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JESUS AND PACIFISM: A CORRESPONDENCE

MYLES WERNTZ AND ANDREW FULFORD

Following the publication of Andrew Fulford's Jesus and Pacifism: An Exegetical and Historical Examination, *Dr. Myles Werntz contacted Fulford with the proposal that the two of them undertake a correspondence on the subject. Dr. Werntz is the T.B. Maston Chair of Christian Ethics at Logsdon Seminary at Hardin-Simmons University. A theologian in the evangelical pacifist tradition, he hoped for a critical and yet irenic engagement on relevant topics, and on the book, with a focus on identifying points of common ground. The editors are pleased to offer their correspondence in this special issue of* Ad Fontes.

LETTER I

Andrew,

Before we begin, I have to offer a word of appreciation for your book (and to *Ad Fontes* for the chance to have such an interesting kind of conversation!) While I don't share all of its conclusions, it raises a number of important points concerning Christian reflection about war that I think are important to get out front. Most often when the "pacifism versus just war" conversation occurs, it's forgotten that these positions share more than they don't: the Scriptures, the presumption that God is at work in the world, respect for the role of prudential reason, commitment to care for the suffering, etc. To be honest, when the possibility of doing this came up, I was a bit reticent, as I've been on a number of panels as of late where the trope of divergence was assumed rather than critically engaged.

Rather than focus on your book, I'd like to start off by asking about one of the key premises of your presentation of just war: that just war coheres with the natural law, and that Scripture shares the assumptions of that natural law. As such, any teaching of Scripture which could be read as pointing toward pacifism must be refused on this basis: the natural law requires certain tenets of self-defense, the validity of punishment, and care for the suffering which do not comport with a pacifist reading of Scripture.

WHAT IF THE PRESUMPTION THAT SCRIPTURE MUST COMPORT TO NATURAL LAW ASSERTIONS SUCH AS THOSE OF CICERO AND GROTIUS IS SIMPLY WRONG?

This is a portion of the conversation which, to be honest, pacifism has not often known what to do with. Certain modifications within pacifism in the 20th century, such as Glen Stassen's "just peacemaking" movement, attempted to offer a realist take on the theme—that pacifism must attend to the need for public order, punishment of wrongdoing, and defense of the innocent. Stassen's own work tends to rely too little upon theological assumptions and too heavily upon social scientific ones for my taste, but I think his instincts were correct: our theologizing about war must attend to concrete situations, or more properly, to the creaturely conditions of creation.

But allow me to put the question to you directly: what if the presumption that Scripture must comport to natural law assertions such as those of Cicero and Grotius tttis simply wrong? One of the key tenets of Christianity from the beginning is that, while Christ certainly is one of us—fully human and fully creaturely—what is restored to the world in Christ is a different kind of "natural" than we had assumed. Put differently, what we take to be the "supernatural" is in some real sense what is properly "natural" to us as creatures. Put differently, when Christ enjoins us to turn the other cheek, love our enemies, and the like, these are not teachings which must fit into our framework of what counts as natural; rather, Christ is restoring what is truly natural to us as creatures. As Christians have put it for centuries, sin is not properly "natural" to us, but the most unnatural thing there is: a corrupted twist on ourselves as originally

intended by God. From one vantage point, then, the unbreakable assumption of natural law regarding self-defense, or in some variations of it, the inviolability of national sovereignty, are making virtues out of deficiencies. If, in Christ, we see what is truly natural to us as creatures, then the teachings of Christ which would point in the direction of pacifism are not teachings to be modified within a natural law framework; rather, they are the framework which calls into question what we assume on the basis of reason alone to be natural.

Thoughts?

—*Myles*

LETTER II

Myles,

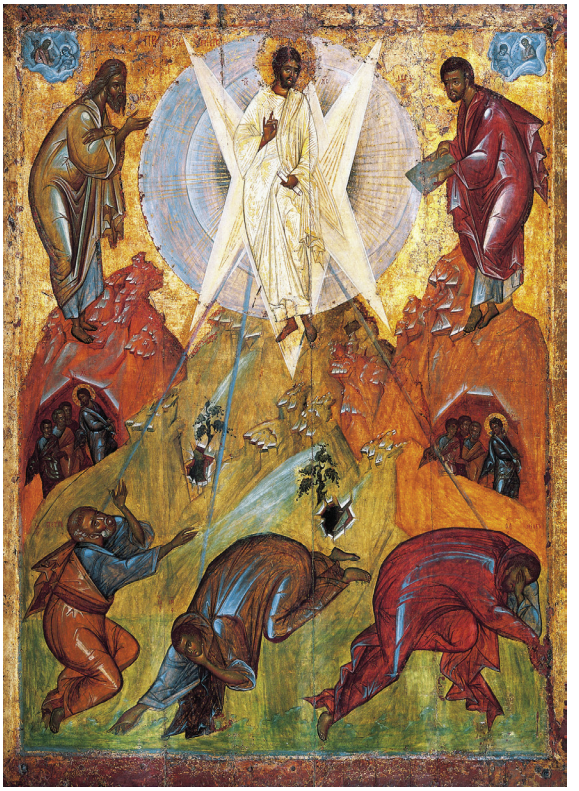
Thanks for your message, and the spirit in which it was given. I agree that pacifist and non-pacifist Christians have a great deal in common, and in the spirit of irenicism, I believe the differences are resolvable given our shared starting points. In fact, my book tried to focus as much as it could on common ground, rather than beg the question against the pacifist position (as, for example, arguments from consequences often do).

For the sake of getting the dialectic as far along as possible, I'll just get right to it. Though I could go in different directions, I'll stick to the main point you make as the place to start the conversation. Your main argument is to problematize not the existence of natural law, but rather our knowledge of it apart from the revelation of Christ. As a pacifist, you also regard this revelation as pointing to pacifism. Correlatively, you conclude that self-defense and the inviolability of national sovereignty are examples of sinful deficiency, and not natural order.

My first response would be to raise a question about one of your premises: that what Christ reveals and teaches is at odds with what we already know about natural law. It doesn't seem to me that it is. What evidence would you suggest for that premise? Without a doubt there are many New Testament texts that suggest that Jesus is a unique and central mode of divine revelation (e.g., Heb 1:1-3). But this does not entail that nothing is known of natural law prior to his coming. Second, I would suggest there is some evidence against your thesis in Scripture, and even in Jesus' own teaching. Paul in Romans 1:21 and 1:32 teaches that the Gentiles, without the revelation given to Israel or in Christ, know a number of things about God's intentions for the human race, about natural law. Jesus, further, in many of his teachings seems to repeat the content of what Paul says the Gentiles already know: e.g., the Greatest and Second Greatest Commandments (Matt 22:37-40) do not seem to require anything different than does the created order according to Rom 1:21 and 32. I'd argue that all of Jesus' moral teachings are actually just implications of these two commands, but maybe you would say otherwise. Nevertheless, it seems indisputable that Jesus assumes that people know at least some directives of natural law prior to receiving his revelation.

Looking forward to your reply,

—*Andrew*



THEOPHANES THE GREEK, THE TRANSFIGURATION, 15TH C.

LETTER III

Andrew,

With respect to the content of the natural law, and what of it humans know independently of divine revelation, I agree that there's some universal (though I'm hesitant to make too much of that term) knowledge of Creator by creature, at least in a negative sense. For example, in your citations from Romans, the examples Paul uses are in the negative: what is to be avoided, what is to not be done (idolatry, murder, hating one's parents, etc.). Unless we're going to say that the knowledge of God is attained solely through conscience and reason (apart from revelation), the natural law provides that which is to be avoided, and *some* clarity about what *is* to be done.

I don't want to get too far afield in the discussion of natural law, so let me turn it back toward our conversation in this way: what is approved of by natural law are precepts built largely upon what is to be avoided, not infallible knowledge of what *is* to be done. This is why Jesus' teaching in Matthew in particular is so extraordinary: even in the face of what seems to be very clear teaching (the Law of Moses and the received rabbinical tradition), Jesus provides his followers with very different instruction, which at times amplifies and at other times sets aside even that Law which seems to be crystal clear! I take it that this is in fact one of the main arguments of Matthew – that as crazy as the teachings of Jesus are, he is the one who is superior to Moses and who is to be followed as such. Whether in refuting Satan by the Law, or going into the wilderness, or going up on the mountain to teach, or in Moses confirming Jesus' ministry in the transfiguration, the whole of Matthew does not seem to be pointed toward seeing Jesus as fine-tuning certain legislative commendations of violence, but restricting them further than Moses had done.

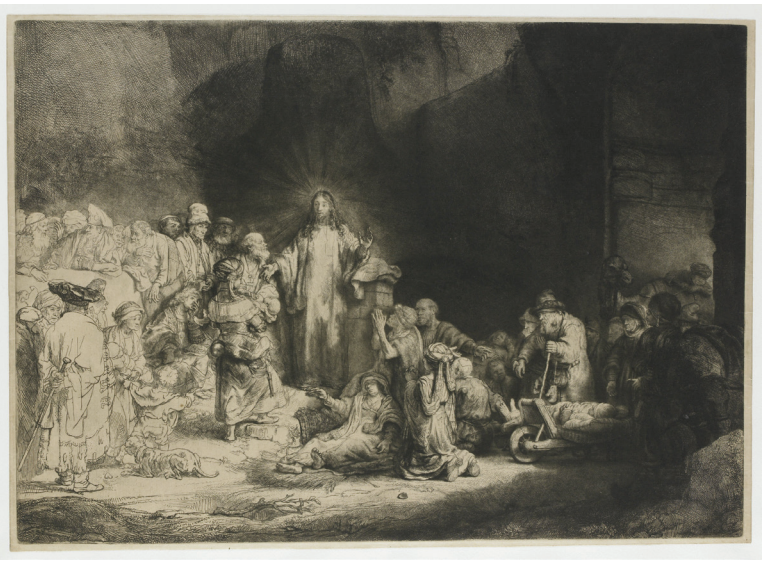
Put differently, in light of Jesus we cannot go behind Jesus but only forward from Jesus, the Law having been our teacher and keeper but not our present guide on this point.

—*Myles*

LETTER IV

Myles,

It seems to me that any negative moral knowledge we have, regardless of source, *ipso facto* implies positive knowledge. If we know, e.g., that it's not good to be faithless, we know just by reflecting upon the meaning of those terms that it's good to be faithful. I assume that this is what you're getting at by the "some clarity" about positive obligations. Paul, anyway, suggests the Gentiles perceive some (positive) truths about God that have moral consequences, and are guilty because they contradict those moral consequences in their thought and behaviour. The issue of infallibility in means of knowledge is interesting, but I'm not sure it makes much of a difference here. That is, unless you're implying that the infallibility of knowledge received through Jesus should overcome the fallible knowledge the Gentiles receive apart from special revelation (indeed, through conscience and reason, though we also receive special revelation through the operations of our minds). But that isn't relevant when we already acknowledge that the Gentiles have real knowledge, regardless of the fallibility of the source of knowledge, since truth can't contradict truth, and God won't deny in his special revelation what he has revealed through the created order.



REMBRANDT, THE HUNDRED-GUILDER PRINT (CHRIST PREACHING), 1947-9

But, returning to the content of Jesus' teaching, I think the dilemma that has been set up here is a false one, because I don't see a convincing reason to think that Jesus gives commands that contradict the content of the natural law. Nor do I think that he gave commands that would contradict those of Moses that repeat the content of natural law. I tried to discuss the apparent counter-evidence to this claim in the book, including evidence from the Gospel of Matthew. But to sum it up, I think Jesus' statement that he did not come to abolish the law and the prophets entails the truth of my perspective. The Mosaic covenant has been brought to its climax, but the Torah in its descriptive force, including its record of what God did in fact command Israel through Moses, is as authoritative as ever. And insofar as the Law meant to protect the original created order, its commands still reflect the natural law, and are valid summaries of it. It's for this reason that Jesus said "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven."

—Andrew

LETTER V

Andrew,

I think it's more accurate, in the case of Jesus' teachings, to say that Christ perfects the natural law, to crib from Aquinas. This seems to be the force of Matthew, but not in the way that Aquinas argues. For in "perfecting" the natural law, Jesus teaches in a way which at times counters our sensibilities about what is "natural" to us. To be sure, Jesus does not come to destroy the Law, but to complete it—but we find that to complete the Law does not mean to maintain it! If the Law was meant to be a fence, a teacher, a guide, then to be sure it does not countermand the ordering of creation, but it also does not speak to the fullness of what it means to live well as God's creature within creation either. This is what I meant in my opening statement with respect to Christ restoring to us our "natural" sensibilities, in ways which I think are obscured by recourse to certainty about natural law as our baseline: if Christ names what is truly natural, then some of our ways of thinking about natural requirements surely do not square with Christ's teachings. There are any number of examples that we could name here (family obligations, financial prudence, Sabbatical practice), but at stake in our discussion particularly is the question of violence by followers of Christ.

To turn our discussion in a different direction: in your book, you specifically name John Howard Yoder and Richard Hays as pacifist exemplars. In Nigel Biggars' *In Defense of War*, his opening chapter "Against Pacifism" takes the triumvirate of Yoder/Hays/Hauerwas as the stand-in for all Christian pacifist practice (I have criticized him on this very point in the Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics in 2015). Do you take them to be exemplary of what you mean by Christian pacifism, and if so, what specifically do you find wanting in their arguments? The "neo-Anabaptist" trajectory is to be sure the most prominent stream of Christian pacifism, but not the only one which offers a cogent theological account.

—Myles

LETTER VI

Myles,

Regarding the relation of Jesus' teaching to natural law: this seems to me to bring us full circle back to my first reply. You (I believe, rightly)

want to be able to affirm the existence of natural law independent of and prior to the incarnation and the explicit teaching of Jesus, but also contend that, in effect, our knowledge of it is so unreliable that we have to know what Jesus teaches before we can rightly know much of its content. My original reply moves in the opposite direction: the NT teaches not only that there is a natural law, but that even unbelievers know it, at least in basic principles and general outline, though undoubtedly not perfectly in every application, prior to the revelation of Jesus. So there can be a baseline of naturally revealed ethical principles prior to someone coming to faith. Now, it's possible that people can misunderstand the implications of nature, but then it's also possible that they can misunderstand what Jesus meant (as our conversation itself shows, as one of us is by necessity incorrect about Jesus' teaching in relation to pacifism). It further seems to me that in, e.g., Romans 1:32 Paul assumes people know they are worthy of punishment for their sins, so special revelation confirms not only the knowledge of natural law in general, but natural knowledge of the the moral licitness of retributive justice in particular.

That being said, dialectically we are unlikely to advance as interlocutors, or as representatives of longstanding traditions, without engaging with the other pole of the disagreement: i.e., the teachings of Jesus which are purported to correct our natural "sensibilities". Of the three you allude to (familial obligations, financial prudence, and Sabbatical practice), I see nothing in what Jesus said that contradicts what could be discovered about morality from rational reflection upon human nature and the structure of the cosmos. Perhaps you could elaborate on why you think otherwise.

Regarding what represents pacifism: I do take that triumvirate as the strongest representatives of the most prominent stream, but I tried to be careful not to take the Yoderian position as the only possible one. This was the main reason I tried to talk about various possible rationales (I gave seven in the book), rather than specific thinkers, and this approach was motivated by Yoder's own careful delineation of the various kinds of pacifisms that have appeared in history. Though my knowledge is less direct about what we could call "classic" peace Anabaptism, it seems to me that at least some of that tradition relies more heavily on what I would call a divine positive law rationale for non-violence. That is, it's a tradition that (at least in some proponents?) accepts violence as morally legitimate, but believes that God has given an additional law to believers that says they may not participate in what is an intrinsically morally legitimate type of action. In other words, I tried to consider as many different kinds of reasons as could be given, though still in general types (as opposed to, say, engaging with every possible theological argument for pacifism). But perhaps I'm still missing a significant option, in which case I would certainly appreciate correction.

I SEE NOTHING IN WHAT JESUS SAID THAT CONTRADICTS WHAT COULD BE DISCOVERED ABOUT MORALITY FROM RATIONAL REFLECTION UPON HUMAN NATURE AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE COSMOS.

—Andrew

LETTER VII

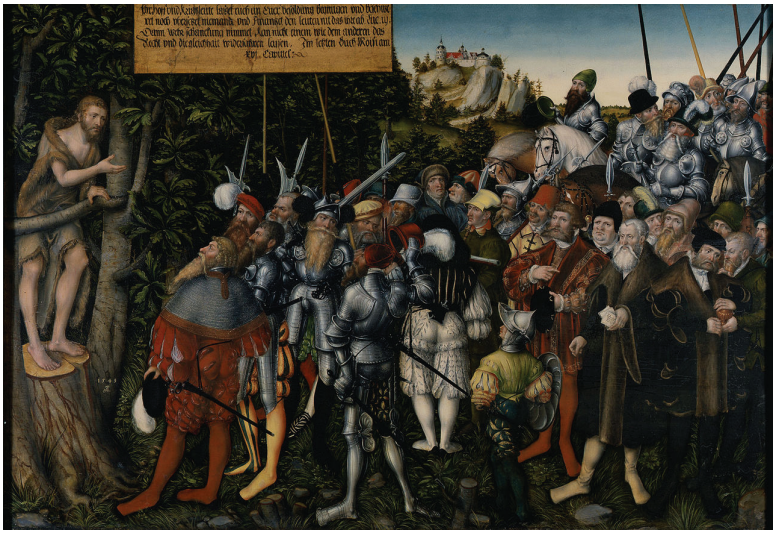
Andrew,

One more on natural law, and then to the next topic:

With respect to the natural law and pacifism, you've linked together two concepts that I think perhaps need not be linked, or at least not in the manner you do: the natural law and retributive justice. It's certainly common among many pacifists to extend the pacifist critique to a critique of punishment *as such*, i.e. against capital punishment, incarceration, etc.—and while I have some sympathies with that fam-

ily of commitments, I think it's a mistake to link those two together. Pacifism is not first and foremost about a rejection of punishment, or an anarchic impulse against law as such, but as I've been suggesting, a reordering of life in a way such that war is not an activity in which Christians participate.

Here's what I mean by this: in the 16th century Anabaptist writings, you find them holding together both the need for discipline and correction, and the refusal of killing for the same reason. To be a member of the body of Christ is to be a part of a baptized community which is not concerned *first and foremost* with public services, but with how those might cohere to one's commitments as a Christian. They exercised the ban and communal discipline, and pacifism too, accordingly, without a contradiction. Modern pacifists most frequently locate the heart of pacifism as not commitment to Christ in baptism, but in opposition to violence, which means then that they balk at the parts about the ban and discipline, seeing those as violent. Accordingly, one can certainly be a pacifist and a fan of public order, without thinking than killing needs to be a part of promoting that order. What this means practically is a different part of the conversation which I'm sure we'll get to, but to be clear: punishment and pacifism are only incompatible if you think that the heart of Christian pacifism is "not violence" instead of baptism.



LUCAS CRANACH THE YOUNGER, THE SERMON OF JOHN THE BAPTIST, 1549

By beginning with baptism, we begin to see that commitment to Christ means things with respect to family structure ("putting one's hand to the plow and not looking back", Jesus' distinguishing between his family of origin and his disciples, etc.), and finances ("giving to them that ask", "not thinking of tomorrow", etc.) in ways which do not comport to natural impulses. I don't know any way around that: Jesus himself was criticized for economic imprudence and family disregard. This is not to say that Jesus doesn't take care of his mother from the cross, but he does so not by reifying the family structure (giving her to one of Mary's other children), but to his disciple—again, that Christ reorganizes our understanding of natural goods, without destroying the good as such. With respect to conflict, the same holds: he addresses conflict as a given, but apart from recourse to killing.

With respect to the sources of pacifism, my worry with the Yoder/Hays/Hauerwas triumvirate as the representative edge of Christian pacifism is that it does some things well (reorienting our attention to our identity as people of baptism), but doesn't attend well to other things, such as the role of violence in civil society. Hauerwas et al have largely been agnostic on this point, though Yoder in his later writings tries to show that pragmatically pacifism can provide a better basis for civil society than structures rooted in violence—but he's only somewhat convincing in some of those attempts, in my opinion.

The plurality of Christian thought on pacifism is important here, and Yoder is only somewhat helpful on this score—his *Nevertheless* (1971) is an amalgam of too many humanist options and not nearly thick enough on contemporary voices, even in his own day. Case in point: he's endlessly talking about Tolstoi, but does little with the Civil Rights movements or with Catholic options, as he sees them as "Constantinian", as attempts to steer the ship of society rather than being faithful to Christ fundamentally.

The one thinker (whom Yoder largely ignores, apart from one chapter in *Nonviolence: A Brief History*) who seems to speak most to the concerns you've articulated is Dorothy Day, who in her writings directs us to the ways in which the person of Christ is the fundamental human, such that the full vocation of what it is to be human can only be fulfilled supernaturally in Christ. For her, this pertained not only with respect to the spiritual telos of humanity, but to everyday human participation in the world as well: Christ is the capstone and transfigurer of what we mean by "natural". This is what drove her to be involved in agrarian movements, cooperative housing ventures, adoption of the common purse, sharing of resources, and pacifism. In Day's approach to the supernatural completing and transfiguring the natural, I think we find an approach to pacifism which satisfies some of your concerns about abandoning the natural law. Day was not unrealistic about conflict or the degradation which sin brings to the world, which is why she added to her vision of Christian practice notions of patience and suffering as necessary parts of our obedience, something Yoder rarely if ever writes about.

—*Myles*

LETTER IX

Myles,

As far as I understand it, the rationale you describe for pacifism as different from the anti-punishment and Yoderian one, would definitely fall under my divine positive law category. In this case, "based on baptism" seems to mean based on commitment to Jesus and his specially revealed commands, and thus it seems that it's his teachings that are the foundation of the practice; moreover, since you're contrasting this with an anti-punishment logic, this view takes his commandments to be something beyond what human nature/natural

law itself would require of us. That is, it's not clear how punishment could be permitted but not capital punishment if we were just going by what we could perceive in human nature; but if the latter kind of punishment is prohibited based directly on a verbal command of (and the practical example of) Jesus, then it's intelligible.

On the teachings of Jesus, a few thoughts. Regarding family structure, it seems to me his saying about putting "the hand to plow and not looking back" is not that radical in one way. Nature teaches us to seek to do God's will above all else, even family obligations; Jesus gives us more specific content about God's will, but that that could come to us is itself compatible with natural law. Further, his specific content does not require someone to disregard their family unless the family is requiring the disciple to sin, and in that case natural law would itself tell the individual to disregard the family anyway. He does distinguish between family of origin and disciples, but to what end? Not, I think, to override what we know about family obligations from nature. When you say Jesus is criticized for family disregard, I'm not sure exactly what you're referring to. But I'd ask: does nature itself support this judgment, or just the morally defective cultural customs of his time? And when he looks out for his mother, it's not clear to me he's really changing anything nature teaches about the family. Fictive kinship, most widely known in the practice of adoption, was already a reality before Jesus, and so was the wider community taking care of the needy. Further, Mary's children already had obligations to her, so they can't take over for Jesus' obligations in the way that a non-family member could. Thus in a way one could see this as more fitting.

IF WHAT WE FIND IN CHRIST IS THE IMAGE OF GOD RESTORED, THE UNION OF GOD WITH CREATION RENEWED, THEN WHAT WE FIND IN CHRIST IS WHAT IS MOST NATURAL—MOST "FITTING"—FOR US AS CREATURES.

Regarding finances, especially from Jesus' sermonic teaching, I do think we need to be care of the element of hyperbole here. I realize that people have used this point to skirt what Jesus meant, but for all the abuse it's still undeniable that he does use literary figures in his teachings. And when it comes to "give to those who ask", it seems unlikely he meant people to be ridiculous about it, especially since he thinks people have obligations to others. E.g., if you are supporting a fellow Christian, and then another Christian comes up and asks for all of your money, it would be harmful to the first person to just "give to them that asks" without any qualification whatsoever. It also does not seem that the early church took Jesus absolutely literally in this case, since people went on living fairly normal lives when it came to working daily jobs, having property, raising families, etc., even including the case of the Jerusalem church which did pool resources by giving them to the apostles to oversee. With regard to not thinking of tomorrow: it seems to me as in the previous case. Even the later epistles require people to take care of their families, which requires some foresight and planning, and when James discourages presumption on the part of his letter's readers, he doesn't directly condemn planning, just presumption. In Jesus' case, it seems more like the point is against worry, not planning per se. Prudence is not regarded as immoral. And so when you say Jesus was criticized for economic imprudence, I'd ask what example you're thinking of. Judas did this (indirectly, anyway), but Jesus gives a justification for his practice there based on his circumstance, and natural law requires people to do what is right given their specific circumstances. Further, special revelation can provide further knowledge about circumstances that nature alone might not, and yet the obligation in that circumstance can still follow from principles known by nature (such as the higher claim God and his will has on all property).

It's interesting to have Dorothy Day as a case study; I'll try to dig into her thought when I have a chance. Assuming you're presenting something close to her views when you present your own, however, I think I would say to her largely what I have already said in response to your comments about the epistemic revisions of natural law that come in Jesus.

One further point. Though so far I've been arguing for the continuity of Jesus with the natural law, in many cases I could provide a just-war compatible argument based on the continuity of Jesus with the Old Testament. In many ways it would be easier, I think, especially with cases like those you gave above regarding family and finance. The Old Testament taught Israel to treat allegiance to God as higher than family (consider the laws about punishment for idolatry among family members), and to trust him for daily provisions (see the manna episode, Psalms, Proverbs, the promises of the law following obedience to God's will/kingdom, etc.). But the OT was not pacifist for all that. If the only cases of Jesus apparently going "beyond" natural law are with him saying things the OT already said, and the OT is not pacifist, then there doesn't seem to be much evidence that baptism entails pacifism. One could point to discontinuities between the OT and the NT, but one would then have to argue that these are what logically entail pacifism, and I've yet to see that persuasively done.

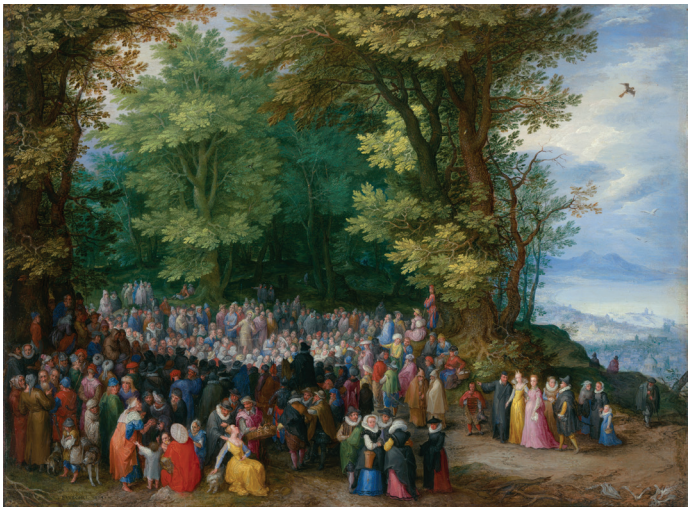
—*Andrew*

LETTER X

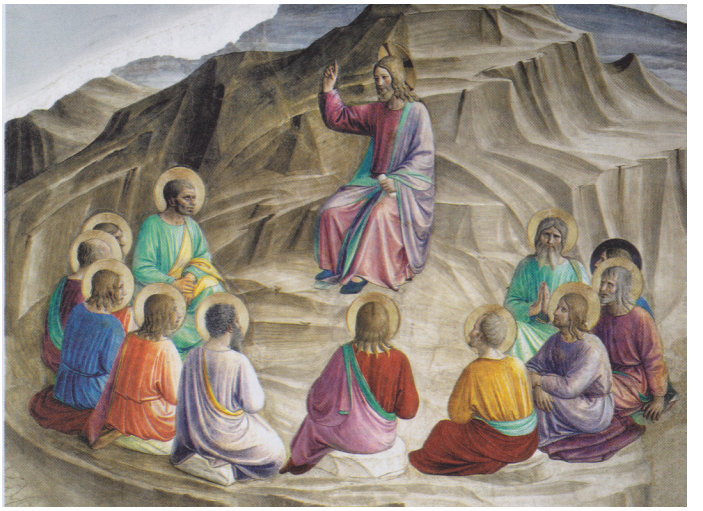
Andrew,

The ongoing challenge of interpreting the Scriptures on the question of violence is unlikely to be one which is resolved any time soon, as indicated by this exchange, for any number of reasons. In our particular exchange, the question of continuity and discontinuity in the Scriptures has come to the forefront, and so in conclusion, let me offer a brief case for (modified) discontinuity.

It seems without question that the hermeneutic of the New Testament authors is not necessarily of a unified voice with the Old Testament ones, though I do not take this to mean there is a simple irreducible "plurality" of voices in Scripture; rather, I take it to mean that there are subaltern threads of the Old Testament which are recognized fully in the New Testament. For example, in the Gospels, particular texts



JAN BRUEGHEL THE ELDER, THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, 1598



FRA ANGELICO, THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, 1437-45

are lifted up as fulfillment of Messianic prophecy which, on their faces, do not appear to us as part of prophetic literature; this is not to say that these texts were not prophetic, as any words of Scripture, inspired by God, certainly have multivalent referents which may very well elude us. Accordingly, if Jesus lifts up elements of the Old Testament for his followers which are not the main teaching of the Old Testament with respect to the use of violence, it should not surprise us: there are many previously inconceivable things which emerge in the New Testament which are highlighted as in fact the very work of God: the inclusion of the Gentiles, the crucifixion of the Messiah, and the raising of Jesus from the dead. All of these things the New Testament defends on Old Testament grounds, using unlikely texts, rereading their Scriptures in light of Christ.

Such is the case with the Sermon on the Mount. In Jesus' words, particularly on violence, we find Jesus appealing to an eschatological hope which has been made visible and present among them, a hope which Jesus then proceeds to enact. The earliest readers of Scripture—from France to North Africa to Egypt to Turkey—recognized this as a new norm of moral behavior which required them to reread the Old Testament, making sense of what appeared to be discontinuity. In doing so, they were not proof-texting, but following the very pattern of the apostles; when Origen, for example, argues that the wars of *harem* in Joshua are to be read profitably for the spirit, but not for the body, he is following Paul's example in Galatians where the apostle rereads Abraham's lineage as a teaching about the flesh and the Spirit. For Origen, and for nearly every exegete of the earliest church, there is no contradiction between saying that the Old and New Testaments speak of one God and of one divine economy, and saying that making sense of discontinuity means re-reading these things in light of Christ. This brings us back to the question of the natural law—for the ancients here, natural law was hermeneutically subject to Christ. To understand what was "natural" to us meant not only paying attention to the contours of creation, the dictates of reason, and the virtuous life, but preeminently, filtering these assumptions about our natures through the person of Jesus. If what we find in Christ is the image of God restored, the union of God with creation renewed, then what we find in Christ is what is most natural—most "fitting"—for us as creatures. This is, in the end, an appeal to faith, but not fideism: rather, it is an appeal to reason perfected by faith, the natural transfigured by the supernatural.

My thanks to you, Andrew, and to *Ad Fontes* for this great opportunity to think through some of these vitally important theological matters, particularly as they pertain to how we follow Christ as flesh and blood creatures.

—Myles

THE OVERALL APPROACH OF THE WRITERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TO THE OLD TESTAMENT IS NOT ONE OF JESUS TRUMPING THE EVIDENT MEANING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT; IT'S A PATIENT ELUCIDATION OF HOW THE OLD TESTAMENT REALLY ALWAYS POINTED TO JESUS.

LETTER XI

Myles,

I think it is right to focus on the issue(s) of continuity as crucial to this discussion. For my part, it seems to me the New Testament authors are concerned with completely upholding the authority and truth of the entirety of the Old Testament prophets. If one wonders where this sentiment originates, I think we need look no further than the Lord himself. On the road to Emmaus he exclaims "How foolish and slow you are to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" He did not castigate them for failing to see something that only became visible in light of his resurrection; he rebuked them for failing to see that his resurrection was in the text all along. And in the Sermon on the Mount, as I argued in the book, he makes sure to head off any misconceptions of his teaching as contradicting the Law of Moses (and thereby rendering him a false prophet): "Do not think I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." And then he tells us why these things are so: "For truly I tell you… not the smallest letter or stroke will pass away from the law un-

til all things are accomplished." For Jesus, upholding the veracity and authority of every part of the OT was a non-negotiable foundation of his teaching, and those who might think that he was contradicting even a part of the scriptures were in significant error. This attitude toward the OT continues in Jesus' disciples who wrote the NT, including the extended argument of Paul in Romans and Galatians, and the brief argument of James in Acts for the inclusion of the Gentiles, along with the numerous appeals to the OT to show why the Messiah had to die and rise again throughout NT literature. The conviction also appears in the willingness of the apostles to debate with the Jews in the fora of their day: they did not think that their interpretation of the OT was ultimately a function of an external principle that required a creative use of the scriptures. Rather, they thought they were arguing for what the prophets had always promised.

Similarly, insofar as they discussed natural law, as Paul does in Romans 1-2, the NT authors take it for granted that nature teaches people the will of God, and that the human race finds itself in the predicament of having disobeyed God's known will. Further, the constant pattern of redemption, from healings to exorcisms to provision of goods to restoration of community, is one that restores the manifest goodness of things to the way God obviously meant them to be. It is a pattern where grace perfects nature, and does not destroy it. Even after the reception of grace, we can see how it is fitting to us given our manifest nature; it is for this reason that on occasion Paul can even appeal to what nature teaches as a way of giving Christians instruction on how to be Christians. The overall approach of the writers of the NT to the OT is not one of Jesus trumping the evident meaning of the OT; it's a patient elucidation of how the OT really always pointed to Jesus. And similarly, the apostles assume that the will of God apparent both in nature and in scripture is harmonious if viewed humbly and honestly, rather than through the distorted lenses of sin.

There is of course discontinuity between the requirements of the Mosaic law and the order of the New Covenant (and I mentioned them and the reason for the shift in my book); but it seems to me not surprising that the Fathers had great trouble with theological revisionists like Marcion and the Gnostics. The trouble in part came from their sometimes cavalier attitude towards the grammatico-historical meaning and authority of the Old Testament (Origen being an example I note in the book). Once it could be allowed that the literal meaning of the OT, along with its moral teaching, was not binding for Christians, it is not surprising that Jesus' teaching was misconstrued, abstracted from its native context. It is also not surprising that this misconstrued teaching then became a foundation for further error.

Nevertheless, I am grateful for the Fathers not because they were always right, but because they obviously loved God and were serious about obeying him and defending his teaching; moreover, they were sometimes the most noble exemplars for other Christians in their day. And I have fundamentally the same feeling about many from the Anabaptist tradition today. For this reason I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss this perennial and important issue with you, Myles; and I thank *Ad Fontes* for giving us the space to do so.

—Andrew

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