

Reflections on the “new” Vatican position about homosexuality



I've been noticing a lot of conversation in the last few days about the Vatican's apparent "shift" regarding homosexuality, both in the secular press and among Christians. There is both celebrating (by secularists) and gnashing of teeth (by traditional Christians). Before they conclude either that the Vatican has finally "seen the light," or that "the sky is falling," people should read the document in its entirety: [Relatio post disceptationem](#).

The document clearly affirms the historic Christian position on marriage. The key paragraph is probably the following:

Jesus Himself, referring to the primordial plan for the human couple, reaffirms the indissoluble union between man and woman, while understanding that "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning" (Mt 19,8). In this way, He shows how divine condescension always accompanies the path of humanity, directing it towards its new beginning, not without passing through the cross.

What is being addressed seems clearly to be an issue of pastoral response to what are described as "wounded families" and "irregular situations." A number of such "irregular

situations” are referred to: African polygamy, children born outside the context of marriage, civil marriages (a problem for Roman Catholics, since non-church marriages are not recognized), religiously “mixed” marriages, non-remarried divorced, remarried divorced, cohabiting couples, homosexuals.

The document says very little about homosexuality, but clearly distinguishes between homosexual orientation and homosexual practice. The key paragraph is:

Homosexuals have gifts and qualities to offer to the Christian community: are we capable of welcoming these people, guaranteeing to them a fraternal space in our communities? Often they wish to encounter a Church that offers them a welcoming home. Are our communities capable of providing that, accepting and valuing their sexual orientation, without compromising Catholic doctrine on the family and matrimony? [my emphasis]

The document affirms the following:

- 1) There is no compromise on the church’s historic stance: “In this light, the value and consistency of natural marriage must first be emphasized.”
- 2) The pastoral goal in cases in which “irregular situations” exist is to regularize the situation wherever possible: “All these situations have to be dealt with in a constructive manner, seeking to transform them into opportunities to walk towards the fullness of marriage and the family in the light of the Gospel.”
- 3) The document asks for a pastoral sensitivity in response to those in such situations, an approach that (to use Reformation language) is driven by the promise of grace, not the condemnation of law:

Each damaged family first of all should be listened to with

respect and love, becoming companions on the journey as Christ did with the disciples of the road to Emmaus. In a particular way the words of Pope Francis apply in these situations: "The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this "art of accompaniment", which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Es 3,5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life» (Evangelii Gaudium, 169).

4) Even in the presence of "irregular situations," a pastoral approach should recognize that there often are positive aspects included in the relationships: for example, cohabiting couples exhibit many of the positive characteristics of marriage, and many do eventually marry; gay couples do care about and sacrifice for one another, and, if there are children involved, the church has a pastoral responsibility to them:

Without denying the moral problems connected to homosexual unions it has to be noted that there are cases in which mutual aid to the point of sacrifice constitutes a precious support in the life of the partners. Furthermore, the Church pays special attention to the children who live with couples of the same sex, emphasizing that the needs and rights of the little ones must always be given priority.

As an aside, this is simply recognizing that even in a sinful situation, there are always elements of grace present. Without approving of the compromised situation, the church is asked to recognize that these elements of grace can be steps toward moving in the right direction:

All these situations have to be dealt with in a constructive manner, seeking to transform them into opportunities to walk

towards the fullness of marriage and the family in the light of the Gospel. They need to be welcomed and accompanied with patience and delicacy. With a view to this, the attractive testimony of authentic Christian families is important, as subjects for the evangelization of the family.

5) Aside from pastoral sensitivity, the primary concern of the document seems to be evangelism, that is, how might the church most effectively communicate the gospel to those in broken family situations? “The announcement of the Gospel of the family is an urgent issue for the new evangelization. The Church has to carry this out with the tenderness of a mother and the clarity of a teacher (cf. Eph 4,15), in fidelity to the merciful kenosis of Christ. The truth is incarnated in human fragility not to condemn it, but to cure it.”

6) There is a christocentric focus:

In order to “walk among contemporary challenges, the decisive condition is to maintain a fixed gaze on Jesus Christ, to pause in contemplation and in adoration of His Face. ... Indeed, every time we return to the source of the Christian experience, new paths and undreamed of possibilities open up” (Pope Francis, Address of 4 October 2014). Jesus looked upon the women and the men he met with love and tenderness, accompanying their steps with patience and mercy, in proclaiming the demands of the Kingdom of God.

As I read it, the point is that, pastorally, the church needs to act more like Jesus, and less like Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50).

If there is a shift, it is not in the church’s historic teaching about sexuality, but rather in the recognition that the church has done a poor job in communicating the gospel to people in such “irregular situations.” If the only message that cohabiting couples, divorced couples, and gay couples

hear is that they are condemned because they are sinners, they will not be able to hear the good news of forgiveness and healing, and they will be reluctant to be reconciled either to Christ or to the church.

Last week, TSM (where I teach) had a conference on “Christian Faith and Same-Sex Attraction: Finding Paths to Ministry.” My own take is that the Vatican is saying something very similar to the issues addressed at that conference.

Without in any way compromising the church’s historic teaching about sexuality, I think it important that those of us who are orthodox Christians recognize that we have often done a poor job of communicating to people of same-sex attraction that the gospel really is good news, even for them. Aside from a suggestion to read the Vatican document for yourself, I would also suggest that folks would profit from reading the book of my colleague, Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*, (Zondervan, 2010).

As a final reflection, one of the key themes of the document is one that I think should be heeded by all orthodox Christians who have been fighting the battle of the cultural wars of the last few decades. A demand for conversion is not one that only needs to be addressed to those in anomalous sexual relationships. If the church is to be heard in its call for conversion, it needs to heed that call itself. It is not enough to just keep telling gay people that they are sinners:

For this reason, what is required is a missionary conversion: it is necessary not to stop at an announcement that is merely theoretical and has nothing to do with people’s real problems. It must not be forgotten that the crisis of faith has led to a crisis in matrimony and the family and, as a result, the transmission of faith from parents to children has often been interrupted. Confronted by a strong faith, the imposition of certain cultural perspectives that weaken the family is of no importance.

Conversion has, above all, to be that of language so that this might prove to be effectively meaningful. The announcement is about letting it be experienced that the Gospel of the family is the response to the deepest expectations of a person: to his or her dignity and its full realization in reciprocity and communion. This is not merely about presenting a set of regulations but about putting forward values, responding to the need of those who find themselves today even in the most secularized countries.

How to be Happy: Some offhand remarks

Over at StandFirm, Sarah Hey has interrupted the usual grouching to post [“A Few Thoughts on Happiness: Is Happiness A “Moral Obligation”?”](#). This led to the following offhand remarks.



While Aristotle (and Christian eudaemonists like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas and Richard Hooker) granted that beatitude (translated “happiness,” but more like “complete well being”) was correlated with character, they saw it as a byproduct of something else, namely doing a worthwhile activity. To set out to pursue happiness in itself led to unhappiness. However, doing

something inherently worthwhile, and doing it well, can lead to happiness.

This is the unexpressed assumption in Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, the intent of which is to help sort out one's vocation. One begins not by asking "What makes me happy?," but "What do I love?"

How to be happy? Pursue those things you love doing, and, to the extent it is possible, do good. Don't pursue happiness for its own sake. Be aware that if you're unhappy, that may be a sign that you need to change something you're doing.

May be, not must be. Our ancestors were very savvy about the passions (not to be equated with the emotions, full stop), and recognized that some people just had a disposition to melancholy.

The most significant way in which Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Richard Hooker differ from Aristotle on happiness is that Aristotle believed neither in a personal God nor in an afterlife. Like so many of our contemporaries, Aristotle believed that if we were going to be happy, it had to be here and now. In contrast, the Augustinian tradition recognizes that God is the Greatest Good (*summum bonum*), and true happiness can be found only in the beatific vision (seeing God "face to face" and enjoying him forever). This is what we are made for, and it is the fuel that drives all our seeking for happiness. As Augustine expressed it at the beginning of the *Confessions*: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

This is a tremendous help insofar as it relieves the [implicitly Pelagian] demand of our culture that we *MUST* be happy, and we must be happy now. Augustine, Thomas and Hooker correct not only Aristotle, but the contemporary culture's notion of happiness in the following ways:

- 1) They make clear that only God can truly make us happy.

This does not mean that there is no genuine happiness connected with created things or “secular” activities, but it does relativize the kind of happiness we expect from them. We shouldn’t be surprised if our spouses, our jobs, our bodies, or our “stuff” does not make us happy. They’re not supposed to.

2) They introduce a personal dimension to happiness. Happiness comes not from things, but from friendship with God, and, to a lesser extent, from friendship with others. Thomas Aquinas is especially good here.

3) They remind us that life is a pilgrimage, and we are pilgrims (*viators*) on a journey. We’re moving to happiness, and we can be certain that some day we will have it, but we’re not there yet, and we don’t have to insist on having happiness NOW. Meanwhile, we can get on with the task at hand.

4) Their understanding of happiness helps us to be grateful for the genuine goods that we enjoy, realizing that they are gifts from our Creator.

5) They remind us that some of the things that our culture tells us will make us happy will not. Happiness is not equivalent to pleasure. Pursuing activities that are contrary to our true end—knowing and loving God—will actually make us unhappy. For Augustine, the first step in ethics is sorting out true from false goods, and learning to pursue those goods that will actually make us happy, while avoiding those siren voices (apparent, but false goods) that promise us happiness, but will ultimately make us miserable because they are self-destructive.

6) A rule of life is important. Mundane activities like regular private prayer, reading/praying the daily office, Sunday worship, *lectio divina* (reading Scripture and “spiritual” texts), being with friends, physical exercise, being in nature, playing music, doing “chores,” preparing a

good meal and sharing it with friends and family, are the kinds of “habits” that make the conditions possible for the kinds of limited happiness we can expect in this life, and help form us to be the kind of people who will be happy with the only kind of happiness that God has to offer in the next life—himself. Contrary to certain distorted forms of Lutheranism, this is not “imposing law” on people. It recognizes that there is a correlation between our practices and the kinds of people we become. I do not have to buy flowers for my wife to prove that I love her, and I certainly do not buy flowers for my wife in order to “earn” her love; however, occasionally buying flowers for my wife is one of those practices that helps create friendship; it not only expresses love, it helps create love. Similarly, we don’t pray, read the Bible, receive the Eucharist to “earn” God’s favor. Nonetheless, these are practices that not only express our friendship with God, but help to make it grow over time. We don’t do these things because God needs them, but because we do.

Some Brief Reflections on Inclusive Language

I first encountered the problem of “inclusive language” when I was working on my doctorate quite awhile ago. The University of Notre Dame Theology Department had a policy that all written work had to use “inclusive language.” At least one of the faculty members interpreted this to mean that one could not use male language in reference to deity, and would penalize students a full grade for doing so. I encountered a real problem when I wrote my dissertation and had to decide how to translate *homo* (the Latin word for “human being”).

Latin does not normally use pronouns, but English does. In translating Latin "homo," should I use "man" or "human being"? Which pronoun should I use when an English translation of a Latin verb referring to the action of "homo" needed a pronoun – "he"? "He or she?" "They?"

I think the problem is less acute these days. However, if we write papers or give sermons, we still have to ask the question of how properly to refer to God and to human beings. Do we call God "she"? If God is "Father" is God also "Mother"? Do we use "man" when referring to human beings? Why or why not? Following are some short reflections:

There are a number of issues that need to be addressed. First is the issue of theological language in general.

1) The motto of my blog is "*Non sermoni res, sed rei sermo subiectus est,*" which comes from Hillary of Poitiers on the Trinity. It translates approximately "The thing is not subject to the word, but the word is subject to the thing." I first came across Hillary's rule in Karl Barth, who appeals to it to make the point that the theology is always subject to its subject matter. That subject matter of theology is the Triune God *in se*, but as known in revelation.

We have to use some kind of language to talk about God, but that language is always subordinate to the Reality of the God who has revealed himself, not our own projections. We are not free to impose any metaphors we might wish when we speak of God in the matter of Sallie McFague's *Metaphorical Theology*. The Christian claim is that God speaks, and that the canonical Scriptures are faithful witnesses to God's Word of revelation. At the same time, any human language is inherently inadequate to speak of God. No language can capture God, and our attempts at conceptualizing continually demand correction. In the words of Charles Williams, "This is Thou, This neither is Thou."

Theological language uses the distinctions of the *via negationis*, *via affirmationis* and *via eminentiae* to speak of God.

Via negationis (the negative way) denies of God all limitations characteristic of creatures. Many of the traditional "divine attributes" are not positive affirmations so much as negative denials of creaturely limitations. Divine omnipotence and omnipresence mean that God is neither temporally or spatially limited; divine eternity means that God is not subject to temporal limitations; God is Spirit means that God is not embodied; Impassibility means that God does not have passions or parts; Immutability means that God is not subject to the physical or temporal alteration – God does not "get better" or "worse."

Via affirmationis (the positive way) affirms that, as the source of all created perfections, God must *in se* contain these perfections in an eminent manner (*Via eminentiae*) and is self-identical with them. God is not only good, but Goodness Itself. God is not only loving, but Love Itself. God is not a being, but Being Itself.

At the same time, while we can affirm positive language of God, we can form no proper concepts of God. We can apprehend God, but not comprehend him. One of the inherent dangers of theological language is to confuse our theological conceptions with the reality to which the language refers. Theology can be incredibly flexible about the terms it uses, precisely because the terms do not encompass Divine Reality. At the same time, theology needs to be on guard that its language is not unfaithful to the reality.

Because all human language originates in created concepts, and we have no direct or immediate access to Divine reality, human language is inherently inadequate to provide proper concepts of God. Nonetheless, human language about God can provide proper judgments about God. We can affirm that certain things

about God are indeed true, although such affirmations are mediated through human concepts that are inherently inadequate to express the divine reality. Because of its inadequacy to conceive divine reality, positive language is either analogical or metaphorical. Analogous language is literally true perfection language. Because God does not participate in perfection, but is himself identical with the divine perfections, such language is both universal and particular: God is not only good but goodness; God is not only just, but justice. Although expressed through creaturely concepts, the language of divine perfections applies primarily to God rather than creatures insofar as God in his self-identity is the original source of all created perfections. Creatures are created goods, because God is primarily Good and Goodness in himself, and shares that goodness with creatures.

Metaphorical language is language that is not literally true, but expresses some truth about God through comparison of some likeness with created reality: "Our God is a consuming fire."

Second is the question of specifically gendered language about God:

1) God has given us certain kinds of language to refer to himself in revelation, and this is the primary language we use because God has given it to us. If we take revelation seriously, we must believe that there is analogical or metaphorical correspondence between the language applied to God in biblical revelation and God's eternal reality. The primary way that God has given to refer to himself is by the Triune names: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe that God is Triune in himself because he has revealed himself in the history of revelation as the Father of Jesus Christ, Jesus who is the Son of his Father, and the Holy Spirit who has been sent by Father and Son.

2) Besides the Trinitarian names, Scripture provides us with other names in speaking of God. In the OT, God is YHWH,

Elohim, Adonai, El Shaddai. In English translation, these generally are translated as LORD, God, Lord, God Almighty. Besides the divine names, Scripture refers to God with numerous metaphors. The metaphors are predominantly masculine, but occasionally are feminine. A crucial distinction is that between metaphor proper, and simile. Proper metaphors tend to be masculine or neutral (God IS a Warrior, a Lion, a King); feminine metaphors tend to be similes (God is LIKE a mother, LIKE a woman in labor).

A predominant metaphor in the Old Testament is that of God as the Husband or Father of Israel and Israel as bride or daughter. In the NT, this analogy is transferred to that between Christ (as Husband) and the Church (as Bride).

At the same time, the wisdom literature of the OT regularly uses a feminine personification to describe the attribute of God's wisdom (*sophia*). Significantly, in the NT, this originally feminine language is regularly referred to Christ. HE (not she) is the Divine Wisdom.

3) Divine transcendence: One of the crucial differences between religions of transcendence (like Judaism and Christianity) and religions of immanence (Hinduism) is the metaphors they use to articulate the relation between Deity and creation. Religions of transcendence tend to use metaphors of height (God is in "heaven") and masculine language to characterize divinity (God as Father). Religions of immanence use metaphors of embodiment (the world as God's body) and feminine imagery (mother goddess). This is not consistent across the board, however. Scripture speaks of the Spirit as brooding over the waters, and indwelling the church. Hinduism has male gods like Brahmin who do not transcend created reality.

4) Monotheism: that God is One is a crucial distinctive of Biblical faith. The masculine imagery of God (particularly in the OT) does not make the point that God is male (he is never

described below the waist), but that God has no partners (there is only one God, and the God of the Bible has no consorts) and God is distinct from creation (the earth is not God's body).

5) Pronouns: That God is personal demands that we use personal pronouns in referring to God. Such personal pronouns do not mean that God is "sexed," but that God is personal (God is not an "it"). God is not sexed because God has no body. Refusal to use any pronouns (repeated and exclusive references to "God" or "God-self" or "Divinity") present the image of an impersonal God. In normal usage, the pronoun "she" really would seem to imply that God is "sexed." The preferred pronoun "he" is used, not because God is male (again, God has no sex), but because God is not an "it."

6) Some have suggested that because the Hebrew (*ruach*) in the OT is feminine in gender, we should refer to the Spirit with female pronouns ("she"). Insofar as the primary imagery of the Spirit is that of immanence, there might be some logic here. However, this seems to be confusing grammatical gender (which English does not have), with sexuality. There is no correspondence between grammatical gender and sexuality. Moreover, in the NT, the Greek *pneuma* is neuter, when Jesus refers to the Spirit, he uses the masculine pronoun (*ekeinos*), and the masculine "Comforter" (*parakletos*).

Conclusion: If we are going to be faithful to the language of biblical revelation, we should use the primary biblical language of the Triune names (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in referring to God. The proper pronoun would be "he." At the same time, there are numerous feminine similes applied to God in the Bible (God is not "mother," but God is "like a mother"), and these should not be avoided, but encouraged.

To reiterate, use of the Triune names in reference to Deity and the masculine pronoun follows the language of biblical revelation. It does not imply that God is male, because God is

not sexed. The use of "he" in reference to God does not mean that God is male, but that God is personal.

Use of inclusive language in reference to human beings is a rather different question.

1) The primary purpose of language is to communicate. Language evolves and changes over time, and what communicates at one time does not necessarily communicate at another.

2) The church should avoid getting involved in the politically charged culture wars. We have no stake in taking sides at either preserving or demolishing "the patriarchy." The church has fundamentally different loyalties.

3) The "offending" words are the generic "man" and the masculine pronoun "he." While previous generations used these regularly in both an inclusivist sense ("human being") and an exclusive sense ("male human being"), English language use has considerably changed, and many (perhaps most) now hear the word "man" in only an exclusivist sense.

4) English has a peculiarity in that it does not distinguish between an inclusive and exclusive use of "man." Latin, for example, distinguishes between *homo* (human being), *vir* (male human being), and *femina* (female human being). Greek distinguishes similarly between *anthropos*, *aner*, and *gune*. In Middle English, *man* was "human being," *wer* was "male human being," and *wifman* (woman) was a female human being. In modern English, *wer* has long ago fallen out of use.

5) It seems that any contemporary English document should use language in the way that it is used by the general population. While "man" seemed to be avoided for a couple of decades, it now seems to have found its way back into the general population. "Man" (with a capital M) is regularly used by the media and popular culture to refer to "humanity" or "humankind." "Man" (small "m") is also regularly used in reference to "male human beings." However, the pronoun "he"

seems regularly understood to refer only to a male human being. "Men" (plural) is never understood to mean "human beings" (plural) but "male human beings" (plural). A document that deliberately reverted to the terminology of forty years ago would be understood to be deliberately provocative. People would notice not the content of the language, but the way it was used. Whether intended that way or not, the document would be read as "sexist."

6) The ESV translation of the Bible has adopted what I think is a good compromise. "Man" (capitalized) is used for Greek or Hebrew "human being." "Man" (not capitalized) is used in referring to male human beings. When no gender is present in the original Hebrew or Greek, "Man" or "man" are not used. ESV does not use "men" for plural human beings, but "humans," "people," etc.

7) My own standard practice when writing is to use "human being," "human," or "humankind," when the context calls for generic "human being," but sometimes "Man," as in Aristotle's definition of humanity as "Man is a rational animal." For pronouns I use "he or she" or "one." I do not use "they" to refer to individual human beings, although many of my students do, as did even Jane Austen almost 200 years ago. (That just seems grammatically awkward to me.) For the plural, I use "human beings" "humans" or "people," not "men," unless I am referring to more than one male human being. I think my students (particularly those under 30) would hear consistent use of "man" and "men" as referring to males. The plural of "brothers" should be "brothers and sisters." Siblings sounds too formal.

New Article on The Hermeneutics of Same-Sex Practice



It is only within the last generation that affluent Western Christians have suggested that same-sex sexual activity might be morally permissible. The unanimous consensus of the previous Christian tradition (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Anglican) has been that homosexual activity is immoral, condemned by both Scripture and Church tradition. The vast majority of critical biblical scholars continue to recognize that the plain-sense reading of the biblical texts prohibits homosexual activity, and that Scripture endorses only one permissible model for sexual activity: exclusive life-long commitment within heterosexual marriage.

Given the historic Anglican commitment to the primacy and sufficiency of Scripture, it would seem difficult to make a case from an Anglican perspective for the approval of same-sex activity, for the blessing of same-sex relationships, or for the ordaining of practicing homosexual clergy. Those who attempt to make such a case necessarily have to address the question of biblical authority. How one attempts to reconcile the endorsing of same-sex practices with the authority of Scripture will depend, first, on whether one recognizes that Scripture prohibits same-sex activity, and, second, how one responds to Scripture's teaching.

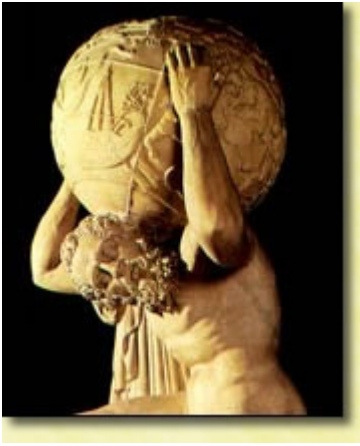
The above is the beginning of a new rather lengthy article I've just written entitled ["The Hermeneutics of Same-Sex Practice: A Summary and Evaluation."](#) It can be found in the Pages section to the left. I cannot imagine it will win me many friends.

The Perils of Bootstrapping or What is Christian Ethics? A Sermon

This is the first sermon I preached right after The Episcopal Church's General Convention 2003. At the time, I was an aspirant for Holy Orders in the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut. Within a month I had withdrawn from the ordination process. Two years later, on July 13, 2005, Bishop Andrew Smith invaded St. John's Episcopal Church, changed the locks and deposed Mark Hansen, our priest, and imposed a priest-in-charge, who later removed those of us on the vestry for "numerous offenses" (unspecified).

I now live in the Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh, and Archbishop Robert Duncan is my bishop. With the inaugural meeting of the new Anglican Church of North America this week, of which I am a member, I thought it appropriate to repost this sermon.

Psalm 147
Eph. 5: 15-20
John 6:53-59



At General Convention 2003, the Episcopal Church made two decisions that have put the Anglican communion in an uproar. They decided to ordain an Episcopal priest who had divorced his wife, and has been living in an ongoing homosexual relationship with another man, and they decided to allow individual dioceses to provide rites of blessing for homosexual relationships, at the discretion of the local bishop. The issue of controversy in the Episcopal Church today has to do with a disagreement about ethics or morality. So I have decided to talk a little this morning about Christian ethics.

The first thing that I think needs to be said is that it is quite difficult today to think about ethics from a Christian perspective, even for those inside the Church. The reason for this is that there is a competing ethic in our culture that has nothing to do with Christianity, but which we can hardly avoid. This is an ethic that has so permeated our culture that even Christians fall into its ways of thinking. I am going to refer to this as the “do-it-yourself” ethic. “Doing-it-yourself” is the idea that morality is about doing the best you can—pulling yourself up by your boot straps. If you do the best you can, you’ll be all right.

This “do-it-yourself” ethic comes in two varieties, a conservative variety and a liberal variety. The conservative variety aims for perfection. The conservative “do-it-yourselfer” does not allow for any failures, and tolerates no half-hearted efforts. Sometimes this view is called moralism

or Puritanism. The liberal “do-it-your-selfer” is more tolerant. He realizes that not everybody is perfect, so he thinks that God grades on a curve. As long as you try, you get an A for effort.

A lot of people think that “do-it-yourself” ethics is just what Christianity is all about, that Christianity is kind of like the boy scouts’ motto: “Do a good deed daily.” If they like the idea of doing good deeds, then these people approve of Christianity, even if they’re not Christians themselves. They say things like, “I admire Jesus’ moral teaching. I think he was a great man . . . but I don’t go to church or anything. I’m not a fanatic.” On the other hand, if they’re not so sure about their own stock of good deeds, if they’re concerned that they don’t measure up, then they won’t like Christianity at all. One sometimes hear people complain that Christians are “goody two shoes” or “killjoys” who like to keep other people from having a good time.

And you can hear both sides represented in the public media discussions of what happened at General Convention. The conservatives were horrified. Even if they don’t go to church themselves, they think that Christianity is about keeping the rules, and Bishop Gene Robinson is a bad example. He hasn’t kept the rules. On the other hands, the liberals were pleased. It is about time that those Puritan Christians got off their high horse, and accepted the changes that are going on in the real world. Of course, these folks don’t go to church, and they’re not going to start now, not even if the Episcopal Church comes around to their way of thinking. But they are happy to know that they were right all along.

The problem with both of these groups is that they do not understand the Christian gospel, and so they do not understand Christian ethics. Since they don’t understand Christian ethics, they can not provide a Christian evaluation of what has happened in the Episcopal Church.

For the last few weeks, the epistle readings in the lectionary have come from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and what Paul has said has largely had to do with issues of Christian behavior. So I think Paul can give us some tools to help us think about Christian ethics. What does it mean it mean for Christians to act and to live in a moral manner?

The heart of the Christian gospel is about two things: forgiveness of sins and transformation of life. We see this earlier in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. He says in chapter 1, "In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" In chapter 2, Paul says, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ."

The problem with "do-it-yourself" ethics is that it has no room for forgiveness, and it has no room for redemption and transformation. Since the conservative "do-it-your-selfer" insists on perfection, there is no room to be forgiven, or to start over. For the liberal "do-it-yourselfer," no one needs to be forgiven. We're just fine the way we are.

But Christian ethics is an ethic for people who realize that they are sinners, and that they need forgiveness. It is also an ethic for people who know they need to change, but realize that they are powerless to change without divine help.

Christian ethics is about becoming a follower of Jesus. But what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? It means that we enter into a new kind of life, a life that would not be possible if there had been no Jesus. Christian living is about our coming to share in the very life of this Jesus who lived, was crucified, and was raised to new life. The Bible talks about this in different ways. Again in Ephesians, Paul says that "God has raised up up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places." Later he uses the imagery of a head

and its body. Paul says, "speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body . . . when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." In chapter 4 of Ephesians, Paul compares becoming a Christian to putting on a new suit of clothes. Paul says that through Christ, we have "put off [our] old self," and have put on a "new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." Scholars believe that Paul is using the image of baptism here. When the early Christians were baptized, they took off their old clothing, and were immersed in a pool to symbolize that they had died to their old life. After they rose from the water, they put on a new white robe, to illustrate that they had been raised to a new life. When we are baptized, we put aside our old life, our old ways of living and thinking, and begin a new kind of life, a life that is lived because the Holy Spirit lives in us, and unites us to the risen Jesus.

In John's gospel, Jesus says: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing" In this morning's gospel reading, John uses the language of the other central New Testament sacrament, the eucharist or the Lord's Supper, to speak of how we come into union with Christ, and so come to share in this new kind of life. Jesus says: "My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in them. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me."

By being united with Christ, we come to share in the life of Christ. Because Jesus Christ is God incarnate, we can come to share in the very life of God, which Jesus has because he is the Word made flesh, the second person of the Trinity become a human being.

That is the heart of Christian ethics, and it has nothing to do with doing the best we can, or doing it by ourselves. Christian ethics is all about being forgiven, and allowing ourselves to be changed and transformed, as we become more and more like Christ.

And because Christian ethics is not about self-improvement, but God-improvement, that is, about God making us all over again, its characteristic attitudes are neither the scolding we find among Puritan “do-it-your-selfers”—“You’ve just gotta try a little harder!”, nor the kind of defensiveness we often find among compromising “do-it-your-selfers”—“I’m as good as you. Where do you get off telling me what to do?”

The characteristic attitudes of Christian ethics are the attitudes of those who realize that they have gotten what they do not deserve, not those who think they deserve what they’ve got. What are those attitudes? In the chapter in Ephesians from which this morning’s reading comes, Paul mentions two that are certainly among the most important. First, in this morning’s reading, there is gratitude. Paul says we should “give thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Second, at the beginning of the chapter that was last week’s epistle reading, Paul mentions love as characteristic of those who wish to imitate the God who has come near to us in Jesus Christ. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” You probably recognize that verse, since it is one of the offertory sentences in the Prayer Book, one of the verses of scripture that is read just before the gifts of tithes and offerings, and bread and wine are presented at the Lord’s table for the celebration of the eucharist.

This then is the heart of Christian ethics. Christian living is about being forgiven, and starting over, and living a new kind of life, a life that depends on the very life of the

risen Christ. In Jesus Christ, God became human, died for our sins, and was raised from the dead. Through the Holy Spirit, we are made one with the risen Christ, who shares his life with us, and enables us to live a life of holiness like the life he lived on earth. The Christian life has to do with following Christ, with responding to God's gift in Christ with gratitude and with love. It is not about just following the rules, nor of saying that I do not have to follow the rules because I am all right just the way I am. Christian ethics is about entering into a new kind of life.

Unfortunately, there is a way of hearing the gospel message so that it is not a message that challenges us to live a new kind of life, but a message that endorses the kind of life we were living anyway. But the gospel message in the New Testament is not that kind of message. If Christian ethics is about sharing in a new life by following Christ, if it means (as Paul says) putting on a new self, then we have to ask, what about that old self? And Paul is very clear, that old self has to die. As Paul says, the old self "belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires."

Paul begins this morning's epistle reading with some very negative instructions: "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." In the current climate of disagreement that characterizes discussion in today's Episcopal Church, there is sometimes a tendency to contrast love and law. Those who want to change the church's historic teachings claim to be motivated by love, and to be following a new leading of the Holy Spirit. Those who resist the changes are accused of being unloving, and being bound by rules and regulations. I think this contrast is pitifully inadequate. We have heard Paul tell us to "walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us." But to walk in love means to do certain kinds of things and not to do others.

Later in chapter 4, Paul gives a list of instructions that tell us what it means to walk in Christ's love. He marks a contrast between darkness and light. Paul says, "Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." Surely Paul's point is that certain kinds of behaviors are behaviors that are appropriate to the children of light, the behaviors that are good and right and true. And certain kinds of behaviors are not appropriate to the children of light because they are the works of darkness. To walk in Christ's love is to walk as a child of the light. To walk in darkness is to reject Christ's love.

And throughout Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, Paul contrasts various kinds of behavior which are consistent with Christian love with kinds of behavior that are not. He tells us positively that we should speak the truth in love. Negatively, he tells us that if we become angry, that we should not let the sun go down on our anger. He says the thief should no longer steal, but should do honest work so that he will have something to share with others. Paul says that we should not speak language that will corrupt others, but only things that will build others up, and will give grace to our hearers. He says that we should put aside bitterness and anger and slander, and that instead we should be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as Christ has forgiven us. Lots of negatives there, but each is balanced by a positive.

And, yes, Paul does say some things about sex. He says that those who are sexually immoral have no place in God's kingdom. But Paul is consistent here. What Paul says about sex is not merely negative, for the verse just before Paul condemns sexual immorality is the verse where Paul says that we should walk in love, as Christ loved us. Paul knows that what makes Christian ethics work is that it is about love. All human

actions are rooted in desire, but some desires are illusory because they are loves for things that are ultimately not good for us. So Paul says that our old self belongs to a former manner of life that is corrupt through "deceitful desires."

Sexual immorality is one of those loves that ultimately is a false love. It is an attempt to fill a hunger and thirst that can only truly be satisfied by Christ with a substitute. As Jesus says, "My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." Do-it-yourself religion can offer no hope to the one who is caught in the false love of sexual sin. The high minded Puritan "do-it-yourselfer" can only point fingers, and accuse. The more open minded "do-it-yourselfer" can only say, "Well, we all do it, don't we?" But what Paul realizes is that the love of Christ offers hope where "do-it-yourself" religion does not. Christ's love forgives, and Christ love transforms, and Christ's love offers the alternative of a holy love for one that is ultimately self-observed. And this offers hope to all of us, for haven't we all followed deceptive loves from time to time, even if they are not the love that has created the crisis in the Episcopal Church?

Is it too late for the Episcopal Church? I do not know. I do know that speaking the truth in love will not allow the Christian to endorse a false love that separates from Christ even if Episcopal bishops endorse it. But I also know that Christ's love still offers a way beyond the choice between cold anger and easy acceptance that are the only choices for our contemporary culture. Christ's love offers forgiveness, and Christ's love offers transformation. Do we dare to risk that love for ourselves? Can we hear Paul's words that speak even to us?:

*"Awake, O sleeper
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."*

Richard Hays's Challenge to the Just War Tradition

Richard Hays represents an approach to Christian ethics that follows in the tradition of Mennonite John Howard Yoder and Methodist ethicist Stanley Hauerwas.¹ This ethical approach understands Christian ethics to have a specific content provided by the New Testament texts themselves. Christian ethics is not simply a reiteration of ethical principles known by everyone in general (natural law). Nor is Christian ethics simply a matter of drawing practical application from abstract theological principles like law and gospel. Finally, the narrative texts of the New Testament do not present an “impossible ideal” meant to show human shortcomings, an “ethic of perfection” for select Christians, or an “interim” ethic reflecting a “consistent eschatology” concerned only with the end of the world—all views amounting to the claim that New Testament ethics are not relevant to the lives of contemporary Christians.

One of the distinctive characteristics of this approach is its narrative emphasis. The narrative mode of the New Testament documents is understood to have moral content. The gospels tell a story and Christian ethics has to do with appropriating the Christian story for one's own. This narrative approach has been found to be helpful in contemporary theology. Numerous theologians have adopted it; recent variations focus on the notion of drama, e.g., Kevin Vanhoozer.

However, this narrative approach has been a challenge to at least one reading of Christian ethics, the just war theory. The story of Jesus is a story of non-violence and non-resistance. Jesus conquers the powers of evil not by raising

up an armed rebellion, but by going to the cross. God the Father vindicates him by raising him from the dead; the paradigm for Christian discipleship is that of “imitating Christ,” and the classic Christian ideal is that of the martyr. Hays’s exegesis follows in the earlier steps of John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas who argued in their works *The Politics of Jesus*² and *The Peacable Kingdom*³ that following in Jesus’ non-violent way of the cross demands a non-violent ethic.

Hays is clear about the problems that this narrative approach to Christian ethics creates for traditional “Just War” ethics. He says that the “just war criteria” are not derived from, nor derivable from the New Testament. They depend on a process of “natural law” reasoning that has little biblical warrant. In Hays’s words: “[T]he New Testament offers no basis for ever declaring Christian participation in war ‘just.’ ” Accordingly, Hays concludes that the just war tradition, even if the Church’s majority position, has to be rejected as incompatible with the teaching of the New Testament (Hays, 341).

This is a fairly serious objection. If the just war tradition is incompatible with the central narrative structure of the New Testament, it would seem that Christians who wish to make the Jesus story their story must embrace pacifism.

Has Hays made his case for Christian pacifism and against the classic just war tradition? I am not convinced that he has. Yet I am not happy that advocates of the traditional just war position adequately address the issues he raises. In what follows I will summarize two just war advocates to see how well they measure up against Hays’s critique.

First to be examined is an essay by C. S. Lewis, “Why I Am Not a Pacifist.”⁴ Lewis was one of the most popular Christian apologists of the twentieth century who also wrote numerous

essays on Christian ethics, including this one. His essay is helpful because it represents just the kind of “common sense” argument that is often raised against Christian pacifism.

At first read, Lewis’s argument does indeed seem to be a classic case of “natural law” reasoning. (This is not surprising given that Lewis argued in an essay entitled “On Ethics”⁵ that Christian ethics has no uniquely revealed content. In that essay he states that one can no more imagine a new moral value than one can imagine a new color. Jesus did not come to provide a new ethics but to challenge people to recognize their failure to live up to the ethic they had already learned from their parents and nurses.)

Confirmation that Lewis is arguing for a “natural law” critique of pacifism is his initial claim that the source of moral judgments is conscience. Fundamental to conscience seem to be a collection of what Lewis calls “intuitions,” which are “inarguable,” and are “such that no good man has ever dreamed of doubting” (38). These intuitions include “ultimate preferences of the will for love rather than hatred and happiness rather than misery” (37). Combined with these “intuitions” are “process[es] of argument” by which one arranges the intuitions to convince someone that a particular act is wrong or right. Lewis says such processes are “highly arguable.” In addition, there are the facts themselves about which one raises moral questions or makes moral judgments. Finally, in order to exercise humility in judgment, there should be respect for previous authority as well, what we might prefer to call “tradition.”

Lewis states the process by which one comes to a reliable moral judgment as follows: (1) The facts are clear and little disputed; (2) the basic intuition is unmistakable; (3) the reasoning that connects the intuition to a particular judgment is strong; (4) there is agreement (or at least not disagreement) with authority. If the above four criteria are

met, then one can have “moral certainty” about an action.

Lewis then applies the four criteria to the question of pacifism and finds it wanting.

On the question of fact, Lewis suggests that all agree that “war is very disagreeable” (39). The contrary claim made by pacifists, he claims, is that “wars always do more harm than good.” Lewis rejects this point as “merely speculative.” There simply is no way to know whether wars always do more harm than good. (But Lewis does seem to go beyond this claim. He ventures that “history is full of useful wars as well as useless wars.”)

Is this, in fact, the fundamental factual claim that Christian pacifists make? One at first is tempted to reject it as a caricature, but Hays does, in fact, seem to say something like this. He says a “serious case can be made, that, on balance, history teaches that violence simply begets violence.” To the hoary test case of resistance to Hitler, Hays responds with his own question: “What if the Christians in Germany had refused to fight for Hitler?⁶ . . . The long history of Christian ‘just wars’ has wrought suffering past all telling, and there is no end in sight.” (Hays, 342).

But, rhetoric aside, I do not believe that the fundamental Christian pacifist claim about facts is that “wars always do more harm than good.” Rather, I think the fundamental pacifist claim is a rejection of the consequentialist ethics assumed in such a claim. That is, the rightness or wrongness of participating in war is not decided by the outcome of the decision in terms of its consequences in terms of tangible goods, but in terms of moral consequences. Some acts should not be done regardless of their possible benefits. One thinks, for example, of rape or torture or the deliberate taking of innocent human life. The historic ethical stance that I think even Lewis would have embraced would be that rape, torture, or the deliberate taking of innocent human life should be avoided

regardless of their tangible consequences in terms of concrete goods because such actions are inherently morally repugnant. I think the pacifist argument is somewhat the same in regard to acts of violence. And, of course, the facts that a Christian pacifist like Hays appeals to are not the facts of the perceived consequences of certain violent or non-violent actions, but the facts of a certain kind of community. The story initiated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the non-violent confrontation of and redemption of evil. Those who make this story their own must live as Jesus did.

On the question of intuition, Lewis suggests that the relevant intuition is that love is good and hatred is bad; helping is good and harming is bad. Since, however, Lewis has already argued that such intuitions alone cannot lead to moral judgment, the question is whether, as he puts it, "reasoning leads from this intuition to the Pacifist conclusion or not." It could, of course, be objected that reasoning could lead to almost any number of conclusions from such broad abstract starting points. Lewis's own attempt to apply reasoning to the general principles supplied by intuition makes a number of questionable moves.

So Lewis notes correctly that it is impossible to do good to "simply Man as such." One must do this or that particular good to this or that human being. If one does a particular good to one human being, one is automatically precluding doing it for another. Lewis concludes from this that the law of benevolence involves not doing some good to some human beings at some times. Lewis then draws some rather dubious conclusions from this distinction, such that helping some human beings necessarily will involve harming others. So, for example, Lewis suggests: "[T]his most often means helping A at the expense of B, who drowns when you pull A on board. And sooner or later, it involves helping A by actually doing some degree of violence to B." If, for example, B is intent on harming A,

one must either do nothing (which violates the principle of benevolence), or one must help A against B.

Lewis suggests that the pacifist can help A and remain a pacifist only by saying that violence is permissible short of killing, or by saying that the killing of individuals is permitted, but that the mass killing of war is not.

But surely Lewis's argument here shows a lack of imagination, and simply begs the question. First, he assumes that violence is the only way in which one can help A against B. The pacifist would argue, I think, that there are a number of ways in which one can help A that stop short of violence. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. demonstrated that non-violent resistance can be an effective method of resisting evil. A pacifist who is true to his or her convictions should certainly be as willing to impose his or her own self between the perpetrator of violence and his victims, as much as the one who would use violence would do so. And Lewis's assumption that violence is the only way to restrain wrong-doers is often shown not to be the case in real life. I remember, when I was a high school student, watching a middle-aged female school teacher physically stepping in between two brawling students who were twice her size, and pushing them apart. While they were willing to beat up each other, they were not willing to strike her, and the fight ended.

Lewis's one solid objection in the argument is his statement: "In some instances—for instance in a small isolated community, death may be the only efficient method of restraint." (42). It seems to me that the pacifist might well agree, but would perhaps suggest that one's own death in such a situation would be preferable to causing the death of the aggressor. The Christian pacifist, in particular, would point to the example of one who did love his enemies precisely by dying for them.

Finally, in this section, Lewis demonstrates a real misunderstanding of the motivations of those whom he

criticizes when he imagines that the goal of pacifists is political—to recruit enough people to the pacifist vision so that finally war will become impossible. Lewis responds to this goal by noting that only liberal societies tolerate pacifists, and that the most likely result of a large number of recruits to pacifism in such communities would be the inability of the liberal community to defend itself against those societies that do not tolerate pacifists. The long-term result, then, of a large number of recruits to the pacifist cause would be a world in which there were no pacifists.

Whatever one might think of a certain kind of utopian secular pacifism, Christian pacifism has usually been embraced by Christian sects who viewed themselves not as converting the greater society as a whole to their pacifist vision, but as providing a non-violent alternative to the violence of surrounding cultures, e.g., the Mennonites. Hays's Christian pacifism is just such an alternative. The vision of church he embraces is that of a "community of peace," an alternative to a church "deeply compromised" by nationalism, violence, and idolatry (Hays, 343).

This brings us to the final point of Lewis's critique of pacifism, that having to do with authority. And, here, I think Lewis scores a few points. First, Lewis notes correctly that the pacifist is at odds with human authority in general: "To be a Pacifist," he says, "I must part company with Homer and Vigil, with Plato and Aristotle, with Zarathustra and the *Bhagavad-Gita*, with Cicero and Montaigne, with Iceland and with Egypt." I would think that, for the Christian pacifist, parting ways with all of these pagan worthies would not be particularly disturbing. After all, the Christian community is supposed to be an alternative community to the ways of the world. Augustine most famously contrasted *The City of God* and *The City of Man*. However, Lewis points out correctly that the pacifist also parts company with Christian authority. He points to the Thirty-Nine Articles, to Protestants, to

Catholics, to Thomas Aquinas, to Augustine. Lewis is mistaken, however, when he claims that "All bodies that claim to be Christian—those who claim apostolic succession and accept the Creeds—have constantly blessed what they regarded as righteous arms." (Lewis, 48). While the majority of the Christian tradition has rejected pacifism, there have been exceptions, and highly honorable ones. One thinks, of course, of the historic peace churches like the Mennonites, but also, of celebrated individual Christians like St. Francis, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day. (Hays rightly points to these people as praiseworthy examples.) Just as significant, a good case can be made that the pre-Constantinian patristic church was pacifist. Origen, for example, argued against the pagan Celsus that Christians do not take up arms. They pray for the emperor. They will not fight for him. The office of soldier was one of the offices that early Christians had to renounce when they were baptized. Moreover, the exemption of clergy from military service seems to harken back to an understanding that bloodshed was incompatible with a perfect following of Christ. Nonetheless, Lewis has a point. The vast majority of Christian history and tradition has seen the soldier's role as an honorable one, and when Christians were no longer persecuted by the state, they did not hesitate to take public office, and a new role that did not exist before came into being, the Christian soldier.

This brings us to Lewis's last point, which, if he were making a Christian argument, should, I think, have been his first. That is, what do the biblical texts actually say? Lewis concedes that the "whole case for Christian Pacifism" rests on "certain Dominical utterances," specifically, the commands in the Sermon on the Mount not to resist evil and to turn the other cheek. (Lewis, 48). Interestingly, Lewis rejects the possible interpretation that Jesus' command is hyperbole, a way of saying that we should "put up with a lot." Lewis thinks that the text means "exactly what it says," but with certain reservations that the hearer would understand without having

to be told so (49). Specifically, Lewis understands the command of non-resistance are absolute when understood to apply to injuries to myself and to any temptation I might have to retaliate. But the problem changes when other factors intervene. Lewis asks whether Jesus' hearers would have understood him to mean that one should simply stand aside and do nothing if a homicidal maniac attempted to murder a third party. Again, Lewis's argument supposes that the only alternative to allowing a homicidal maniac to murder his victim is to use violence, but his reading is, I think, a possible reading of the text.

Lewis says: "I think the meaning of the words was perfectly clear—Insofar as you are simply an angry man who has been hurt, mortify your anger and do not hit back." Lewis, then, interprets the command of non-resistance to apply only to individuals facing personal injury. He suggests that insofar as Jesus' hearers were "private people in a disarmed nation," they would not have been thinking of war. "The fractions of daily life among villagers were more likely to be in their minds." (50).

Lewis believes that this interpretation also harmonizes better with John the Baptist's commands to soldiers and to Jesus' praise of a Roman centurion. He notes that Paul speaks approvingly of the magistrate's use of the sword (Rom. 13:4) as does 1 Peter 2:14. He says little else to make his case beyond suggesting that the pacifist interpretation of Jesus invents a Jesus whom no one has ever imagined before, a reconstructed "historical Jesus" that would be contrary to Christian teaching.

What to make of Lewis's argument against the kind of Christian pacifism we find in Richard Hays? Hays has argued that the just war tradition is really a case of "natural law" based on reason rather than a case of listening to the biblical texts, and Lewis's argument is surely such an example. I have argued that insofar as he based his case on reason as such, his

criticisms do not really meet their target. I think that Hays could easily match his points one for one. Interestingly, I think Lewis begins to make headway when he begins to address the question of biblical exegesis, for it is here that I think Hays is vulnerable. In making a distinction between "private individuals" and magistrates, Lewis picks up on what I think is a real vulnerability in the kind of argument Hays makes. I think Lewis mistaken when he thinks that there is no corporate dimension to Jesus' command against non-resistance. In a culture where Zealot uprising represented a real option against Roman oppression, and in which such uprisings led to Israel's eventual destruction in 70 AD, Jesus' command not to resist evil, to "go the extra mile," and to "turn the other cheek" had real corporate relevance. In contrast to contemporary revolutionaries, the early Christian community responded to Roman oppression with non-violence. Yet not with capitulation. The Christian soldier of the first century is the martyr, not the zealot. If the modern parallel to the zealots might have been revolutionary radicals of the 1960's like the Weathermen or the SDS, one could certainly argue that the Southern Christian Leadership Conference or Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee were parallels to the early Christians. Are there contemporary parallels to Pontius Pilate or Nero?

Yet Lewis does strike a point with his references to Christian respect for magistrates, and here Hays is at his weakest. Hays seems most uncomfortable when dealing with New Testament references to Roman soldiers. He compares them to other converts, such as tax collectors and prostitutes. He fails to note, however, that the New Testament presumes something questionable about these other occupations. Zacchaeus offers to make right what he has defrauded. The woman caught in adultery is told to "Go, and sin no more." While John the Baptist commands tax collectors to collect only what they are authorized, he merely tells soldiers to not "extort money" and to be content with their wages. Cornelius the Centurion is the

church's first Gentile convert, and Paul does not hesitate to use a military escort to provide for his safety (Acts 23:12-35). Coupled with the statements in Rom. 12 and 1 Peter about the magistrate, the New Testament seems to make a distinction between the sword as used by the magistrate to restrain evil-doers and the sword as an instrument of violence.

Lewis will not help us much here, however, so we turn to an earlier writing of Oliver O'Donovan, one of contemporary Anglicanism's foremost ethicists. O'Donovan has recently written a book entitled *The Just War Revisited*.⁷ The book, while a masterful discussion of historic just war principles—authority, discrimination, proportionality—says virtually nothing about biblical exegesis. For that reason, it seems to confirm Hays's criticism that just war theory is a case of "natural law" ethics, not really faithful to the biblical material.

However, O'Donovan wrote an earlier essay entitled "In Pursuit of a Christian View of War,"⁸ and in this essay he particularly addresses the biblical texts, and does so in such a way that challenges Hays where he is weakest.

O'Donovan raises a fundamental parallel between the soldier and the magistrate. Both have unpleasant duties insofar as both exercise power over other people's destinies, and they do so "not by invitation and with consent, but in the face of violent resistance or sullen reluctance." O'Donovan believes that agents of the state have a duty to do "real harm" to those who really object, and must do so, because "they deserve it." The Christian gospel, on the other hand, tells us that victory comes through renouncing power and accepting suffering, not through making others to suffer. So there is a real problem: "How, then, can the duties of the soldier and the magistrate ever live with the believer's response to the Gospel of Christ?" (O'Donovan, 5).

Hays's answer to this question is clear. They cannot. He writes: "Though the governing authority bears the sword to execute God's wrath . . . , that is not the role of believers." And later, "Christians would have to renounce positions of power and influence insofar as the exercise of such positions becomes incompatible with the teaching and example of Jesus." (Hays, 331, 342). It needs to be clear that the kind of pacifism that Hays endorses precludes Christians from exercising government authority, and must do so. Not only may Christians not be soldiers, it is hard to see how they could be police officers, judges, mayors, perhaps even school teachers.

This, I think, is the fatal flaw of Hays's account, and it is here where O'Donovan makes his case. O'Donovan and Hays both agree that governments must rely on violence. Nonetheless, O'Donovan believes that the New Testament teaches that political authority, "though not the final answer of God who adopts men as their sons, nevertheless has divine authorization as a provisional arrangement for a world not yet redeemed." (O'Donovan, 8). O'Donovan's case against Christian pacifism rests on the New Testament case for divine sanction of government.

O'Donovan argues, first, that government is a divine institution. He cites Rom. 13:4 to the effect that the magistrate is "God's servant for your good." Government is necessary in a world of "house-breakers," but even in a utopian world in which there were too few resources, where individuals were less than wise, and less than impartial.

Second, he argues, that in the New Testament, governments exist to fulfill requirements of justice, "to execute God's wrath on the wrong-doer." O'Donovan argues that New Testament writers measured government by moral standards that they inherited from the Old Testament. They thus not only assumed that government had divine institution, but that it could become demonic. Nonetheless, the New Testament assumes that

justice is the special task of political authority, defending the rights of the weak against the oppression of the strong.

Third, there is an inherent contradiction between the Kingdom of God and human political relationships. (O'Donovan cites Luke 22: 25 ff.) The Mosaic ideal was that government could be performed through divine rule. The New Testament, however, looks to the eschaton where Christ will reign as the new Moses, the new David. Consequently, government in this world must be a compromise, where justice is a "tragic virtue." The question is raised whether Christians can ever wield such limited political authority. In the New Testament, it is assumed that Christians will meet justice as those who are the powerless, but O'Donovan suggests that, given a changed political situation, it would be consistent for Christians to exercise political authority, recognizing its inherent ambiguity.

O'Donovan states that governments cannot exercise judgment without violence in that "the task God has given them is to control violent men." He defines government as "that institution in a community which is generally recognized to have the right to use force when all else fails." (12).

The "just war theory," O'Donovan notes, rests on making a case to interpret acts of war by analogy with acts of civil government, not justifying war-making, but bringing it under the restraint of moral standards that apply to other acts of government. The criteria of just war—proper authority, just cause, just motive, discrimination, proportionality, are, we might add, arguments of natural reason. However, O'Donovan notes that these criteria exist so that important distinctions are not overlooked, so that the state does not become a gang of terrorists (15). (One of the weaknesses of Hays's account is that insofar as he assumes that all use of violence is illegitimate, he does not distinguish between governments that initiate violence, e.g., Nazi Germany, and those governments that restore justice by resisting that violence.) O'Donovan

spends the rest of the essay examining these criteria, and in his recent book does so more thoroughly. His arguments here need not detain us.

Does O'Donovan's account for just war meet the case against something like Hays's argument for Christian pacifism? I think it does. O'Donovan raises the crucial question that Hays's approach can deal with only uncomfortably: What role does civil government play in the Scriptures? While Old and New Testaments both recognize that governments can become demonic, they also recognize that government plays a limited and necessary role, and that role is a good one. Government exists to bring about what justice there can be in a fallen world. Because this world is not yet the kingdom of God, government is necessary. In a world that is not the kingdom of God, force is sometimes necessary.

This does not mean that we can simply disregard Hays's reading of the New Testament texts as irrelevant. Hays makes a superb case for understanding the New Testament community as a community that must live a certain kind of life, modeled on the character of Jesus, who chose the cross over the sword. At the same time, however, the church is not the only community. Both Old and New Testaments recognize governments as having a limited role in executing justice, a role that the church cannot fulfill.⁹ It seems, then, that Hays's reading stands in light of a certain correction, something like Luther's distinction between the two kingdoms, O'Donovan's reading points in something like this direction.

However, this does not get the Christian advocate of just war off the hook when it comes to answering the question of whether a Christian can partake in war. Where the Christian pacifist can simply dismiss any Christian participation in violence as inconsistent with what it means to follow Jesus, the Christian who intends to follow the just war tradition has a moral obligation actually to apply the criteria. Hays is

right that Christians have been particularly compromised by repeatedly participating in wars that do not come close to meeting just war criteria. In our contemporary setting, one needs to ask questions like: Can a pre-emptive war ever be consistent with just war criteria? Is it permissible to engage in war on the basis of a fear of what one's enemies "might do"? What are a nation's obligations when it goes to war based on presumptions about "weapons of mass destruction" that turn out not to exist after all? Are weapons that indiscriminately kill civilians and non-civilians alike like cluster bombs and land mines permissible to use in warfare? If it is permissible to invade a hostile nation for its ostensible possession of weapons of mass destruction, how can we justify our own possession of such weapons? If torture is inherently immoral, have Christians already failed when they argue about whether actions like water-boarding really constitute torture? Is it morally permissible to imprison people for years without trial and without charges because we have determined ahead of time that they must be terrorists when it is only the trials and charges that we have denied them that could determine whether they really are? The list is a long, and uncomfortable one.

1 Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996).

2 John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd. Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

3 Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peacable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

4 C. S. Lewis, "Why I am not a Pacifist," *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1980), 33-53.

5 C. S. Lewis, "On Ethics," *Christian Reflections* (Grand

Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 44-56.

[6](#) One of the students in my ethics class pointed out that there were Christians in Nazi Germany who did refuse to fight for Hitler – the Confessing Church. One of those Christians, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, notoriously participated in an unsuccessful plot to assassinate Hitler.

[7](#) Oliver O'Donovan, *The Just War Revisited* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[8](#) Oliver O'Donovan, *In Pursuit of a Christian View of War* (Grove Books, 1977).

[9](#) One of the crucial distinctions in the modern Reformed political thought following in the footsteps of Abraham Kuyper is the notion of “sphere sovereignty”— that there are different spheres of authority within a community, and that what is permissible in one sphere is not necessarily permissible in another. So, families, schools, work places, churches, and governments each operate within their own spheres. Problems occur when the borders between these communities is not respected. Current attempts by court justices to redefine marriage to include same-sex relationships would seem to be just such a case of boundary violation. On sphere sovereignty, see especially David T. Koyzis, *Political Visions and Illusions: A Survey and Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003).

Using Caesar's Sword to

Promote Christian Marriage

There has been a discussion at TitusOneNine about the movement among Christians and other groups in California – including Hindus and Muslims – to organization in opposition to same-sex marriage. At least one individual who claims to be an orthodox Christian is opposed to this because it means Christians are "manipulating Caesar to force Christian sacraments on the empire. . . . Conservative christianity cannot be salt and light by means of Caesar's sword."

This is my response.

In the history of Christian social thought, there have been at least the following models of the relation between church and state:

1) Separatist—the model of radical Anabaptism. The most vivid contemporary example might be the Amish, who, as much as possible, live separately from the rest of the culture, do not participate in politics, do not bear arms, live in their own communities.

2) Government as corrective of sin—Augustinian/Lutheran. In a fallen world, the primary responsibility of government is to punish evildoers and provide a safe space for the Church to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. Luther's "two swords" analogy illustrates the distinction. There are some things the state does that the church does not do, and vice versa. The state enforces law and executes punishment on criminals; the church does not.

3) Promotion of the Common Good—Thomist/Aristotelian/Hooker's Anglicanism. "It is not good for the man to be alone." God created human beings to be social animals. For humans to live together, there needs to be government to enable cooperation to promote human flourishing. The state not only punishes wrong-doers, but also takes positive steps to enhance human

community and preserve the orders of creation. For example, anyone who uses the internet or drives an automobile on public streets is benefiting from a state that takes positive measures to promote the common good.

4) Transformationist–Calvinist. Inasmuch as possible, the state should work to transform society to promote Christian values, and anticipate the Kingdom of God. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech is a prime example. As I was watching the speeches at the Democratic convention last night, and I heard Ted Kennedy preach "Health care is a right, not a privilege!," I was aware of just how much this Calvinist vision is alive in American culture.

5) Catholic subsidiarity/Reformed sphere sovereignty. (David Koyzis discusses this in his *Political Visions and Illusions* (InterVarsity, 2003)). There are numerous groups and cultures within a given society—churches, government, businesses, voluntary organizations, clubs, guilds, schools, etc. Each has its own realm of integrity and problems happen when groups trespass their bounds. The realms of the family or the schools, for example, are not the realms of either the state or the church; they have a genuine integrity of their own that both state and church need to respect.

6) Secularist separatism. Religion is a private matter of individuals and voluntary organizations. The realm of government is the realm of the public. The government should respect the right of religions to keep their own rules within their private environs, but the churches have no right to impose their private morality on the state or culture as a whole, and, if necessary, the state can pass laws that affect public matters that private voluntary organizations like churches must respect. So, for example, a Christian wedding photographer can be fined for refusing to photograph same-sex blessings. Catholic adoption agencies cannot discriminate against unmarried or gay couples.

There are, of course, other models.

Of the above six models, only 1) and 6) would suggest that the church has no business pushing against same-sex marriage. In any society of which Christians are citizens, Christians have the same privilege and duty to act in the public square as do other citizens. My own leanings are toward models 3) and 5). I would argue that heterosexual marriage is neither a creation of the state nor of the church, but is an ordinance of creation that pre-existed both. From a theological view, Genesis 1 and 2 is decisive. From an anthropological and historical view, it is clear that the heterosexual family predates not only government, but also cities and cultures. It was the heterosexual family that enabled cities, cultures, and eventually governments to be formed.

If the purpose of the government is to promote the common good, then the government has a moral obligation to promote the prospering of the heterosexual family, and to discourage cultural movements that would harm it. At the same time, because the family is a separate sphere, the government has to respect its freedom in that sphere. The government, for example, has no right to create a new definition of family by blessing same-sex unions. That is a violation of the family's sphere of sovereignty. Because there needs to be some kind of coordination for human cooperation to take place, and there needs to both positive and negative enforcement of activities that benefit or harm the family, the government (by default) can establish laws to regulate such things as legal age of marriage, regulations of divorce, whether or not polygamy is permitted, compulsory childhood education, specific penalties for such specific violations of marital good as incest, domestic abuse, sexual predation, etc.

Similarly, the church also has the right to decide within its own sphere what are the requirements of Christian marriage, but the church neither creates marriage, nor has the right to

change it. The church can forbid divorce to its members, specify who can or cannot be married within a church, but cannot bless things that would violate the very definition of marriage, e.g., same-sex unions.

Insofar as Christians are citizens, they certainly have not only the right, but the obligation to promote legislation that helps the family to flourish, and to resist legislation that harms it.

To complain that such legislation is coercive is to miss the point that all legislation is coercive. If the government passes a law that says I must drive on the right side of the street, I am interfering with the freedom of those of British ancestry who might prefer to drive on the left side of the street, but I am also preventing the deaths that would inevitably result if everyone was allowed the freedom to simply drive on whatever side of the street they preferred. Those who cannot have their sexual relationships blessed by the church or the state certainly have restrictions on their freedom to do what they wish, but this is true not only of same-sex couples, but of all whose sexual activity falls outside the norms of what it properly means to be family—certain consanguinous relationships, underage relationships, polygamy, etc.