

Shalom!

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The Third Way Church

WHILE I WAS planning this edition of *Shalom!*, an article appeared in *The New Yorker* magazine, “Millennial Evangelicals Diverge from Their Parents’ Beliefs” (posted online on August 27, 2018). The whole article was very interesting (and an important read for anyone who wants to reach millennials with the gospel), but one sentence in particular jumped out at me. An Hispanic pastor, reflecting on a sermon he had preached to 5,000 young evangelicals, noted that the line that received the best response from his listeners was this: “We can’t be married to the agenda of the donkey or the elephant. We must be married to the party of the lamb.”

Then, on November 6 (Election Day in the U. S.), my pastor (featured on page 2) posted this on Facebook:

If Caesar asks for your opinion every couple years in a ballot box, and you can share it in good conscience, then by all means vote. Do what you think is right. But as Christians we ought to resist the demonic allure around voting that would have us treat it as a sacrament of empire. [O]ur identity is found in Christ and the communion table. We are followers of the Lamb, not the donkey or the elephant. I will vote today as a citizen of my country, but I admit it gives me the willies. You can have my vote America, but you cannot have my soul. My life belongs to Christ and his Kingdom.

I detect a theme: there is a third way beyond the way of the donkey and the elephant, beyond partisan politics. That third

way is the way of Jesus, the Lamb of God. At a time when too many Christians are hunkering down in their respective political camps, and partisan politics threaten the unity not only of individual nations but also the unity of the church, this is an absolutely critical reminder. We are first of all citizens of God’s Kingdom, and that kingdom demands our primary loyalty.

This is something I have to remind myself every single day when I’m struggling to figure out how to speak into this messy morass of politics with truth and grace. I believe it’s important to be involved in the world, whether through political action of some sort or through more personal acts of compassion and witness, but it’s a constant struggle to maintain the balance and remember that the values of Kingdom of God must always take priority.

This edition of *Shalom!* features several pastors describing their efforts to challenge their congregations (and themselves) to follow the third way of Jesus and not be torn apart by the divisiveness all around us. There is also an analysis of how our Brethren in Christ theological heritage of Anabaptism, Pietism, Wesleyanism, and Evangelicalism helps us do justice in the world in ways that are in keeping with our primary commitment to Jesus. Finally, the book review highlights the efforts of Dorothy Day, of the Catholic Worker movement, to find a third way of acting justly in the world.

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

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On Being a Third Way Church

by David Flowers

THERE REALLY IS nothing more divisive in this country and in the church today than politics. If we let partisan politics cloud our vision, if we let allegiance to a flag and American political parties take precedence over our baptism and our unity in Christ, we are no different than those without Christ and we have absolutely nothing uniquely kingdom to offer the world. Our ancient confession that “Jesus is Lord” must mean that Caesar (whether Republican or Democrat or something else) is not Lord.

In various places in the gospels, Jesus emphasizes his supremacy and his Lordship over all things; in order to follow him, your love for him must be so great in comparison

that it actually looks like you hate (or disregard) anything that competes for that love, loyalty, and allegiance. When we make him our first love, everything else finds its proper place. Then we’re prepared to follow the Lamb that was slain and triumph with him over empire, as the book of Revelation calls us to do. This is how we overcome.

Unfortunately, too often many folks in the church have wrongly assumed that we have no competing loyalties, no idols, no other love affairs that oppose and blind us to the truth. We often can’t see that we’ve become idol worshippers, identifying with our earthly citizenship, a political party, and a particular viewpoint so much that anyone who disagrees with us must be an enemy of all that is good. Which is, of course, why exile, in this case a Post-Christian America, can aid us in seeing what Christians in the U.S. have for the most part not been able to see before. Exile—that is, losing power and privilege and the church being pushed to the periphery—will force us to reimagine the church, to reevaluate our understanding of discipleship and what makes us Christians and unites us as the body of Christ. It will bring focus and clarity to who Christ is, who we are together, and what it means to live in the world but not be of the world. We must rise above the divisiveness brought on by fear, misinformation, and the widening gap of political parties, and discover a third way.

A third way should include unity in the body of Christ: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:20-23). Look at that: Jesus wants the same unity and oneness he shared with the Father, made possible by the Spirit, to be

known in his church. And notice that in his mind, if the power of this Trinitarian community isn’t experienced by his disciples, if they are not brought to complete unity and overcome their differences, the world will not believe in Christ and not know that God loves them.

Earlier, in John 13:34-35, Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” In other words, if we do not love each other with the love of Christ, and if we’re not united in that loyalty and love for Christ, then the flock will scatter and the world will never be able to believe, nor will people see the power of the gospel put on display through the local church. I am not saying that we have to agree on everything; I’m talking about unity and oneness despite our differing opinions.

The New Testament confession that “Jesus is Lord” was jam-packed full of meaning in the first century. It had all kinds of implications—personal, corporate, and socio-political. When we confess with our mouth that “Jesus is Lord” (as Paul said in Romans 10:9), we’re saying that Jesus is the visible God only seen partially in the Old Testament. When we say “Jesus is Lord,” we mean that our allegiance is to Christ and his kingdom, not to any king or kingdom of the world. If we say “Jesus is Lord,” we must be willing to let Jesus guide our thinking in how we feel about abortion, war, poor people, gay people, black people, racism, refugees, and terrorists.

And if Jesus is Lord of our life, and we’re truly getting our marching orders from him, then we must know that anyone who is faithful to Christ will not fit neatly into any social or political category of the world. Period.

How many times do the leaders of Israel try to pigeonhole Jesus? They try to get him to reveal where he stands, so they can trap him and bring him down. One time, they show him a coin and say, “Jesus, is it right to pay taxes or not?” This was an ongoing reli-



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EDITOR

Harriet S. Bicksler
127 Holly Dr.
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055
EMAIL: bickhouse@aol.com

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Jonathan Stanton, Sarasota, FL

DENOMINATIONAL LIAISON

Perry Engle, Upland, CA

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Lois Saylor, Harrisburg, PA
Jonathan Stanton, Sarasota, FL

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gious and political debate in Jesus' day. Jews thought the "divine" Caesar's face on a coin was idolatry, and yet they were expected to pay taxes with it, which would then go toward supporting the evils of the empire. If Jesus told them to rage against the machine, forget Caesar, and not pay the tax, he would be in trouble with Rome. His ministry would be over. So he says, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's (his face is on the coin, well give it back to him), but then give to God what is God's (meaning, everything else belongs to him)." He chooses a third way out of this very political predicament.

During his temptations, Jesus explicitly rejects Satan's offer to ascend to power and kingship through the kingdoms of the world, which the devil says he has authority over and Jesus does not dispute. And by rejecting this path, Jesus shows us what kind of Messiah he is, and how his kingdom will be established. It will be by power-under, not by power-over. It comes by dying, not by killing. When Pilate asks if he is a king, Jesus says, "I am, but my kingdom is not of this world." He doesn't mean that his kingdom is out there somewhere in the clouds, far from earth, far from the pain, suffering, and the injustices of the world. No, while his kingdom may not be of the world, his kingdom is most definitely for this world. It just doesn't come through coercion and force, by vengeance and violence, but by way of self-sacrificing love, by way of the cross.

Therefore, it is right for us to have a healthy suspicion of all kingdoms of the world, especially the ones that claim they are a city on a hill, a light to the nations, and the last great hope of the world. Those words must only be used to speak of Christ and his church. Some good may come from the kingdoms of the world, but don't put your trust in those kingdoms.

I recognize that some people sincerely want to work in the political arena because they care and understand that bad policies and unjust laws hurt and oppress people. But the church must never turn away from Christ's calling to change the world by first making disciples and reconciling the world to God through transformative communal practices, as well as the innovative influence of the local church. Jesus put it in the DNA of the church to be change agents. As Stanley

Hauerwas has said, "The church doesn't have a social strategy; the church is a social strategy." In other words, we are the divinely appointed vehicle that is sent out to turn the world upside down.

If the state asks for your vote, and you can do it in good conscience, then by all means vote. If you feel called to work in government, insofar as you can faithfully obey the teachings of Jesus, try to do some good. Do as you feel led, but do not be deceived by the allure of politics because it is not the best way to make a difference in the world.

Ignorance of history, a lack of awareness of global Christianity, and a lack of imagination about what God can do through the local church have often made us turn quickly to politics. We see the church failing or suffering from a poor imagination, and we turn to the methods of the kingdoms of the world.

We need fresh vision in the church to see what we can become. We need the entrepreneurs and the innovators. We need the doctors and the nurses, the school teachers, the accountants, the construction workers, and the lawyers. We need you and your gifts to help us imagine great things and do them in your local congregation.

I like how Christina Cleveland put it in her book, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart*. She writes:

The body of Christ is vast, diverse, talented and brimming with resources. I wonder how many real-world issues we could tackle if we weren't so busy bickering about the correct way to define a doctrine or which political party is better equipped to solve the crises in our country and beyond. What if we decided that we were going to use our numbers, our expertise and our (potential) unity to solve real problems?

I love that. The "what if" calls us to re-imagine the way things could be. If we're going to be a part of a new reformation, or even help lead out in this fresh move of the Spirit, then we must rediscover what it means to call Jesus Lord together, to love as he loved, and to be united in his eternal purpose.

To do that, we must be intentional about living out a third way of purposely pursuing a loving way to address injustice in our world

and work for more of the Kingdom without mixing the gospel with partisan politics in the process. If we are a third way church, we grow and learn by loving and truly listening to others, we sharpen our focus and our passions on Christ, and we bear witness to the power of the gospel through a united church.

David Flowers is senior pastor of the Grantham (PA) Brethren in Christ Church. This article is condensed from a sermon he preached at the Grantham Church in November 2017.

"Third Way" Statements

(from three organizations to which Brethren in Christ U.S. belongs)

Wesleyan Holiness Connection: "You can't really escape the widespread differences of opinions today surrounding political issues. . . . Some have called for sacred resistance. . . . May I urge instead "Graceful Engagement. . . . The outcome is a "via media" or middle way that is not so much compromise as it is seeing with eyes that are anchored in God's nature and reaching into the circumstances of people's lives (holinessandunity.org).

National Association of Evangelicals: "What all evangelicals share in common does not require organizational connection, denominational affiliations or shared leadership. Our common bond is . . . faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. . . . We return to the teaching of the Bible and the leadership of Jesus in our quest to be faithful to our callings to love God, love our neighbors and share our faith (nae.net/sharedfaith/).

Mennonite World Conference: "As a world-wide community of faith and life, we transcend boundaries of nationality, race, class, gender and language. We seek to live in the world without conforming to the powers of evil, witnessing to God's grace by serving others, caring for creation, and inviting all people to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord" (mwc-cmm.org/article/shared-convictions).

Dialogue, Unity, and Love

By Rachel Sensenig

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view...if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16-19).

PAUL'S WORDS TO the Corinthian church give me hope that we can be the people of God in the divided politicized morass of our country right now. What amazing news, that God is not counting our sins against us! The more we can humbly receive that grace, individually and collectively, the more we can actually be reconciled to one another across political divides and work for the common good.

I recently took a lengthy international trip with my Dad that required me to rely on a "third way" beyond the partisan divide. My Dad and I could not be any more different on the political spectrum—he a military man and me an Anabaptist pastor—and we both feel strongly about our convictions. Over the years, we've had many heated arguments that highlighted our differences and kept us in opposite camps.

But the more I've come to know Jesus, the more I'm called to value the person over the camp. People are more than their opinions, and our basic humanity is at stake here, in keeping with Jesus's new command to "love one another as I have loved you."

It helps to be father and daughter, but still, the conversation was hard at times as we got into issues of immigration, economics, race, and foreign policy. The issues struck emotional chords and tapped into spiritual convictions on both sides. I realized again why many families often say "next topic!" when the issues come up, or why they don't get together as much anymore at all.

I'm glad we're not doing that as a blood-related family or as a church. At Circle of

Hope, we've renewed our conviction about the importance of dialogue—a crucial Anabaptist value that has become even more vital in our politically anxious times. We need to engage and not ignore one another. Indifference and silence can be just as destructive and violent as loud insults and arguments. We need to talk with each other, even when we might rather avoid conflict. So one of our top three goals this year as a church is to create more opportunities for dialogue that unites us in the radical way of Jesus.

Dialogue is a way to realize our humanity. The fruit of dialogue—when we listen and not just talk—is NOT that we end up agreeing on all the fine points. It's not that nobody's feelings get hurt and everybody is completely "safe" in every moment. What happens is that we get to see each other as people, not just stances or opinions or camps but human beings with reasons for being the way we are: human beings who have gone through hard times and are still learning, who need community, who are being reformed by God, made into a new creation, even as we come together! We listen to the Spirit in and through each other. Through dialogue we can often at least agree on a way forward and develop a plan of action that allows us to express our gifts to the world.

In the partisan quagmire that produces a lot of **IN**action, there is a common commitment to capitalist values. I have found it very helpful to recognize the fear of scarcity on both sides as a way to understand what keeps us from unity in Christ. For the "liberals" it is often a fear of rights being taken away, and for the "conservatives" it is often a fear of their resources being threatened. Both feel they have "moral" convictions and even religious arguments to justify their positions.

A racist, sexist ideology still has a lot of power in the United States. But even more than that, a deep, unconscious commitment to capitalist values has warped our desires. Americans are taught to want the latest upgrade, to know our rights, because we are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of

happiness. So naturally, we must fear and fight whatever threatens our "freedom" to unlimited consumption and self-determination. From Daniel Bell in *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World*:

Many Christians have failed to see what's at stake in contemporary "postmodern" life—dominated as it is by a globalized market and the rhythms of consumption—because we still tend to think that Christian faith is an "intellectual" matter, a matter of what propositions we believe, what doctrines we subscribe to, what Book we adhere to. And conversely, we tend to think of economics as a "neutral" matter of distribution and exchange. Because of these biases, we can too easily miss the fact that Christian faith is at root a matter of what we love—what (and Whom) we desire. If we forget that, or overlook that, we'll also overlook all the ways that the rituals of "late capitalism" shape and form and aim our desire to worship rival gods" (p. 11).

I believe we must look at our desire—what and Whom we love—if we are going to find a way through this political morass. We have to hear the call to die and rise with Christ, and to love him first. This love frees us to see and hear people as human beings, beyond their parties and affiliations. This love allows us to build something new and ancient together—the living, breathing body of Christ! This love speaks to our basic need, reclaims our basic humanity, and helps us live into our fullness with dignity. We don't need to have all of our intellectual arguments intact to make some action plans together. We don't need to fear what we may lose—whether face or resources or life itself—because we belong to the Lord. The world needs the healing, generosity, and reconciliation that we bring, so I pray for a new movement of the Spirit that unites us in his powerful, suffering, and self-giving love.

Rachel Sensenig is the pastor of the Broad Street location of Circle of Hope, Philadelphia, PA.

Just Jesus

By Joshua Nolt

I THINK THE best way for me to describe my understanding of a third way church is through a story.

I had been preaching on two-kingdom theology throughout the 2016 election season, trying to help our congregation understand what it means to follow Jesus and live in and for his kingdom in the midst of the present kingdom of this world. The day after the election. I began thinking about how to shepherd our congregation that Sunday, as the results of the election caused people to feel a variety of emotions.

How could I help us to focus on Jesus? Perhaps this question is a cornerstone of a third way church.

Throughout the week, I talked with other pastors, prayed, and jotted down various ideas. In the end I decided that preaching a typical sermon wasn't the best option. More words in the midst of the war of words flying around in every venue containing words would only add more noise. We needed to experience the reality of Christ with us, and we needed to experience one another.

I began that Sunday morning by describing a small wooden box sitting on top of the pulpit. Figuratively speaking, inside the box were the results of the election. It was not descriptive of the winner; rather within the box was a compilation of the reactions and responses of different people groups. It represented the breadth of the political, cultural, and economic spectrum. The purpose of reading this aloud was to help us acknowledge the feelings of those who might be different from us (and by us I don't mean our particular church, but an individual's particular perspective).

After reading this aloud, I passed out small pieces of paper with two words on them: "I feel." For the next several minutes, I gave the congregation time to write down their feelings with regard to the election. I told them up front that I was going to read each one of them aloud. The only reason I would not read them is if they were disparaging or if I simply couldn't read the handwrit-

ing. I also continued my practice of never mentioning a candidate by name from the pulpit. After giving them a few minutes to write down their feelings, the papers were collected and brought back up front.

I began to read. For the next ten minutes we heard one another's feelings. "I'm hopeful, because my trust is in Jesus." "I came here to be encouraged. We shouldn't talk about this in church." "I believe God chose the 'candidate.'" "I am afraid for my bi-racial grandchildren." "I have hope that the candidate will move the country in the right direction." One person walked out.

Judging from the comments, we weren't quite 50-50 in terms of political affiliation, but we were close.

After I read the feelings of the congregation aloud I had our ushers redistribute the papers. I wanted them to hold someone else's feeling that was sitting in the room. I remember saying something to the effect, "I pray you get someone's feelings that you vehemently disagree with." As they held the papers, I began to read from Philippians 2—words about considering others better than yourselves and having the same attitude of Christ Jesus. This was in preparation for communion.

Our church receives communion each week, and this was the focal point of the morning. Everything we had done in the service, from hearing the general feelings of different groups in the nation, to writing and reading our feelings aloud culminated in this act of receiving the body and blood of Christ. But before we received what Jesus offered us in the elements, I encouraged the congregation to think about their processional to the table.

The paper in their hands, not their own, represented their brother or sister in Christ—a brother or sister who was present in the room at that moment. As they came forward, carrying the small sheet of paper, they were symbolically carrying their brother or sister to Jesus. On the communion table were two wooden plates where I asked them to "place" their brother or sister and pause to

pray that God would bless them. After doing this, then they could go and receive communion.

People wept. People came to the front holding hands. I believe that morning we tasted the Kingdom of God.

So what is a third way church? I'm not sure I know. What I do know is that I believe the church is all about Jesus. It's about the revelation of the love and nature of God revealed in Christ Jesus, and it's about sharing that love with others who agree that there is no higher calling than to follow Jesus.

Not our agendas. Not politics. Not even theology.

Just Jesus.

Joshua Nolt is senior pastor of the Lancaster (PA) Brethren in Christ Church.

Editor's Notes

Final call for 2018 subscription renewals:

If you haven't renewed your subscription yet this year, please consider doing so with your end-of-year giving. We also welcome extra contributions to offset the cost of complimentary copies and postage costs. The basic subscription rate for 2018 is \$20. You can renew or contribute by sending your check, made payable to Brethren in Christ Church U. S. to the editor (address on page 2). You can also renew or contribute online at bicus.org/resources/publications/shalom.

Topics for 2019: Topics have not yet been determined, and we welcome your suggestions. Some possibilities are: living peacefully, end-of-life and aging issues, parenting in a post-Christian age, creation care, and economic justice in a world of increasing gaps between rich and poor. Contact the editor with your ideas for topics or other features for *Shalom!* and if you'd like to write.

Separation for the World

By Jeff Williams

“TOO MANY OBAMA bumper stickers.”

The year was 2008, and I was experiencing my first U.S. election as a senior pastor. A new family that had attended multiple Sunday worship services suddenly stopped coming. What happened? The answer, I eventually discovered, was simply stated: “There were too many Obama bumper stickers in the church parking lot.”

How should we as Jesus-followers engage the political sphere? As Americans, we are familiar with the various ways in which it is acceptable (and expected?) to be political (to vote, support a candidate, discuss politics, etc.). But here’s the thing: We aren’t (just?) American citizens; we are something different. Shouldn’t that “something different” extend to how we “do politics”?

Our congregation is politically diverse (especially for Indiana), and the 2008 election season was a particularly tense time. I remember on multiple occasions during informal fellowship times that our church family would divide into little pockets of like-thinking (and voting) people. Our political identities were taking precedence over our Kingdom identity, with the result being a church family that reflected the partisan divide in our larger society.

How could this happen to us? We are, after all, God’s people. Yet we continue to witness this kind of (idoltrous?) behavior in many of our churches today. I keep thinking, “Shouldn’t we be better than this?” Or, perhaps the better question is, “Shouldn’t we be more than this?”

Simply put, our version of the Good News is too small. We have condensed the Gospel of Jesus Christ into something that is too easily compatible with our patriotism, our way of “doing politics,” and our political allegiances. The result is that Christians in this country are often just as partisan and divisive about politics as non-Christians. In other words, Jesus does not seem to have made much of a difference in how we “do politics.” It should come as no surprise, then, that our churches reflect the same sin-caused

divisions found in society at large.

These divisions produce further damaging results. First, they damage our witness before the world. Not only are we seen as a divided people, but our tendency to align ourselves with a particular political party (or candidate) sends a message about who we are (and who we believe God is). White evangelicals (and, to some extent, all Christians) are now identified as “Trump supporters.” I wonder whether we are guilty of causing God’s name to be blasphemed among the peoples (Rom. 2:24).

Second, these politically caused divisions also blind us to the needs of people, especially the marginalized. In the game of politics, issues such as immigration, abortion, and race become tools to be used in the quest for control. Too often lost in the struggle are the actual people affected by those issues. Until recently, evangelicals have been largely silent on many social justice issues (or outright opposed to them—see John MacArthur’s recent statement against embracing social justice issues: statementonsocialjustice.com). Richard Stearns, president of World Vision, writes, “One of the disturbing things about Church history is the Church’s appalling track record of being on the wrong side of the great social issues of the day” (*The Hole in Our Gospel*, p. 173). It should come as no surprise that people enslaved to the power of sin consistently choose power and control over the needs of the helpless, but too often we in the church have followed suit.

Third, our divisive political practices can become idolatrous. By aligning ourselves completely with a party or candidate, we run the risk of choosing a kingdom of the world over the Kingdom of God. But herein lies the problem: We do not see the conflict in our multiple allegiances because the Good News we proclaim is too small. I believe that the root problem behind our political divisiveness and all the harm that comes with it has to do with our understanding of the Gospel itself.

The Good News of Jesus is much bigger

than the “Jesus-died-for-my-sins-so-I-can-have-a-relationship-with-God-and-go-to-heaven-when-I-die” gospel we evangelicals have traditionally proclaimed. Instead, the Good News of Jesus is centered on God’s Kingdom invading this world. It is nothing less than a cosmic regime change, a worldwide revolution. One of the earliest Christian confessions is simply, “Jesus is Lord” (Philippians 2:9-11). In the ancient world, where everyone knew that the Roman Caesar was Lord, the early Jesus-followers proclaimed something radically different. Being a “Christian,” then, meant a total change of citizenship, a radical shift in allegiance. As N.T. Wright and others have argued, “If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar is not.”

How Jesus-followers are to engage the political realm in a modern democratic republic like the United States is a daunting question. It is, however, unfathomable that one could become part of God’s Kingdom, shift (completely) one’s allegiance to the Lord Jesus and then proceed to “do politics” just like before. It is not just that our allegiance to God should be stronger than our allegiance to country; it is that allegiance to God must be total and uncompromised. We should not be too quick to deemphasize the potential conflicts between allegiance to God’s Kingdom and allegiance to the United States.

I believe we are well-served by dusting off the oft-dismissed Anabaptist concept of separation from the world. The early (Swiss) Anabaptist “Schleitheim Confession” states, “We have been united concerning the separation that shall take place from the evil and the wickedness which the devil has planted in the world, simply in this: that we have no fellowship with them, and do not run with them in the confusion of their abominations” (p. 11).

Even we self-proclaimed Anabaptists have become unaccustomed to such strong language, and there is an immediate tendency to dismiss such language as isolationist and naïve. Yet similar language is found in 2 Corinthians 6:17-18. Moreover, Jesus him-

self made it clear that because his kingdom was not of this world, his followers would behave in radically separate ways (in this case, by not fighting the Romans; see John 18:36). The New Testament repeatedly refers to Jesus-followers as “not of this world” or as “strangers and aliens” (John 15:18-19; 17:16; Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 11:13-16; 1 Peter 2:11). It was and is vitally important that Jesus’ followers understand themselves to be separate from the world, belonging to a different Kingdom.

I argue that it is only when we are separate from the world (having completely shifted our citizenship to God’s Kingdom),

that we are able to be for the world (Matthew 5:13-16). The whole Gospel is one that is cosmic in scope; it is for the whole world. That is, the point of the Good News is not to escape the world but to remake it. Becoming full citizens of God’s Kingdom doesn’t mean we ignore the problems of the world; it means we become more concerned for the world than ever before. It also means that we work for the world not as Republicans or Democrats or Americans but as Christians. What this world needs (ultimately) is not the United States (even an improved version of it) but the Kingdom of God—the place where God rules, where our relationships

have been made whole and where every tear has been wiped away. It is our citizenship to that Kingdom that defines us, unites us, and moves us to action, whether in the political realm or elsewhere.

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Jeff Williams is senior pastor of the Nappanee (IN) Brethren in Christ Church.

Strained Loyalties

By Craig Sipes

I WAS RAISED in a political and religious tradition where if you said the motto was “Kill a commie for Jesus,” you would not be far off. It seems like that has changed to include Muslims and liberals. As a Christian, especially an Anabaptist Christian, I have a problem now with my previous tradition, so much so that I would be, and am, considered a traitor by some because I hesitate to support the Republican Party. This by no means makes me a Democrat, however. So what is my position? I am a follower of the King of Kings and dare not waver from his agenda. I may be a citizen of the United States, but I am first a subject of God’s Kingdom.

In *The Hideous Strength* by C.S. Lewis, the character, Jane, rebukes a skeptic intellectual for having no loyalty. The skeptic professor responds that in her youth she is easily enamored and gives her loyalty too quickly. He tells her that when she gets older she will understand that loyalty is too precious to be given lightly. In our own time we see many problems with understanding where our loyalties lie. We have anthem kneelers and those who have contempt for them. We have racists and those who are super-sensitive and suppose that all things are racial. We have gun enthusiasts and gun grabbers. We have men who abuse women and women who manipulate men. Each of these calls us to commit our loyalty to a cause that may pull us in ways that are not in line with Christ even if

the main supposition seems good.

I may believe that school shootings are a terrible evil (which I do by the way) and yet be opposed to gun control by the state. I may not admire Donald Trump and yet be glad that he has averted a state of war with Russia and North Korea. I may believe that the unborn should be protected and yet be against violence toward abortion clinics. Politics wants me to pick a side and devote my energy to that commitment. Christ wants the same thing but in regard to him and his Kingdom. There have been many times in our history where this has also been as true as it is now. For example, many Anabaptists opposed slavery and some even went so far as to participate in helping slaves escape. But that does not necessarily mean that they supported the invasion of southern States and subjecting millions of people to death, maiming, and deprivation.

The actions or inactions that equate with following Jesus will usually bring us into conflict with both or all parties at some point, and our allegiance to Jesus will then be tested and stretched. We not only have to think about what we are against but what we are for. I may be opposed to both Communism and Islam (which I am by the way) and not believe that adventurous wars and covert operations are the best and only way to resist those philosophies. Actually being opposed to evil is much simpler and easier than being

for the good. I can speak against social evils without doing anything to alleviate their influence. As a Christian, I don’t have the luxury of hating or just disapproving of my enemies. I am required to love and serve them. In this current time of polarization, that can be viewed, even by people we agree with, as a form of treason. Party politics wants loyalty, not love! With Jesus our loyalty is proved by our love.

Another problem with political loyalties and policies is that we may agree about the desired outcome but not the proscribed solution. I may want random shootings to end as do, I believe, most others. But I might not believe that taking everyone’s guns away will solve the problem or that the risk of a war with many thousands dying is worth the benefit. I may even believe that the cure is worse than the illness or would lead to worse outcomes than the initial problem. These are reasonable differences between people, and we should not vilify those who disagree. We should also keep in mind that we Christians believe that the ultimate solutions will only come when we all are in a right relationship to Christ and his Spirit. Even the Apostles wanted and hoped for a political solution to their situations and were instead filled with the Holy Spirit and sent to proclaim a message beyond the scope of Judea and Rome.

Yet one more problem with political solutions is that they all imply, either directly or

indirectly, the use of force. For the government to feed the poor, it must force others to give their own resources to this task. If you want more gun control laws, then they must be enforced by police and courts. I am not saying that all use of force is wrong or that Christians cannot reasonably disagree on this subject. I am saying that any use of force must be known for what it is and used with extreme judiciousness. We may not all agree on how far we must go with “turning the other cheek,” but surely we followers of Jesus must agree that our response will, at the very least, be different than the world’s practice of violence and the threat of violence. The virtue of restraint is not highly valued in party politics.

We must also be careful how we speak about those whose ideas we oppose. Someone in the opposite camp may be vile or even disgusting, but we are called to bring the Good News of redemption to all people without prejudice. Party loyalties call on us to degrade our opponents as individuals and to expose the dirt in their lives. This is especially true when we feel like we are losing in the conflict of ideas. We want to believe that we are better than those with whom we disagree. We look to win elections and hope to enforce our own ideas, and often do not concern ourselves with the casualties in the bat-

tle.

In these times, truth is set aside and victory becomes the main, or even the only, concern. Jesus said we would “know the truth and the truth would set us free.” How many times in political life has truth been set aside if it does not fit the desired narrative? I was once on a public forum, and a friend proclaimed that President Obama was the Antichrist and was going to take over the country with martial law. He later said that we needed to “support the troops” that were in Afghanistan and Iraq “fighting for our freedom!” I pointed out to him that President Obama was the Commander in Chief of those very armed forces he thought we should support. Did that mean that we should support the armies of the Antichrist? When our loyalties take over our emotions and we vent our feelings against our perceived enemies, it is very easy to overstate the case and set truth aside.

The truth is that the truth is usually complicated, and we often do not have all the facts and so must exercise restraint and discretion when announcing our political ideas. We were instructed by Christ not to be quick to judge lest we be judged ourselves. I believe that this is one of the teachings of Jesus that is very hard to practice and is easily set aside in the political arena. We must come in with

the belief that we might even be wrong, and someone else might have a better idea. I can admire even people with whom I disagree. Jesus was perfect; I am not. I cannot hold others to a standard that I myself cannot keep and have not kept. In the satirical song “Dirty Laundry,” Don Henley sings the refrain: “Kick ‘em when they’re up; Kick ‘em when they’re down.” This pretty well represents the current trend. Christ, however, offers me reconciliation and expects me to offer the same to others. The world admires victory while Jesus carries a cross.

My loyalties are stretched taut, but they don’t have to break. I can speak and even promote political ideas if I remember that I am a subject of the Kingdom of God long before and long after I am a citizen of my country. In the atmosphere of pledges, anthems, and slogans, I must beware of idols and meaningless conflicts. I must remember that my loyalty is to my King and Savior who “bought me for himself and redeemed me that I might be part of a people who are his very own. Eager to do what is good.” I must be willing to break with political loyalties when they are opposed to Christ. With him, I must neither strain nor break.

Craig Sipes pastors the Morrison (IL) Brethren in Christ Church.

Uniting Around the Table of Jesus

By Jenn Shaffer

THE TENSION WAS palpable as we began our second workshop discussion titled “God’s Sovereignty, Knowledge, and Human Free Will.” As a more recent member of my local church’s pastoral team, this was my first Brethren in Christ General Assembly, and I came curious. I was aware of the conversations going on about open theism in various Brethren in Christ congregations, and I also knew that “conversations” was a soft term to describe some of the words that were passed around. I sat down for the discussion and waited to see what a room full of church leaders would do in the middle of taut controversy over opinions, belief, and doctrine.

I am new to the Brethren in Christ, but I

am not new to denominational politics within the Christian Church. My stories written here are told through the lens of a Jesus-following woman of color, a middle class U.S. citizen, raised in a politically Democratic-leaning Californian environment paired with a Republican-leaning, religious counter-environment. I was initially converted to Christianity with a theologically Calvinist foundation, was slowly introduced to other Orthodox Christian theologies, and was heavily integrated into the American Evangelical and Presbyterian Christian traditions as both a church member and pastor. Experiences have connected me to the global church (mainly Pentecostal and Seventh Day

Adventist traditions), but always through the lens of an American. It is only within these last three years that I’ve found myself within the Brethren in Christ, and so far, it’s been an interesting journey.

My church family is located in Seattle, a very liberal pocket surrounded by the more conservative populations of Washington state. The present political divide is inescapable in our conversations, relationships, and prayers. Everyone is being shoved to either side of a hyper-partisan, polarized society, and as Anabaptists, we find ourselves in the crossfire. Or at least, we desire to be in the crossfire. For what does it actually mean to choose a “Third Way” when everything in

our environment, including the Church, is vehemently pushing us to choose one side or the other?

Our Seattle community is continually challenged with this question. Most members have close relationships with family and friends that are threatening to divide over issues of politics and religion—words that are rapidly becoming synonymous. The desire to find some sort of Third Way is personal and constant in our context. And to be honest, it's been a struggle with a lot of unanswered questions and a lot of unknowns—the feeling of “here and not yet.”

My spiritual director recently asked me what the word “mystery” meant to me, in regards to my faith and understandings of God. My answer was more (more of someone good and loving) and holy, in the sense that it's “set apart” from one pinpoint or perspective of reality. I find hope in that definition. Because that means that mystery is found in diversity, in the collective, and we can lean into more of what mystery has to offer when we're connected to each other. So much of how Jesus continues to disrupt our current understandings of God is to include more people, which is why I believe that mystery is a threat, as it can belong to no political party. Mystery does not bow to the patriarchy; it cannot be globalized by the dominant Western culture. It is not stagnant in the archives of history, and it cannot be bound by any current, modern view of God.

But in the U.S., we have an obsession with belief (also frequently termed as policy), and this fixation pressures us to force Jesus into the role of a U.S. politician. As a culture, our primary method to deal with darkness and fear is to know absolutely. The struggle of our church members is to navigate this tendency with relationships outside of our small community. When our friend's or family's ability to know is threatened, mistakenly it feels like their ability to belong is at stake, and the tensions that arise from these feelings have led to painful divisions. Within our church, thankfully, the story is different. Our members vary in denominational background, political leanings, and interpretations of Scripture, but we are trying not to give the power of division over to those differences. We are striving to dismantle the assumption that knowing equates to belonging, and in-

stead are trying to embrace the mystery that all can belong at Jesus' table.

The night that Donald Trump was elected president was memorable for most, and for me personally, it wasn't an encouraging day. But here I'd like to make an observation as a Christian woman of color: the idea that we are currently finding ourselves in a uniquely hyper-partisan, polarized, extreme political context is a luxury of my white and/or privileged brothers and sisters. I'm not going to dance around the fact that my political leanings tend to be Democratic. But not once during Trump's campaign or election did I think that all of a sudden the church was confusing nation with Kingdom, flag with cross. I am someone who has not always had the option to ignore nationalistic agendas within the church, mainly due to my gender and the color of my skin. A new politician who took less care with his language about misogyny, racism, and power did not change that for me. My personal position in life has led to experiences of oppression from the systems of this world regardless of which U.S. political party gets a seat in power.

So I actually find a lot of hope in where we are today. The principalities and power of “empire” have become emboldened and pronounced, as the tensions between our binary politics and our polluted religion have come to a peak. It has become much harder for some people to ignore. The reason this gives me hope is that now my white sisters and brothers are talking and groaning with me more than they ever had before. And I'm seeing a remnant of Christ-followers emerge.

Less than two months after the U.S. 2016 presidential election, Jeff Wright (pastor of the Madison Street congregation in Riverside, CA) visited our church to host a workshop called “Imagining the Peaceable Kingdom Overcoming the Empire,” candidly discussing the crisis of American nationalism not-so-subtly masquerading as the Kingdom of God, how to discern the difference as Jesus-followers, and what it means to navigate relationships across our political divide.

The picture that kept coming up in that discussion was the one of the Table, a table belonging to Jesus, in which he radically embodied that all belong to that table. I remem-

ber raising my hand to ask the question: What does it mean for a table to hold both oppressors and the oppressed on an equal plane in a world where that plane was systematically tilted to lift the oppressors with privilege? Jeff's answer was simple and profound: our greatest tool for following in the way of Jesus in a skewed world is to use the power of story. Personal stories dismantle dehumanization; they help us see the real person sitting across from us. Stories help us understand that both the oppressed and the oppressor need to be set free. Stories help us understand that individuals are not systems, but certain individuals do benefit from these systems at the cost of the person sitting to their right, to their left. Hearing stories takes patience, and sharing stories risks discomfort.

This is why our church believes that the Table is a profound posture to host these stories: food, wine, belonging, and Jesus as the ultimate host. What could the church look like if we actually embodied the Eucharist? I believe that we miss out on crucial parts of the Kingdom of God if we try to push other people away from the Table. The cost of missing out on each other's stories is higher than we think.

Luke 22 has proven to be a central passage for me this year. Here, we see the disciples seated around Jesus' table but yet again obsessed with the concept of greatness, status, and power. Jesus invites them to think about power in a different way, pointing out that they have stood by him, or “continued with him,” in his trials. After that, Jesus “confers royal power on you just as my Father granted royal power to me” (Luke 22:29, CEB). I find the emphasis on continuing with someone in their trials as the deserving of Kingdom power to be profound. Has the church earned that authority? Do the politicians we so readily divide over deserve the authority we give them?

I'm an amateur theologian, and I'm not speaking here as a master scholar or holder of any fancy degree. All I have are my stories, all I can ask are for yours, and the only kind of kingdom authority I want to seek is one where I can stand by you in your trials, and maybe you can stand by me in mine. And those trials will remain unknown unless we

are willing to patiently sit and eat at the same table—Jesus’ Table—and listen to the lives of others.

On that contentious day in General Assembly discussion this past July, the stories of people, rather than concrete doctrine, brought unity to the room. Through a well-facilitated dialogue, voices were heard and faces were seen. The sharing of real stories became the invitation to love. We found a Third Way. Although no one’s beliefs were changed on the subject at hand, we collec-

tively chose to unite rather than divide, and I was joyously surprised—especially because that very hour I had received news from my husband Andrew that his seminary program was being torn apart by the same subject that the Brethren in Christ were refusing to let be a dividing factor. As has happened too many times before, doctrine, rather than Jesus, became the guide for who was in and who was out. So to see my Brethren in Christ brothers and sisters let their unchanged minds be considered irrelevant to having soft hearts, ending with the physical embracing of each

other as family, was to see the first hope I’ve personally seen within the church on a denominational scale. That day, the Brethren in Christ showed that to choose a Third Way is to belong only to Christ and thus refuse to aggressively divide, though both our country and our church beg us to do so.

Jenn Shaffer is pastor for spiritual connection at Pangea Church, Seattle, WA.

Doing Justice: The Impact of Our Theology

by Curtis Book

THE BRETHREN IN Christ understanding of doing justice in the world has been influenced by our synthesis of Anabaptism, Pietism, Wesleyanism, and Evangelicalism. This article very briefly sketches that influence.

First, though, I want to describe what I think is the biblical mandate for doing justice. Loving God entirely will always manifest itself in love of neighbor (“love the Lord your God . . . and love your neighbor as yourself”), but in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus goes further: “Love your enemy, and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). Christian social action is deeply spiritual and must find its root in love of God, which then penetrates every human action.

The New Testament understanding that loving our neighbor—practicing justice—will not happen unless we wholeheartedly love God. I believe there are three additional biblical pillars upon which Christian social justice is built.

- Biblical justice is rooted in Jesus’ central message of the Kingdom of God—the now-but-not-yet of God’s reign in which Jesus came proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom to the poor.
- The prophetic word and text of the Old Testament prophets is congruent with the New Testament vision of the Kingdom of God.
- The foundation of biblical justice requires a complete, balanced Christology of which there are seven parts:

1. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is God housed in human flesh. As such, Jesus is best revealed to the world incarnationally.
2. The life, ministry, and teachings of Jesus are normative for the Christian. In these, Christ proclaimed peace and economic justice for the poor.
3. The sacrificial death of Jesus on a Roman cross is both a sacrifice for sin and a model for Christian discipleship.
4. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead on the third day proclaims victory over sin, death, and evil—the basis of Christian hope.
5. Christ ascended to heaven and intercedes for the church at the right hand of the Father.
6. The Holy Spirit is sent to equip, empower, and guide the church.
7. Jesus comes again, in which the fullness of God’s reign “on earth as it is in Heaven” is realized.

These seven components form the essential basis for Christian social action, and are part of our Brethren in Christ theological heritage.

Twenty years ago in a lecture series in Colombia, Luke Keefer, Jr. made a statement that stuck with me: “The great contribution that Anabaptism has given to Christianity is its theology of the church.” For Anabaptists, the church is the people of God, the visible community of faith, for-

given and redeemed through grace. The values that characterize the body of Christ are poles apart from worldly values, and the church lives in contrast to the world. The community of faith offers the world a visible model of redemption in which personal, economic, and social relations are transformed.

While not all Anabaptists agree that the church’s role in society is to challenge structural injustice and the Brethren in Christ have historically been cautious about speaking truth to power, there is a growing conviction that working for just structures is part of an ethic of obedience to the way of Jesus. Wherever we are, Anabaptists share the conviction that loving enemies is costly, and obedience to Christ and his teachings is not something easily compromised.

Pietism emphasized a heart-felt, life-changing conversion experience of God’s saving grace. In addition to a vital relationship with God, classical Pietism in seventeenth-century Europe emphasized evangelism, missions, personal and group Bible study, prayer meetings, fellowship, and Bible societies. Pietists also developed social structures to care for widows, orphans, the poor, and the sick, and they established schools to provide education for children and adults. The early Brethren in Christ were especially attracted to Pietism’s emphasis on individual conversion, and so they synthesized the Anabaptist view of the church with the Pietist view of salvation.

Even though this original Anabaptist/Pietist synthesis did not result in a Christian ethic that addressed injustice in society during the first 110 years of our history, our subsequent embrace of Wesleyan Holiness theology moved us in that direction. In the 1870s and 1880s, some members of the Brethren in Christ Church became attracted to the Holiness movement's teachings on sanctification. Already by this time the denomination had grown more interested in international missions, educational institutions, Sunday schools, revival meetings, benevolent organizations like orphanages and elder care homes, the temperance movement, and a shift from German-language to English-language worship services. With new vitality, the church began to engage the world in new ways.

John Wesley was an articulate proponent of justice and a vocal critic of social sin. He encouraged William Wilberforce, a British parliamentarian, to work to abolish the slave trade throughout the British Empire. In the United States, Wesley's heirs—including Charles Finney, perhaps the most famous preacher of the Second Great Awakening—condemned slavery from the pulpit. Frequently during his revival altar calls during the Second Great Awakening, Finney asked people to denounce slavery as part of their confession of sin.

In his preaching and teaching, Wesley placed considerable emphasis on heart-felt inner conversion and sanctification (holiness) experiences. However, his focus was also always outward. "Social holiness," as he

called it, referred to "inward and outward holiness" or "faith working by love." Even more strikingly, in his ministry Wesley focused primarily on the poor, those that "cultured" society simply saw as the machinery of the new industrial economy. To minister to the poor, Wesley not only preached and evangelized; he also established accountability groups called classes and bands. He formed Methodist societies wherein followers of Jesus received instruction on Scripture and practical matters. He chose and trained both male and female leaders as preachers, assistants, class and band leaders, visitors to those who were sick or in prison, and school masters.

More significantly for our purposes, Wesley's theology required good works; holy living was essential for salvation. His original vision of holiness blended a strong soteriology (theology of salvation) with an equally strong emphasis on orthopraxy (right action).

The Brethren in Christ tradition was transformed yet again by the introduction of Evangelical influence on the denomination starting in the 1950s. Evangelicalism's emphasis on evangelism, missions, church planting, and a high view of Scripture fit well with the Brethren in Christ. There is also a strong and growing justice tradition among some Evangelicals. The 1973 Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Action "acknowledge[d] that God requires justice." More recently, the National Association of Evangelicals' "Statement on Shared Faith in Broad Diversity" notes: "Through-

out history and ongoing today is the compassion and care that evangelical Christians have for others. This has led to sending missionaries, founding colleges, building hospitals, feeding the hungry, seeking justice for the poor and serving as the agents of Jesus in a broken world. . . ."

My challenge to the Brethren in Christ Church is to return to the Greatest Commandment: love God with your entire heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. We must work harder to synthesize our theological traditions. With compelling biblical, theological, and historical integrity, we are in a position to address the social structure of sin in our world, and thereby model a biblically balanced understanding of evangelism and social justice in a way that other traditions cannot.

Curtis Book is peace and justice coordinator for Mennonite Central Committee East Coast and attends the Lancaster (PA) Brethren in Christ Church. This article is significantly abridged from a 2013 presentation at the Brethren in Christ Study Conference on "Doing Justice." The full text is available in the April 2014 edition of Brethren in Christ History and Life. Contact the editor for a copy.

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mercy?

One time as Dorothy was dealing with the bureaucracy of building codes in the courts, she looked around and thought it was all too big and overwhelming. She concluded, "Everything needs to be decentralization into many smaller institutions, smaller hospitals, courts and so on." Decentralization would be much better for people, for individuals, for relationship. What do we think of that? In a time of federal programs and mega-churches, what do we say to the value of local government or the small church where everyone really does know

your name? Is this just nostalgia or a yearning for the heart of God? Is it too late or is there something for us to consider in these yesterday theological understandings? It's a conversation I am very willing to have.

Notes:

The first *Catholic Worker* newspaper came out on May 1, 1933 and began the movement that bears its name. *Loaves and Fishes* was released in 1963 as a retrospective of the movement and Dorothy Day's life and work. She campaigned for workers' rights, protested for peace and women's suffrage, fought for racial and economic justice, and served the poor no matter who they were or

what they believed.

Her book is filled with the stories of people she worked with and served. Houses of hospitality and farming communes emerge as wonderful and messy places to live out the calling of Christ to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and take in the stranger (Matthew 25:35-36). This book review does not do justice to all that Dorothy Day has to say.

Lois Saylor attends the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church and serves on the Shalom! editorial committee.

Address Service Requested

431 Grantham Rd., Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

BOOK REVIEW: **Loaves and Fishes**

By Lois Saylor

DOROTHY DAY, CO-FOUNDER of the Catholic Worker movement, describes herself as an ex-socialist, ex-communist, and a Catholic convert. In her work she followed not the ways of politics, but the way of the cross. Under the tutelage of Peter Maurin, she embraced his ideas of a “newspaper for clarification of thought” which became the *Catholic Worker*, and “houses of hospitality,” and “farming communes” to help any and all through relational works of mercy. These foundational ways of processing ideas and performing acts of mercy became Dorothy Day’s life. Peter Maurin stayed influential, but floated in and out of the Catholic Worker movement sometimes disappearing for months without a word. Dorothy was the steady center of the work to help the poor, influence public policy, and shape ideas of what it means to follow Jesus.

In her book, *Loaves and Fishes*, Dorothy Day quotes Peter Maurin to set the stage for her work. He called for “Personal responsibility, not state responsibility.” He advocated one should be a “go-giver not a go-getter” who “tries to give what he has instead of trying to get what the other fellow has.” He advocated “be[ing] good by doing good to the

other fellow” and being “alter-centered, not self-centered.” These ideals, these ideas, were hashed out through the newspaper and lived out in the houses of hospitality and the farming communes. The work was done under the supervision of Dorothy Day who did the daily tasks of writing and producing the publication, administration, and the feeding, clothing, housing, and counseling of many people in need. Many volunteers came and went for short-term service or for years, but Dorothy was the constant.

What is most surprising in the thought and philosophy of the Catholic Worker movement is the idea of self-responsibility and the aversion to governmental help. Even as they protested against war, aided in workers’ strikes, and wrote about fair labor practices hoping to influence governmental policies, they did not take money from the government for their works of mercy as a matter of principle. Neither did they align themselves officially with the Catholic Church. While some church officials blessed their work, they were an independent organization not falling under the auspices or authority of the church. Their independence allowed them to follow scripture and what

they understood to be the way of Jesus without outside pressure. At the same time, Dorothy and many of the volunteers went to Mass and held two prayer services on the premises every day. They were well rooted in the Catholic Church and engaged the government, but were not susceptible to the political realities of either church or state.

Perhaps today, we should engage in “clarification of thought” as we seek to engage government while not wanting to be ruled by it. What does the Catholic Worker movement have to say to us as historic Anabaptists? Times are different surely, but in an age where there seems to be a movement towards not only more government but government as the first resort for answers to important questions, it would not hurt to stop and study what others have done before us—especially something like the Catholic Worker movement that fed, housed, clothed, and counseled so many by depending only on God to supply their need. Would we change the world more effectively if we accepted “voluntary poverty,” became “go-givers,” and eschewed the institutionalism of government programs in favor of relational works of

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