share the Christian confession. To preserve the distinction between revelation and reason (or natural law), Yoder adopts a strategy of "middle axioms." These function not only to mediate between general principles and more precise policies (as in J. H. Oldham and John C. Bennett), they also "mediate between the norms of faith and the situation conditioned by unbelief."¹⁹ In other words, these axioms are not informed by the "order of nature" (which is arbitrary), they are formulated solely on the basis of revelation, but in a way that magistrates can understand.

From revelation (that is, from Rom. 13 and I Peter 2), Yoder perceives two functions or two standards for the magistrate: to protect the innocent and punish the guilty. Neither gives a blanket authorization to use violence, though both require fair judicial processes. The constant temptation of the state is to use its legitimate police function without holding violence to a minimum. Middle axioms, based on the standards of protecting the innocent and punishing the guilty, can be formulated so that more precise guidance is given, grounded in revelation and uncorrupted by reason or natural law. For example, on the matter of capital punishment, Yoder argues as follows:

In a society sufficiently influenced by Christian witnessing that other more offensive and more corrigible forms of lethal violence have been largely eliminated, to have policemen unarmed and to abolish capital punishment is an intelligent and available possibility because it is within reach. In a society -- such as those of the Middle East, for example -- which has no due process of law, to begin by attacking the legislative provision for the death penalty would be to raise the wrong issue first. This does not mean that capital punishment is ever justified; there may, however, be times when it is not the most offensive of the unjustified things which the state is doing.

In other words, the best alternative for the Christian witness to the state may be²⁰ to insist on due process before seeking to abolish capital punishment.

The reason-revelation issue looms large in contemporary Christian ethics, and Yoder brings it to sharp focus. Mainstream Christians may agree or disagree about Yoder's position on particular moral issues.

¹⁹Yoder, THE CHRISTIAN WITNESS TO THE STATE, p. 33.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 36-37, p. 50. Incidentally, the legitimacy of the police function does not imply that a Christian can be a policeman. Though Yoder does not categorically rule out this possibility, he says he has "met no one testifying to such an exceptional call" (Ibid., p. 57).

However, the substantive issue for Reformed ethics is to formulate a basis for ethics which is not only true to the normative witness of Scripture, but which also is responsive to other sources of knowledge -- responsive to the things Calvin takes into account through his concept of the natural moral law. The contemporary problem, clearly, is that traditional natural law has fallen on hard days (for legitimate reasons). A vacuum has thereby been created. Followers of Barth, for example, continue to argue that there is no such thing as a natural social institution of marriage; rather, the sanction for marriage is found in the immediate commands God gives to individual men and individual women. The substantive and practical issue is to find a contemporary equivalent to natural law.

Another major issue (not unrelated to the first) is the relation of nature to grace, traditionally formulated by the question, How is knowledge of God the creator and sustainer related to knowledge of God's redemption in Jesus Christ? Sattler advocates separation from the evil and wickedness of the world. He renounces weapons of violence. He states that the ordering of the sword is outside the perfection of Christ, and that Christians do not enter disputes about worldly matters such as property. Calvin responds by articulating a just-war theory, by arguing that the magistracy is a Christian calling that serves the common good, and that judgments about worldly matters like property disputes can receive Christian sanction. In back of these disagreements are different understandings of the relation of God to the world.

Yoder addresses the grace-nature problem in a way which is true to his Mennonite heritage but which avoids any blatant charge of withdrawal from the world. He argues that there simultaneously exist two overlapping aeons. One aeon looks backward to human history outside of Christ; the other looks forward, to the fullness of the kingdom of God. Christ rules over both realms,²¹ but in different ways. As the Lord of history he rules over the old aeon. This is the "world" of the principalities and powers, created by God to provide a network of norms and regulations. This world, however, is now fallen and enslaves humans by demanding their unconditional loyalty,²² though the principalities and powers are still necessary for basic human existence. On the other hand, Christ is Lord of the church and rules over the new aeon which is a radical break from the old. Through the cross Christ breaks the sovereignty of the principalities and powers by nonresistant, self-giving love.²³ (Although Yoder is christocentric, his is not a christology of the second person of the trinity. His emphasis is on the person and teachings of Jesus, not on Jesus Christ as the first-born of the whole creation or the high christology of the Logos. The distinction of Troeltsch between church- and sect-type christologies remains pertinent.)

²¹THE ORIGINAL REVOLUTION, pp. 58-62.

²²THE POLITICS OF JESUS, pp. 144-146.

²³THE ORIGINAL REVOLUTION, pp. 58-62.

The question to put to Yoder is whether God's power and presence in the cross of Christ is set in opposition to God's power and presence as creator and sustainer of the principalities and powers of the world. Are grace and nature split so that God's dominion over the world must be overcome through God's rule through the non-resisting church? (A similar question can be asked about the relation of love and justice. In Yoder, justice and love appear to be set in opposition.)

Calvin does not have this kind of dualism. Though he distinguishes God's work in Christ from God's rule over the whole creation, God's redeeming work is not set in opposition to his purpose as creator and sustainer. The substantive task of a contemporary Calvinist is to articulate a perception of the reality of God which does not place grace and nature in opposition (and which does not juxtapose love and justice).

Three other major theological issues are present in the dispute between Calvin and The Seven Articles, and each is brought to contemporary focus by Yoder. I state them briefly. One concerns the relation of sin and evil to the good. What is the extent and location of evil, and how is it related to the power of goodness? For Sattler, evil can be identified and located in the world, and at least certain manifestations of evil can be overcome. Calvin finds sin and evil more pervasively present, and thinks it unlikely that some of its manifestations can be eradicated. He therefore charges the Anabaptists with being naïve about sin, though it is also clear that Calvin has no intention of capitulating to the powers of evil.

Contemporary Calvinists can perhaps charge Yoder with underestimating the power of goodness in the principalities and powers and of overestimating the purity of the distinctive values of the nonresistant Christian community. On the other hand, a contemporary Reformed position must be sensitive to charges from Yoder that Calvinists accommodate evil too easily, and that Calvinists are reluctant to do what is truly possible to achieve the good. I suppose there is no Reformed pastor who does not face this dilemma daily: to be realistic about the perniciousness of sin and evil, yet be steadfast in seeking the temporal good. My suspicion is that this requires an eschatology which is not as oriented to the distant future as is Yoder's.

Another issue concerns law and gospel. Clearly Calvin's three uses of the law discern a greater continuity between the Decalogue, the natural moral law, and the teachings of Jesus, than do Anabaptists who distinguish more sharply between the old law and the new. The Calvinist charge of perfectionism is accompanied by the charge of legalism, though this is somewhat ironic because Calvinists have often been charged with being legalistic.

The same issues can be discerned in Yoder. The central problem is to define the meaning of legalism. In my judgment, the insistence that policy "x" must be followed if a moral good is to be achieved or a moral evil is to be avoided, is not by definition legalistic. Legalism, I learn from Roman Catholics, refers either to an excessively scrupulous

conscience or to a predetermination of what is right. With Yoder, this issue concerns the non-use of violence as a predetermination of what is right. This problem needs attention and refinement.

The last of the three issues to be mentioned briefly concerns the relation of the Christian community to the world or the church-world problem. The issue of "church" versus "sect" has been transformed to no small extent in our denominational, voluntary society. Stated briefly, I believe the central issue here concerns the prior question of God's relation to the world. My own view, which I judge to have affinities with Calvin (the affinities with H. Richard Niebuhr are clearer), is that the Christian community is not so much the locus of God's presence as it is the sphere of conscious acknowledgement of God's power and presence and purpose for the whole creation. I find it difficult to make sense of Yoder's claim that the world exists for the church.²⁴

There are other issues which could be called to attention, for example, the relation of human freedom to God's sovereignty. I conclude my remarks, however, with brief comments about two moral issues, church discipline and just-war theory. There has been a virtual renaissance in historical studies of the just-war tradition recently,²⁵ and some scholars are now trying to revise this tradition for use in the nuclear age.²⁶ In the life of the church, however, just-war theory does not receive much attention. The statement on peacemaking ("Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling") adopted by the General Assembly of both of the major Presbyterian denominations, for example, is in major respects a very unReformed document. It counsels a dispositional ethics which is not correlated in any meaningful way with any of the "hard" issues facing us. Are we for or against a nuclear freeze? Are we for unilateral or bilateral disarmament, or for no disarmament at all? Is deterrence immoral, or can it be justified, or justified only within limits? Is a tactical use of nuclear weapons morally permissible, or

²⁴THE CHRISTIAN WITNESS TO THE STATE, p. 36. "The state, or more generally the organization of society, exists according to the message of the New Testament for the sake of the work of the church and not vice versa."

²⁵James Turner Johnson, JUST WAR TRADITION AND THE RESTRAINT OF WAR (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); James Turner Johnson, IDEOLOGY, REASON, AND THE LIMITATION OF WAR (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Frederick H. Russell, THE JUST WAR IN THE MIDDLE AGES (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975); LeRoy B. Walters, Jr., FIVE CLASSIC JUST-WAR THEORIES (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1971).

²⁶James F. Childress, MORAL RESPONSIBILITY IN CONFLICTS (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); William V. O'Brien, THE CONDUCT OF JUST AND LIMITED WAR (New York: Praeger Special Studies, 1981); Michael Walzer, JUST AND UNJUST WARS (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

not? Are conventional wars morally permissible, and if so, under what conditions? Can a counter-insurgency be conducted justly, and if so, what are the limits? etc. These issues are not addressed in this document. Instead, we are directed toward an attitude, a Gesinnungsethik. Furthermore, all the issues that used to be talked about under the umbrella of "social justice" -- issues which call for hard thought and particularity -- now reappear under the rubric of "peacemaking." Again, only an attitude is counseled. To my mind, it is a discouraging sign of the times that the best contemporary book on just-war theory (Walzer's JUST AND UNJUST WARS) was not written by a Christian, to say nothing of a Reformed Christian.

It is very clear today that on the issues of war and peace we simply cannot repeat Calvin's repetition of Augustine. Further, we know that some judgments "for peace and against war" are warranted, especially if they are made with precision and discernment. It should be remembered that Calvin used just-war theory to restrain or prohibit the use of violence on several occasions. If our judgments "for peace and against war" are justified solely on the basis of an attitudinal disposition toward peacemaking, we shall have been untrue to our Reformed heritage. Reading Calvin's tract against the Anabaptists should make us ask, Is it possible to revise and retrieve just-war theory in such a way as to enable us to make discerning and discriminating judgments about the use of force and threats of violence in the contemporary world? This question presents an arduous task.

The other moral problem I mention is the issue of church discipline. It is a major problem. Is it possible to have an ordering of the life of the church which exhibits a distinctive Christian identity in the contemporary world? I do not think that helpful discussions of church discipline can be carried on today in the sixteenth century mode of John Calvin, if that is taken to mean the imposing of external norms through the use of a ban. In this context, the growth of conservative churches as described by Dean M. Kelley (and elaborated somewhat differently by proponents of church growth) is not, in my judgment, the wave of the future. I believe that the issues are broader and deeper than either Kelley or proponents of church growth perceive. I find analyses like Wade Clark Roof's recent article in DAEDALUS more helpful.²⁷

Calvin also says that the ban is imposed only through the consent of the community. Perhaps the active consent of the church is the key to church discipline today. I have found Don Browning's discussion of church discipline to be suggestive. In THE MORAL CONTEXT OF PASTORAL CARE, he writes

Discipline is first of all a matter of deeply implanting within the character of a people the basic norms, patterns, values, and sensibilities that govern the culture of the group. Discipline

²⁷ Wade Clark Roof, "America's Voluntary Establishment: Mainline Religion in Transition," DAEDALUS, Vol. 111, No. 1 (Winter 1982), pp. 165-184.

. . . [is] the task of forming and maintaining the emotional sensibilities, values, and behavioral norms of a people called Christians . . .²⁸

The mode of this discipline changes from age to age. However, Browning suggests that the internalization of Christian values cannot take place if the church is a community which caters primarily to this-worldly self-fulfillment -- a polemic, of course, against recent modes of pastoral care. What is required is a church structure which meaningfully addresses major moral issues as these impinge on the actual lives of church members. For example, the significance of marriage as an institution, the meaning of death and dying, and the issues of war and peace, are matters which need to be explored in a normative context with the active participation and consent of the congregation. This type of inquiry -- the process of inquiry is as important as its product! -- is THE MORAL CONTEXT OF PASTORAL CARE. I hope Browning's vision is not just a romantic dream. In any event, I see something like his vision as the necessary social condition for ordering the church in today's world. It is a vision that is true to the Reformed heritage.

²⁸Don S. Browning, THE MORAL CONTEXT OF PASTORAL CARE (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 59.

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