THE LIMINAL CHURCH: EXILIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND ADVENTIST THEOPOLITICS

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Introduction

In his award-winning memoir *Out of Place*,[1] the Palestinian-American critic Edward W. Said suggests a twofold connotation of the idea of exile. On the one hand, rather obviously, it points to a political condition—the physical reality of stateless refugees, of violent dispossession, of tragic uprootedness. On the other, the notion exile names "a state of being, a critical mode of standing apart from dominant ideologies, of being scattered in the world yet ultimately not belonging to it."[2] The implied posture is one of dissent, one that stands in necessary tension with dominant codings of reality and expressions of "manufactured consent." Such exilic consciousness, Said suggests, is an instance of intellectual dislocation, a state of liminality defined as the condition of "betwixt and between";[3] a state where one is "neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another."[4]

Postcolonial and cultural studies in particular have picked up on this latter meaning of exilic existence, recognizing in it a potent tool for the mining of colonial/imperial artifacts often embedded in political, religious, intellectual, and popular-level discourse. In such contexts, the language of diaspora, marginality, oppositional culture, and so on, perform the role of a critical vantage point—along the lines of Paul Ricoeur's understanding of utopia as a form of critical distance[5]—for the purpose of protest, resistance, and the

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[1]Edward W. Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (New York: Knopf, 1999). For this reference to Said I am indebted to Alain Epp Weaver, *States of Exile: Visions of Diaspora, Witness, and Return* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 2008), 15.

[2]Weaver, 15.

[3]See Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites De Passage," in *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).

[4]Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 49.

[5]See Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). Ricoeur claims that utopian visions allow us to imagine a "no place," a "ghost city," that offers "an exterior glance" on our reality. He asks, "Is not utopia—this leap outside—the way in which we radically re-think what is family, what is consumption, what is authority, what is religion, and so on? Does not the fantasy of an alternative society and its exteriorization 'nowhere' work as one of the most formidable contestations of what is?" The affirmation of utopian horizons, then, allows us to put our own culture "at a distance." They provide us with a starting point from which to judge ourselves and others whom we encounter in the present or the past. Utopian horizons are not products

nurture of a subversive imagination "set against Western political, intellectual and academic hegemony and its protocol of objective knowledge."[6]

In this paper, I want to build on such delineations of the exile metaphor by both appropriating and nudging it into a slightly different direction. With that in mind, three specific concerns will be addressed in the course of our discussion. First, I will explore how the concepts of exile, diaspora, and liminality might help us rethink, or rather restate, certain parameters of Adventist ecclesial identity and remnant theology. I consider this to be of some importance as current debates in the Adventist faith community about creation, homosexuality, church-state relations, and so on are never simply discussions about doctrinal matters. Namely, the way one goes about addressing and resolving these material questions—be it the revising of fundamental beliefs or the way the bane of heterodoxy is dealt with—always reveals, implicitly and explicitly, different assumptions at work concerning authority structures, "regimes of truth" (M. Foucault), boundary crafting, differentiation, and power, in turn shaping and informing Adventist theology and praxis.

Second, I want to engage the claim that the current heterogeneity of the "Adventist experience," in all of its protean manifestations, is by definition advantageous and worthy of affirmation. Justifications for the beneficence of such pluriformity come in a variety of guises. The need for tolerance, assertions of the postmodern pastiche, rejections of totality and uniformity, subscriptions to "weak" epistemological accounts, and the privileging of unconditional and nonjudgmental hospitality as "first theology" are but some of the reasons people resort to in agitating for a "broadening" of Adventism. In light of that, I am interested in how such sentiments correlate to the need for fostering a remnant exilic consciousness that is both prophetic in nature and obedient to the presence of Christ in this world.

This leads me to the third and final concern, namely, the broader aim of articulating the socioethical dimensions of Adventist remnant theology *vis-à-vis* various ideological forces that frame and justify the various "givens" of our current age. Simply put, I am interested in what it means to be a follower of Christ at a time when our cultural discourse is dominated by concurrent appeals to violence, exclusion, ethnocentrism, and ethical emotivism. Stated even plainer, what shape of living does the confession "Maranatha" point us to as a community of faith inhabiting the postmodern condition, and how does that correlate to some of the points raised above?

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of objective knowledge, known with scientific certitude, but products of desire rooted in faith and dreams of what might be" (ibid., 16-17). I should add that the literature on the problem of utopia is immense. For a good introduction to these issues, see Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990). Note also Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (Boulder: Westview, 2000); Tom Moylan and Jamie Owen Daniel, eds., *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch* (London: Verso, 1997).

[6]Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 65.

I am well aware that these are incredibly complicated issues and that one needs to walk a fine line between cautious dialogue and firmness of assertion. I trust that the following pages will speak to my intention in doing so.

Elect (and Engaged) Exiles

The privileging of the exile metaphor as a linguistic and epistemological tool for the deconstruction of various forms of "royal consciousness"[7] has ample biblical warrants. While this thematic cannot be explored at any considerable length here,[8] I do wish to gesture, however briefly, toward 1 Peter. In particular, I want to point to the opening statement of the epistle—"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the diaspora"—that sets the stage for an interlacing *tour de force* of theological themes and pastoral exhortations.[9] I side with those scholars who see the idea of "foreignness" as the letter's "controlling metaphor"[10] and the essential description of what it means to be a Christian.[11] In contrast to the purely transcendental

[7]On the idea of "royal consciousness," see Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), chap. 2.

[8]Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002) is a good resource for exploring this issue. See also Ralph W. Klein, *Israel in Exile: A Theological Interpretation*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979).

[9]For a good discussion of this issue, see Miroslav Volf, *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), chap. 3. I credit Volf for providing the initial impetus for my reflections on 1 Peter.

[10]Troy W. Martin, *Metaphor and Composition in 1 Peters*, SBLDS 131 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 131; quoted in Joel B. Green, "Living as Exiles: The Church in the Diaspora in 1 Peter," in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*, ed. K. E. Brower and Andy Johnson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 314. See also Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, trans. Peter H. Davis (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008); Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), chap. 3; Douglas Harink, *1 and 2 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009). For a helpful account of the Jewish diaspora in the period of 1 Peter, see Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[11]Feldmeier, 1. Admittedly, the clause "*eklektois parepidemois diasporas*" has proved to be a matter of some contention among biblical scholars. One of the debated issues is whether *parepidemos* and *paroikos* (strangers, aliens, sojourners) refer exclusively to the experiential/sociological location of the epistle's recipients *before* or *after* their conversion. Furthermore, the question is raised whether the designation has a theological significance. It is impossible to outline here the finer points of this debate except to say that I side with those interpreters who see those two perspectives as mutually informing. Certainly, Peter's audience experienced persecution and rejection by "all social strata of the population" that saw Christians as a "foreign body that through its very existence jeopardized their societal foundations, that through its expansion disturbed peace and order and so was subversive" (Harink, 9). At the same time, I believe that the implied sociological reality also serves as a springboard from

or existential portrayals of exilic imagery found in the writings of Albert Camus,[12] Emmanuel Levinas,[13] and Georg Lukacs,[14] Peter structures his exilic ecclesiology along key theological categories, two of which are of particular significance for my argument here. First, with the term *eklektois* (chosen, elect) Peter signals that the origins of the church are set squarely within God's Trinitarian history (1:2). The setting-apartness, therefore, is not a matter of human self-realization or some generic sense of *Unheimlichkeit* or not-being-at-home (M. Heidegger),[15] but rather a result of God's prevenient grace as evidenced in "God with us." Second, it is through the "sanctification of the Spirit" (*en hagiasmo pneumatos*) that the bond between "the election and the holiness of the people of God" is being sustained "by distinguishing the people of God from other peoples."[16] It is thus God's purposiveness in history that circumscribes and determines the character of "otherness" or distance. The nature of exilic subversion, therefore, is not a matter of posh faddism, or avant-garde "prophetic" posturing, or a sophomoric clamor for authenticity; it is simply the external manifestation of the internal acquiescence to the action and call of God in a world that doesn't yet know Jesus.

Second, Peter's exilic ecclesiology is fundamentally apocalyptic in that the notion of foreignness "is based in the eschatological existence of the believers"[17] (1:3, 23; 2:2). Exilic existence, on Peter's terms, transgresses the stultifying historicism as operative, for example, in G. F. Hegel and Ernst Troeltsch, where the "the idea of a cosmic-historical *event* of God's coming kingdom as a . . . qualitative determination of history is . . . rejected."[18] According to such historicist strictures, "Christianity cannot be conceived as standing apart from this historical development"; it can but perform an ideological function of propping up and supporting regnant sociopolitical forces that always seek to project an aura of inevitability through a mixed apparatus of mythological self-descriptions, fear-mongering, and propagandistic rhetoric.

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which Peter constructs "dogmatic ecclesiology" (ibid.); a very specific "messianic politics" that is a socioethical embodiment of the way of Jesus patterned after Jewish diasporic existence.

[12]See, e.g., Albert Camus, *The Plague*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage, 1991), part 4.

[13]For a helpful treatment of the idea of exile in Levinas, see Abi Doukhan, "From Exile to Hospitality: A Key to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas," *Philosophy Today* 54/3 (2010): 235-246.

[14]See, e.g., Georg Lukacs, *Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), 41.

[15]For Martin Heidegger's understanding of that term, see, e.g., *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 158-176, 178.

[16]Harink, 41.

[17]Ibid., 15.

[18]Nathan Kerr, *Christ, History, and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Eugene: Cascade, 2009), 40.

Not so in 1 Peter, however. There an "ethics of secession"[19] in respect to such forces is engendered and sustained by a specific understanding of Christian apocalyptic—a reading of history in light of the singularity and lordship of Jesus Christ in which God breaks into and opens up history to God's own reality. Such Christian apocalyptic, in turn, performs the function of a critical imagination reminiscent of the Foucauldian criticism of historical necessity and normalcy. While such an "apocalyptic politics" assumes the reality of God's agency in this world in a way that Foucault's archeological method clearly does not, the aim is structurally very similar—the articulation of a counter-history and a counter-memory with an alternative coding of power and necessity embedded in the "regimes of truth." Such an anticipatory consciousness is a poetic imagination or productive fantasy of sorts, one that helps human agents envision—returning to Ricoeur's words above—an alternative utopian (or rather heterotopian) standpoint. Rather than being a poison of otherworldly hopes (Nietzsche),[20] therefore, the actuality of Christ's messianic interruption is inducting believers into the school of ocular conversion or perspectival awakening. As Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat put it:

> We don't allow the empire to captivate our imagination and set the final terms of our praxis in the world, because we can see a kingdom that is alternative to the empire. And we don't allow the empire to close down the possibilities of the future for us, because we can see a future in which what is hidden is revealed—both Christ's rule and our own completion and fullness. Such a vision provides a hope that not only is subversive to the empire but also provides a radical direction for Christian praxis.[21]

1 Peter certainly attests to this. Indeed, one could go on to further illustrate how the notion of foreignness serves as a regulative idea in the epistle and the way it illuminates a wide range of topics in ecclesiology, discipleship, and prophetic witness to the culture at large. Although there is no space to discuss it in detail here, I highlight Peter's exile theme as the backdrop

[19]See Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 9.

[20]See Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1976), 125.

[21]Walsh and Keesmaat, 156. Space does not allow for deeper exploration of the language of "eventual rupture" operative in thinkers such as Walter Benjamin, Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, and Slavoj Žižek. According to Žižek, e.g., Christianity entails "psycho-social grounds for a radical break with the past and a reinvention of the self," and by extension an "interruption into the pagan cycle of submission and surrender to the higher powers of destiny and fate." Christianity thus stands in clear contrast to "the ultimate horizon of pagan wisdom, the coincidence of opposites." It "is the miraculous Event that disturbs the balance of the One-All; it is the violent intrusion of Difference that precisely *throws the balanced circuit of the universe off the rails*" (*The Fragile Absolute, or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* [New York: Verso, 2000], 121).

for my discussion of John Howard Yoder, whose creative appropriation of exile language might help in (re)articulating an Adventist theopolitics—"theopolitics" here standing for the idea of the church as a "structured social body"[22] shaped by God's apocalyptic inbreak.

John Howard Yoder's Body Politic

In approaching Yoder's account of ecclesial liminality, one is struck by the extent to which his conceptualization mirrors the marginality discourse of postcolonial criticism and its stress on intellectual and moral distance from "imperial normativity."[23] The irony of such a resemblance is not easily lost here, as it is precisely Christianity that frequently serves as a prime culprit in those forms of ideological criticism. In that sense, seeing Yoder's sly appropriation of the given critical apparatus for his own rhetorical purposes is lusciously ingenious. And yet, in order to delineate his position, Yoder draws on intellectual resources that are quite different. Unlike Said, and in tune with 1 Peter, for example, Yoder focuses most intently on diasporic Judaism from the OT and the Second Temple period as the normative description of "unsettled peoplehood" and of "not being in charge."[24] Diaspora Jewish communities, suggests Yoder, embodied "mission without provincialism, cosmopolitanism without empire,"[25] while at the same time nurturing a Jeremian mode of embodied witness as a dialectical instance of religious

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[22]John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1992), viii.

[23]For recent attempts to re-read Yoder in the light of, e.g., poststructuralism and postcolonialism, see Peter Dula and Chris K. Huebner, eds., *The New Yoder* (Eugene: Cascade, 2010).

[24]Yoder's importance to the Jewish-Christian dialogue has been a matter of sustained attention. While his approach has been lauded for breaking new ground in this regard, it is also the case that his description of the diaspora as the normative Jewish experience has been charged with a measure of tendentiousness. Some have suggested that his reduction of "true Judaism" to that of a "non-violent minority" is itself a Constantinian or colonial move, an artificial postulation of an essence that belies historical reality and the full gamut of Jewish self-understanding. See, e.g., Daniel Boyarin, "Judaism as a Free Church: Footnotes to John Howard Yoder's *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*," in *The New Yoder*, ed. Peter Dula and Chris K. Huebner (Eugene: Cascade, 2010). Or take Peter Ochs's objection that Yoder operates altogether too much on the level of conceptual "purisms" ("Editor's Introduction," in *The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited*, by John Howard Yoder, ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 5). Additionally, there have been worries that accounts along the lines of Yoder have the tendency of co-opting the language of diaspora as a uniquely Jewish experience. For such a critique, see Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 1-33.

[25]John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 75.

countertestimony, attesting to the "practical viability of the ethics of Jeremiah and Jesus." That is, by the nurturing of a decentralized, nonsacerdotal, and nonhierarchical form of diasporic existence,[26] "Jews of the Diaspora were for over a millennium the closest thing to the ethic of Jesus existing on any significant scale anywhere in Christendom";[27] the clearest enactment of the vocation of *galut* (exile) as a form of nonviolent witness.

For Yoder, then, the idea of exilic existence is that account of the church that deconstructs the imperial logic of Constantinianism[28]—Yoder's preferred term for the symbiotic relationship of church and "world" or "structured unbelief"—and the corollary de-Judaization of Christianity[29] in favor of casting the remnant people as a peaceable, eschatologically shaped *altera civitas* rooted in the election of God. Echoing Stanley Hauerwas's often repeated adage that the church *is* a social ethic, Yoder further contends that "there must be a critical mass of like-minded people, sustaining one another in the world view they have given themselves to. . . . The church is the seed bed where valid dissent can sprout, where the alternative world view can be rehearsed."[30]

However, such a notion of "exilic consciousness" seems to catapult us into some rather treacherous territory. Neo-Nietzschean genealogies, indictments of monotheisms and their proclivities to exclusion, historiographic accounts of symbolic and structural violence, personal/historical anecdotes of this or that exclusion, sordid legacies of legalistic strictures—these are just some elements informing the complex nexus of intellectual concepts and experiential realities that present a veritable minefield in this regard. How does Yoder, then, or anyone else for that matter, propose to get away with arguing for the necessity of "separation," "difference," and "judgment" in an age that is

[26]See, e.g., ibid., 171. For a Jewish account that in some facets comes remarkably close to Yoder's proposal, see Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[27]Ibid., 81-82.

[28]For a helpful treatment of Yoder's understanding of Constantinianism, see Michael G. Cartwright, "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity: John Howard Yoder's Vision of the Faithful Church," in *The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited*, by John Howard Yoder, ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 5-14. See also Craig A. Carter, *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), 155-178.

[29]Rodney Stark notes the following: "Constantine destroyed its most attractive and dynamic aspects, turning a high-intensity, grassroots movement into an arrogant institution controlled by an elite who often managed to be both brutal and lax" (*For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformation, Science, Witch-Hunts and the End of Slavery* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003], 33). For an account of the "Fall" of Christianity consisting in the loss of "certain elements of the Jewish heritage," see Yoder, *The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited*, 121; see also chap. 1.

[30]John Howard Yoder, "Christianity and Protest in America" (Unpublished lecture, 1991).

hyperallergic to anything even hinting at "coercive assignments" (Foucault),[31] i.e., the spectacle of symbolic violence through various modalities of the in/out language? In other words, how can such a discourse and related practice be anything other than a form of negative deviance, in the Durkheimian sense of the term, as that which is outside of culturally defined normalcy?

While these are indeed serious concerns, I do believe that Yoder goes a long way in addressing them via two strands of argumentation. First, his insistence on the practice of nonviolence and the church's need to restrain itself from putting "handles" on history—assenting to compromise, effectiveness, and coercion in order to move history in the "right direction"—is a rhetorical strategy that hedges his understanding of exilic existence against different forms of totality. In the same way that Levinas posits ethics as the "first philosophy"—the idea that the acceptance of the alterity of the other precedes any attempts to ontologize the human person—so too Yoder's stress on nonviolence serves a fundamentally regulative function. That is, pacifism is not just a socioethical strategy, but also a description of an irrevocable, a priori epistemological stance that cannot be suspended by clamors, though not altogether wrong ones, for doctrinal purity. It is that commitment that shields Yoder's proposal from tiresome inanities along the lines of, "Beliefs in absolutes and beliefs in one's chosenness always result in things like people flying planes into buildings." An absolute commitment to nonviolence—to the Sermon on the Mount and the resulting politics of Jesus—is the nonnegotiable, indissoluble "first philosophy" in Yoder's vision of reality.

Consequently, and this is the second point, Yoder offers an account of the church's distinctiveness from the world that eschews, or aims at doing so, the twin charges of irresponsible separatism on one hand and a drooling superiority complex on the other. This is because for Yoder the distinctiveness of the church emerges precisely at the point of the church's transformed involvement with the life of the world, an involvement rightly characterized as an "exceptionally normal quality of humanness to which the community is committed." The church is most visible, most distinct precisely at the point that it is the most human, involving itself in the sufferings and sorrows of the world in the pattern of Christ's kenotic, self-giving love. The nature of exilic difference, therefore, "is not a cultic or ritual separation, but rather a nonconformed quality of ('secular') involvement in the life of the world."[32]

And yet, Yoder recognizes, rightly in my estimation, that the very language of "prophetic challenge," "subversive Christianity," "diaspora consciousness," "anarchic resistance," and so on, by definition implies some measure of adjudication and differentiation and thus a rejection of unqualified inclusiveness. In that sense, I want to suggest that Foucault's "aesthetics of existence" and the tragic politics it informs is not sufficiently robust in that

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[31]Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2d ed. (New York: Vintage, 1995), 199ff.

[32]John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 39.

regard.[33] After all, the language of "mutually enriching plurality" or "beneficial dialectics" or "charitable inclusiveness" or "weak thought" (Vattimo) can only carry us a certain way before falling prey to the claws of the *reductio ad absurdum* fallacy, not to mention idolatry and moral paralysis. As Miroslav Volf puts it, "intelligent struggle against exclusion demands categories and normative criteria that enable us to distinguish between repressive identities and practices that should be subverted and nonrepressive ones that should be affirmed." To state it differently, "without use of symbolic codes, without judgments, all we would have is the wild flow of desire." It must be recognized that "there are incommensurable perspectives that stubbornly refuse to be dissolved in a peaceful synthesis."[34] It seems to me that Volf is correct in this assessment given that the very language of *status confessionis*, the notion that there are certain beliefs on which the church stands or falls, implies the necessity, as the history of Christianity clearly teaches us, of saying or naming "nays."

Demarcating Adventist Theopolitics

Even such a pared-down summation of Yoder's approach potentially exposes current tendencies to extol Adventist heterogeneity in an unrestrained sort of way—the idea that all forms of Adventist expression lead to the enrichment of the whole—often in the name of some thinned-out notion of grace or benign pluralism, as being fundamentally misguided. After all, wouldn't such a cavalier apotheosis of unlimited heterogeneity assure, at some point, the church's complicity with the ideological blind-spots of a given age? Wouldn't such a posture be but a form of intellectual kitsch, a sentimentality of "sweet emotion" that bandies about the language of "tolerance" and "diversity" in a way that is self-cancelling and *élan*-sapping?[35] In sum, wouldn't that entail a denial of the church's calling to be a sign of the kingdom of God; a kingdom that has a specific shape, a specific content, a specific message about "this but not that," and thus comes—and yes, this needs to be said—in the shape of God's judgment (*krisis*) against all forms of idolatry and "false fields of perception?"[36] As Bonhoeffer argues:

> [The church] has to make itself distinct and to be a community which hears the Apocalypse. It has to testify to its alien nature and to resist the false principle of inner-worldliness. Friendship between the church and the world is not normal, but abnormal. The community must suffer

[33]David Toole presents a good comparison between Foucault's "tragic politics" and Yoder's "apocalyptic politics" in his *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse* (Boulder: Westview, 1998).

[34]Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 65, 289-290, 52.

[35]For a good treatment of this theme, see Robert Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49 (Winter 1991): 1-14.

[36]Brueggemann, 1. See also Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 27-29.

like Christ, without wonderment. The cross stands visibly over the community.[37]

Perhaps one example from the current debate on the morality of enhanced interrogation methods could serve to illustrate my point. According to the Pew Forum torture poll conducted in 2009,[38] 62 percent of white evangelical Protestants believe "the use of torture against suspected terrorists to gain important information" to be often or sometimes justified. In response, David Gushee published a lament addressed to Jesus in which he mourned the moral obtuseness of much of contemporary Christianity. Here are his concluding words:

> There are times when a church so badly misunderstands what it means to be church that it must be repudiated as fundamentally ungodly, fundamentally a negation of true Christianity. . . . I believe this is one such moment. Any church—congregation, parachurch organization, denomination, or group of individual Christians—that supports torture has violated its confessed allegiance to you and can no longer be considered part of your true church. Let them be anathema.[39]

The way in which Adventists are able to retain, recapture, and practice the language of *anathema*, that is, the way they go about construing their own approach to differentiation, is one of the key issues, I believe, confronting Adventism today. After all, both the Radical Reformation and Adventism believe, contra Augustine's notion of indefectibility of the church, that the church is radically defectible[40] and that such defectibility in principle can and must be named.[41] But how precisely is that supposed to work? Who exactly should be in charge of drawing or naming these boundaries? What about "policing" them? What sort of "enforcement" is being implied here? Isn't such a separatist language but another form of ecclesiological monophysitism, an idealistic account of the church as the divine agent that is a mere abstraction from reality? More pointedly, doesn't the stress on the exilic aspect of the church's identity only acerbate a regressive, narcissistically-inflected reflex, one that is feeding on Adventism's separatist streak with all of its fundamentalist trappings?

To respond to these questions at any significant length is simply impossible here. Still, I want to propose certain directives entailed in Yoder's

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[37]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, ed. Edwin Robertson (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 324.

[38]See http://pewforum.org/Politics-and-Elections/The-Religious-Dimensions-of-the-Torture-Debate.aspx.

[39]David P. Gushee, "A Christian's Lament over the Pew Torture Poll" (http://www.abpnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4052&Itemid=9, accessed 5 September 2011). William T. Cavanaugh observes: "As the case of Chile makes clear, a church that appears to include torturers and tortured alike without judgment has lost its ability to witness to the world" (*Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011], 152).

[40]Yoder, *The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited*, 122, 137.

[41]Cavanaugh, 152.

diasporic ecclesiology and the way such directives might be of help for the (re)construal of Adventist theopolitics.

1. Perhaps the most salient feature present in Yoder's vision of ecclesial liminality is his ability to conjoin a strong notion of exilic consciousness and identity with an attitude of fundamental openness and patience. "My meeting the interlocutor on his own terms," writes Yoder, "is not merely a matter of accepting the minority's conversational handicap although it is that. It is also a spirituality and a lifestyle."[42] To state it differently, Yoder's pacifist, postfoundationalist epistemology, one that I am sympathetic with, names a habit of thinking that in its struggle for truth expresses itself through willingness to dialogue and in turn to be changed by that dialogue. In that sense, nonviolence not only represents an ethical stand, but also "an epistemology about how to let truth speak for itself."[43] "Because *this* Lord is the Lamb that was slain," adds Yoder, "one should not coerce . . . persons to believe by using one's overarching system any more than one should coerce people with superior weaponry."[44] Yoder's whole life is a testament to the pursuit of such a theological method.[45]

The central axis around which such epistemology revolves is the focus on the "particularity of Jesus and the universality of truth." In that regard, Yoder asks the following: "If we cannot transcend the vulnerability of belief by positing as accessible a nonparticular 'natural,' might we then celebrate confessionally that light and truth have taken on the vulnerability of the particular?"[46] Thus reminiscent of Nietzsche's perspectivism, he claims that "there is no 'public' that is not just another particular province."[47] Note

[42]John Howard Yoder, "'Patience' as a Method of Moral Reasoning: Is an Ethic of Discipleship 'Absolute'?" in *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas, Chris K. Huebner, and Harry J. Huebner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 28.

[43]Ibid.

[44]See Gerald W. Schalbach, "Anthology in Lieu of System: John H. Yoder's Ecumenical Conversations as Systematic Theology," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 71 (1997): 306-307.

[45]For a good discussion of the "dialogical vulnerability" in Yoder, see Chris K. Huebner, *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Scottdale: Herald, 2006), chap. 6.

[46]John Howard Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 44; quoted in P. Travis Kroeker, "The War of the Lamb," in *The New Yoder*, ed. Peter Dula and Chris K. Huebner (Eugene: Cascade, 2010), 103. For an important discussion of particularity and violence, see James K. A. Smith, "The Logic of Incarnation: Towards a Catholic Postmodernism," in *The Logic of Incarnation: James K. A. Smith's Critique of Postmodern Religion*, ed. Neal DeRoo and Brian Lightbody (Eugene: Pickwick, 2009).

[47]Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 40. For an important discussion of Yoder's nonviolent epistemology, see Richard Bourne, *Seek the Peace of the City: Christian Political Criticism as Public, Realist, and Transformative* (Eugene: Cascade, 2009), esp. chaps. 1 and 2.

Yoder's point on the possibility and importance of pursuing different forms of *ad hoc* correlations:

> We may be tactical allies of the pluralist/relativist deconstruction of deceptive orthodox claims to logically coercive certainty, without making of relativism itself a new monism. We will share tactical use of liberation language to dismantle the alliance of church with privilege, without letting the promises made by some in the name of revolution become a new opiate. For the reconstruction we shall find other tactical allies. In the realm of ethics we shall not grant, with Tolstoy and Reinhold Niebuhr, that to renounce violence is to renounce power. We may then find tactical alliances with the Enlightenment . . . , or with the Gandhian vision, as did Martin Luther King, Jr.[48]

2. A remnant theology of exile along the lines of 1 Peter and Yoder will always be clear about the ground of its embodied difference. Exilic consciousness should not degenerate into forms of self-infatuation—the tendency to clothe words like "prophetic" and "subversive" with an aura of "coolness"—or ideological allegiances that supplant Scripture as the true *norma normata*. Rather, diasporic difference is the socioethical shape that our love for God and our response to his calling and election take *vis-à-vis* the "city of man" and its insatiable appetite for *libido dominandi*. Unfortunately, the language of difference as it is employed in the community of faith too often reflects a penchant for separatist fundamentalism, on the one hand, and various forms of left-wing Constantinianism, on the other.[49] Thus the focus on difference *qua* difference, detached from the broader narrative of divine election and Christian apocalyptic, will always result in imbalance, co-opted radicalism, and captivity to "principalities and powers" in one form or another.

In contrast, I want to suggest, the Petrine delineation of "diaspora consciousness," as situated within God's Trinitarian *oikonomia* ("God for us" in salvation history), transcends the usual dichotomies of social/personal, theory/practice, *vita activa/vita contemplativa*, and personal holiness/social justice. While I do admit of the potential hubris involved in any *tertium datur* rhetoric—the sort of locution that puts a favorable spin on the author's ability to propose a mediating *Aufhebung* that somehow eludes everybody else's visionary reach—I nevertheless want to state the need for a third-way Adventism that integrates these diverse elements. I think those were Bonhoeffer's sentiments as well as he was hoping for the rise of "a new type of monasticism which has nothing in common with the old but a complete lack of compromise in a life lived in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount in the discipleship of Christ."[50]

[48]Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 62.

[49]For a description of left-wing Constantinianism, see James K. Smith, *The Devil Reads Derrida, and Other Essays on the University, the Church, Politics, and the Arts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 105.

[50]Extract of a letter written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer to his brother Karl-Friedrich on 14 January 1935 (*London: 1933-1935*, ed. Keith Clements, trans. Israel Best, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 285).

3. An Adventist exilic ecclesiology will address frequent reductionisms of remnant identity to matters of orthodoxy at the expense of embodied social ethics. Ultimately, isn't the concern for doctrinal purity *at the expense*—that qualifier is critical—of nonviolent witness itself a legacy of the Constantinian turn? In fact, what is it about our self-understanding that makes us more concerned about "tightening the language" of Fundamental Belief #6 dealing with the doctrine of creation than the fact that we have national flags in our sanctuaries, or that we have honorary guards marching with bolt-action rifles at church or university-sponsored events, or that we are mostly unperturbed by the denomination's soft stand on right-to-life issues, or perhaps that we still have race-based administrative entities in our denomination?[51] It seems to me that these questions cannot be forestalled through an appeal to benign pluralism or a tendency to relegate them to the level of "individual conscience" as if the resultant heterogeneity of ethical positions would not somehow pertain to core issues of remnant theology.

The sad fact is—and I hope that my take here is not needlessly harsh—that Adventists regularly exhibit the troublesome trifecta of expediency/effectiveness, sentimentality/emotivism, and utilitarian thinking, which makes teaching ethics on college campuses, not to mention preaching in general, often such a disheartening endeavor. But teach and preach we must, of course, eagerly attending to the truth that the most fundamental shape of the remnant church—the "first philosophy" of its theology and praxis—will have to be an unconditional commitment to nonviolence, compassion, forgiveness, and sanctity of life.[52] Let us thus forgo those attentions to doctrine, efforts to evangelize the world, and attempts to foster "revival and reformation" in our ranks—all of them, of course, important in themselves—that somehow neglect or minimize the above-stated commitments, or consign them to a second-tier importance. Rallying cries such as "Christ is coming soon" and "Let's focus on Jesus" are certainly essential, very much so, as long as they don't serve as proxies for cheap emotions in lieu of obedient surrender and the willingness to imitate Jesus by taking his cross in all of its "concrete social meanings" in "relation to enmity and power."[53]

[51]For an important historical treatment of these issues, see Douglas Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic: The Public Involvement of a Major Apocalyptic Movement* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001).

[52]Note, e.g., David P. Gushee's definition of the sanctity of life as the conviction that "all human beings, at any and every stage of life, in any and every state of consciousness or self-awareness, of any and every race, color, ethnicity, level of intelligence, religion, language, gender, character, behavior, physical ability/disability, potential, class, social status, etc., of any and every particular quality of relationship to the viewing subject, are to be perceived as persons of equal and immeasurable worth and of inviolable dignity and therefore must be treated in a manner commensurate with this moral status" ("Spiritual Formation and the Sanctity of Life," in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. George Kalantzis and Jeffrey P. Greenman [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010], 215).

[53]Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 131.

Which brings us back to our discussion of 1 Peter, where the church is exhorted to the "good way of life in Christ" and not "doing evil" (3:17). Harink in commenting on these words states that

> it is for the sake of the world that the church offers its gracious, vulnerable, cruciform witness. But if the church participates in the very ways of the world that the gospel reveals as evil (manipulation, coercion, lying, mastery, abuse, revenge, violence, war), will not the judgment of the world upon the church, in the form of the world's refusal of the church's message, itself be the form of God's judgment upon a church that has forgotten the true, cruciform scandal of the gospel? As Peter says later, God's judgment begins with the household of God (4:17).[54]

4. Like diaspora Jews, Christians are called to live out their identity in a condition of "cosmopolitan homelessness"[55] and through an expression of a "catholic personality"—in the sense of belonging to a transethnic, transnational community of believers—that is "not to be identified with a particular spatio-temporal regime."[56] After all, as Terry Eagleton reminds us, "God . . . takes little interest in countries. . . . He can't be used as a totem or fetish in that way. He slips out of your grasp if you try to do so. His concern is with universal humanity, not with one particular section of it."[57] Admittedly, some will object by saying that small dosages of patriotism, the natural love for one's country, is good for the Christian soul, that it fuels and possibly instills civic virtue and makes Olympic games medals a matter of national pride. But how naive it is to think that such sentiments are sheltered from the encroachment of forces—e.g., political, economic—that seek to hijack and manipulate them for their own ends; that they are somehow exempted from being one of the many "principalities" marked by the condition of the "Fall."[58] If the twentieth

[54]Harink, 96.

[55]John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 51.

[56]Kroeker, 79.

[57]"Religion for Radicals: An Interview with Terry Eagleton" (http://blogs.ssrc. org/tif/2009/09/17/religion-for-radicals-an-interview-with-terry-eagleton). For a helpful treatment of this theme, see Ronald E. Osborn, *Anarchy and Apocalypse: Essays on Faith, Violence, and Theodicy* (Eugene: Cascade, 2010), chap. 5.

[58]For an important discussion on the issues of principalities, see William Stringfellow, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), esp. chaps. 3 and 4. While not as well-known as Walter Wink's work, Stringfellow offers some eye-opening insights on this topic. For example, he offers the following description of the squalid and destructive tactics employed by principalities in their intersubjective and institutional manifestations: denial of truth, doublespeak and overtalk, secrecy and boasts of expertise, surveillance and harassment, exaggeration and deception, cursing and conjuring, usurpation and absorption, diversion and demoralization, and the violence of babel such as "verbal inflation, libel, rumor, euphemism and coded phrases, rhetorical wantonness, redundancy, hyperbole, . . . sophistry, jargon, noise, incoherence, . . . falsehood, blasphemy" (ibid., 97-114, 106).

century has taught us anything, it must be the message that patriotism is never just patriotism, but rather a reservoir of volatile sentiments, nitroglycerine of the soul to be handled with extreme care. As Foucault rightly reminds us, it is not that things are essentially bad; they are just always dangerous.[59] Arne Rasmussen illustrates this point rather well:

> The events of 1914, which decisively shaped the twentieth century, are a formative and tragic example of this relationship between material reality and imagination. How was it that German workers, allied with the aristocrats against whom they otherwise fought, enthusiastically (at first) wanted to kill French workers because they lived on the other side of a border, and vice versa? And how could German Christians, even German Catholics, want to do the same to French Christians/Catholics, and vice versa? Why did almost no church leader or theologian see this killing as a scandal?[60]

Sadly, the crafting of such a catholic personality is rarely part of prebaptismal instruction as practiced in the Adventist church. Frequently, people are getting baptized without having undergone a thorough process of initiation into the politics of Jesus—"politics" in its root meaning having to do with "power, decision, and rank."[61] The reasons for that probably vary from context to context. It may have to do with the imbalance addressed above where the need to inculcate doctrinal correctness trumps everything else, or with the pressure to produce numbers, or with the recent (unbiblical) proliferation of "second baptisms" as means of reestablishing one's relationship with Jesus, or with the pragmatic consideration of assuring that our youth remain in the church.

The point I want to make here, though, is that the way we go about baptisms, or rather the forms of instructions associated with them, betrays a lack of recognition that we find ourselves in a post-Christendom environment that is more akin to what the early church was facing than the situation in eighteenth-, nineteenth-, or early twentieth-century America. In light of this, shouldn't things like the ethics of life, the Sermon on the Mount, the issue of catholic identity as discussed above, the role of nonviolence, the question of social and economic justice, sexual integrity in a pornographic age, practices of forgiveness, and the place of martyrdom take the central stage in baptismal instruction and a praxis-shaped apprenticeship as its corollary? Making people believe certain things, along with a few additional life-style changes, will not

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[59]Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 85.

[60]Arne Rasmusson, "The Politics of Diaspora," in *God, Truth, and Witness: Engaging Stanley Hauerwas*, ed. L. Gregory Jones, Reinhard Hütter, and C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 90. See also Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church? Toward a Theology of the People of God* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 315.

[61]John Howard Yoder, *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking*, ed. Glenn Harold Stassen, Mark Thiessen Nation, and Matt Hamsher (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 80.

do if we are intent on nurturing strong Christian communities to serve as outposts of God's kingdom.[62]

Conclusion

Much needs to be added to make this account of ecclesial liminality more robust and, arguably, more dialectical. Other voices, particularly dissenting ones, need to be brought to the table. These caveats aside, I have tried to articulate a vision of exilic consciousness that is true to the Adventist self-description of being a "peculiar people." Taking my cue from Yoder, I have argued that such an understanding must imply the possibility of adjudication and with it the recognition that some expressions of Adventism are irreconcilably dissonant with the gospel. Heterogeneity at times is synonymous with peaceableness, magnanimous goodwill, and intellectual subtlety. However, it also can be an expression of laziness, rabid self-interest, and indifference—a veritable seedbed for apostasy. In that sense, William Cavanaugh might or might not be right when he claims that "the full boundaries of the church are never available to us." But he certainly is correct when he adds that that "does not mean that the center is invisible as well"[63] and that it cannot be named, in principle, over various other heterodox alternatives.

Building on these fundamental commitments, I have sought to emphasize a more holistic understanding of the remnant resting on an epistemology of peace and a deep commitment to a nonviolent "messianic politics." I have also suggested that in our post-Christendom era, theopolitical identity-crafting and the formation of an exilic consciousness should receive central attention not only in baptismal instruction, but also in other practices of ministry such as preaching, counseling, disciple-making, and various forms of pastoral care. That is not to say that truth doesn't matter—that would be alien to both the Adventist heritage and Scripture—and that it should not be intently struggled over, but only that such truth is only to be grasped as we commit ourselves to following in the footsteps of Jesus. In the words of the Moravian creed, "*Vicit agnus noster, eum sequamur*" ("Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow him").

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[62]Alan Kreider makes the interesting observation that much of what we consider to be the proper way of conducting evangelism was simply absent from the early church. There were no evangelistic meetings *per se*, seeker-sensitive services were obviously unheard of, and the Great Commission was rarely referred to. After Nero's persecution, in some places deacons would serve as bouncers, making sure that no unbaptized person would join worship service uninvited. And yet the church grew in leaps and bounds. How was that possible? Kreider explains that a strong notion of both catholicity and exilic consciousness functioned as the key magnet for non-Christians. The rites of catechesis and baptisms were quite formidable, and yet that did not serve as a deterrent for the church's incredible missionary expansion ("'They Alone Know the Right Way to Live': The Early Church and Evangelism," in *Ancient Faith for the Church's Future*, ed. Mark Husbands and Jeffrey P. Greenman [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008]).

[63]Cavanaugh, 152.