

A BETTER WORLDLINESS: DISCIPLESHIP FOR THE COMMON GOOD

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Abstract

This paper explores specific episodes from the life of two contextually diverse Christian disciples—Abraham Kuyper and Dietrich Bonhoeffer—in order to make a unique contribution, first, to a notion of the common good, and second, to connecting that notion of the common good to concrete practices of just peacemaking. After introducing the concept of the common good, the paper follows a unique development and application of the concept of common grace in the Dutch Reformed theology and practice of Kuyper. Then, the paper traces Bonhoeffer’s involvement in advocating for and articulating the practice of confession of guilt for the renewal of society. A final section creatively interprets the life and thought of Kuyper and Bonhoeffer in order to define and apply with concreteness the notion of the common good, particularly as it relates to the contemporary practices of the Just Peacemaking Initiative.

Shared Stories, New Resources

We learn about discipleship from stories – the stories of Jesus, the disciples and apostles, and the great saints and sinners of the faith. Discipleship is, to say the least, about discerning how these stories engage our commitments and convictions in our own following-after Jesus Christ. Stories also help us to unpack abstract theological concepts in order to see how nuanced theology animates and shapes concrete action. The topic of this paper—how the common good informs practice norms of just peacemaking—runs the risk of remaining elevated and abstract. The concept of the common good in particular can be fraught with lofty (although important!) concepts of human nature and the purpose of societies. In an attempt to alleviate even my own tendency to remain ethereal, this paper employs the method of historical drama. The hope is that by encountering specific episodes from the life of two contextually diverse Christian disciples, a unique contribution might be made, first, to a notion of the common good, and second, to connecting that notion of the common good to concrete practices of just peacemaking. Specifically, the paper will begin by following a unique development and application of

the concept of common grace in the Dutch Reformed theology and practice of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). Kuyper was trained as a Calvinist pastor before becoming heavily involved in politics; he was Prime Minister of the Netherlands from 1901 to 1905. Then, the paper will trace Dietrich Bonhoeffer's involvement in advocating for and articulating the practice of confession of guilt for the renewal of society. Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a German Lutheran pastor and theologian that was one of the few voices to stand against the rise of National Socialism in the 1930s and 1940s. That these two figures represent dramatically diverse historical and theological contexts helps prove the point: there is much possibility within the diverse Christian tradition to define and apply with concreteness the notion of the common good. What is more, the continuity of conviction that arises despite Kuyper's and Bonhoeffer's contextual diversity demonstrates the powerful viability of the contemporary practices of the Just Peacemaking Initiative.

Now, a note about the common good. It is undoubtedly a grandiose concept; by its name, it seeks to affirm that the pluralistic and often divisive segments of society can somehow agree on a common purpose and, by implication, some shared solutions toward fulfilling that common purpose. Such an idea may sound naïve and idealistic, and such a practice seems ever fleeting within the increasingly partisan halls of our political institutions. But, what else is democracy if not the pursuit of the common good for society? Perhaps the disunity in our nation could begin to be repaired by the formation of a shared notion of the common good. Certainly some notable and promising headway is being made in this regard. David Hollenbach (2002), for example, provides a robust treatment of the rich tradition of the concept of the common good throughout human history, from Cicero to Aristotle and then through Augustine, Aquinas, and Ignatius. He demonstrates that the common good is not just a Christian or Catholic concept, but that, in its nature, it supports a practice of dialogic universalism by the pursuit of deep intellectual and cultural exchanges of practices and ideas. The common good is defined by the diversity of both local and global society, and as such one historical or intellectual tradition cannot hold the monopoly on its definition and practice.

There is thus an opening inherent within the very concept of the common good for further, and perhaps even creative, intellectual and practical contributions. The Catholic tradition has a particularly long and rich history of the common good. What is more, Evangelicals recently came together and produced a promising vision of the common good, and even mainstream media is contributing a steady stream of articles and editorials on the subject. This concept is re-emerging as a vital measure of

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our shared commitment to our common humanity. As our world becomes increasingly connected, it may be that there is a collective reawakening to our responsibility to care for each other and for the earth. If that is the case, we will need all of the resources we can muster in order to hear, understand, and respect each other.

Admittedly, Abraham Kuyper and Dietrich Bonhoeffer are not usually found around the table discussing the notion of the common good. Most often (and for good reason) when we look to history for guidance on this matter, we see the representatives that Hollenbach highlights – like Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas. These figures are vitally important and provide resources for a diversity of religious and intellectual traditions. Kuyper and Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, are specifically confessional figures with strong ties to their respective traditions – Kuyper was unabashedly Dutch Reformed and Bonhoeffer, even with his critiques and re-formulations, was thoroughly German Lutheran. Is it counterproductive to introduce such confessionally specific voices to a concept that is seeking to cast a wide net? On the contrary, Kuyper and Bonhoeffer both demonstrate that it is not only possible but also necessary for confessional theology to provide a holistic framework for participation and engagement in the pressing issues of society. Today, the question of the common good as it specifically relates to war and peace is just such a pressing issue. So, it is my contention that the historical drama surrounding the life and thought of Kuyper and Bonhoeffer provide compelling companionship in the life of contemporary discipleship. We can see the way forward because of the work they have already done.

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Abraham Kuyper and the Theological Practice of Common Grace

Education was one of the central concerns of Kuyper's political and professional career. Reform of both the primary and higher education systems was a driving force behind Kuyper's involvement as a member of the Second Chamber in the Dutch parliament first in 1874, and then as Prime Minister from 1901 to 1905. In addition, Kuyper founded the Free University in Amsterdam in 1880 as the first higher education institution in the Netherlands to exist apart from state control. It is worth taking some time to set the stage for this education reform debate, as not only this issue in itself, but also Kuyper's method of engagement to effect change offers important components to our concerns with the common good and just peacemaking.

The catalyst for this debate dated back to the impact of the French Revolution on Dutch society. Prior to 1795, Dutch state schools incorporated the values of the Reformed tradition by teaching their pupils

the *Heidelberg Catechism*. In this way, the Reformed tradition was a central resource for the moral and spiritual development of Dutch citizens. As the Revolution spilled into the Netherlands, with its emphasis on secularism and individual *laissez-faire* liberty, state schools began to teach a form of Christianity deprived of confessional doctrine. While both public and private primary schools were allowed to exist during the era of Napoleonic rule, a law of 1806 withdrew state funds from private Christian schools and promoted a kind of civil religion in the public schools. Napoleon believed that civil religion was necessary for the moral formation of society, but his policies—and those of the Dutch government after Napoleon's defeat in 1813—favored the rise of secular ideology in education (McGoldrick, 2005, pp. 53-54).

Kuyper effectively began his political career in 1867. He had served in a pastorate in the small country village of Beesd after finishing his theological studies at the University of Leiden in 1863. In 1867, he took a pastorate in Utrecht and then found himself entering into the debate regarding the state school system. He published articles arguing that state schools, with their promotion of secularism, could not be neutral because of the intrinsic aggressive atheistic value system that they had inherited from the Revolution. Accordingly, he felt that Christians should be able to establish private, confessionally based schools that were independent of the state system. To his disdain, the conservative clergy in Utrecht refused to support him; and so when he received a call to serve a pastorate in Amsterdam in 1870, he quickly and gratefully accepted. Once in Amsterdam, Kuyper became chief editor of the weekly religious newspaper *De Heraut*. He soon founded the daily periodical *De Standaard* in order to give additional voice and leadership to the emerging cultural battle he saw ahead of him. Before long, Kuyper combined the two papers, making *De Heraut* a weekly supplement of *De Standaard*, and over his career he published hundreds of articles on the vast array of cultural, religious, and political issues of his day. Within a few short years of arriving in Amsterdam, Kuyper ran for election into the lower house of Parliament. He easily won a seat, and in 1874—by state law—he resigned his clerical orders to take up the life of politics. Kuyper, however, always saw himself as a religious leader even and especially in the political realm. Fittingly, he took up the school question in his first parliamentary address with as much Calvinist vigor as he had exuded previously from the pulpit (Wolterstorff, 2006, pp. 289-294).

At its base, the education question was about worldview. Kuyper argued that while the federal government indeed had the responsibility to set the standards for primary school education, it should not hold a monopoly on administering education because in doing so the state was

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institutionalizing the secular worldview. Kuyper believed that education was foundationally the responsibility of the family, and so he felt that parents had a right to send their children to schools that were in accord with their own worldviews—religious or not. He wanted the state to provide funding for both public and private schools so as not to penalize families financially for wanting to educate their children in private schools that taught with specific worldview values. The debate escalated in 1878 when the liberal ruling party introduced a wide-ranging education reform bill. The bill stipulated that the federal government would pay the cost of the reforms for the public schools but not for the independent schools. After the bill was passed by Parliament but before it came to King Willem III for his signature, Kuyper joined with Catholic leaders to organize a massive petition-signing campaign. In August, they presented their petition with 469,000 signatures urging the king to reject the bill – quite a feat considering at the time only 122,000 people were eligible to vote. Although the king did receive the petition, he signed the law in August 1878. Despite defeat, the petition-signing campaign provided Kuyper and his followers with a great sense of enthusiasm and momentum. In April 1879 they organized into the first mass political party in the Netherlands under the name the Anti-Revolutionary Party (making a clear distinction from the secular values of the French Revolution). One of their uniting causes was the formation of a national organization to aid in the establishment of independent Christian schools (Wolterstorff, 2006, pp. 294-95).

About this time Kuyper was also taking action in the area of university education. The 1848 Constitution had stipulated the principle of educational freedom for universities, and in 1876 the Parliament had passed a bill reaffirming the possibility for the establishment of independent institutions of higher education. Kuyper worked from 1878 toward the goal of establishing the first university apart from state control in the Netherlands (Wolterstorff, 2006, p. 295). His efforts were realized in 1880 with the opening of the Free University in Amsterdam, an institution that would bear the Reformed worldview within all subject matters, whether theology, law, medicine, or aesthetics. In his inaugural address, Kuyper proclaimed that the concept of “sphere sovereignty” was the hallmark of the Free University, and as such the University held a distinct place within the nation, in scholarship, and with its Reformed character. Sphere sovereignty affirmed the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all areas of life, and in doing so freed and encouraged the pursuit of revealed truth in all aspects of life and subject matters. In Kuyper’s (1998b) famous words, “no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the

whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” (p. 488).

The founding of the Free University was certainly an important milestone for Kuyper’s education efforts, but the work of reform was just beginning. It soon became apparent that Kuyper’s minority Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP) would have a difficult if not impossible time gaining enough influence in Parliament to enact their party platform. However, in 1880 the first Catholic clergyman, Herman Schaepman, was elected as a representative to the Second Chamber of Parliament. Kuyper and Schaepman gradually became friends and then they agreed to form an Anti-Revolutionary-Catholic political coalition. While their parties maintained distinct official platforms, they both wanted to see a pluralistic education system that would allow for the support of independent religious schools. Their parties also overlapped in commitments to causes such as workers’ rights and suffrage. Some within Kuyper’s ranks were furious that he would partner with the “papalists,” but this coalition would bring to power the first government from the confessional parties in 1888. This same coalition enabled Kuyper’s rise to Prime Minister in 1901, and continued to be major political force for a generation (Langley, 1984, pp. 32, 137; Wolterstorff, 1996, p. 296).

The Anti-Revolutionary-Catholic cabinet that was formed as a result of the 1888 elections quickly accomplished two major legislative reforms. Under the ARP Prime Minister Baron Aeneas Mackay, the government focused immediately on school reform and labor laws. The School Law of 1889 provided up to 30% government funding for primary private schools and was easily passed in a Parliament with a confessional-coalition majority. It was not the full-funding of private schools desired by Kuyper, but he felt it was a step in the right direction. Similarly, the Labor Law of 1889 made a modest beginning towards the protection of workers. It set a minimum age requirement of twelve years for workers, and it prevented women and those under sixteen from working more than eleven hours a day, while also forbidding night work. This was the first labor law in Dutch legislative history, and it was a signature achievement of the Anti-Revolutionary Party and its confessional coalition (Langley, 1984, pp. 39-41; Wolterstorff, 1996, p. 296).

Kuyper became Prime Minister when the Anti-Revolutionary-Catholic coalition once again gained the majority in the parliamentary elections of 1901. Not surprisingly, the reform of primary and higher education was one of the new cabinet’s legislative priorities. Through much turmoil – including a massive railroad strike in 1903—Kuyper’s cabinet was finally able to mediate a debate on higher education in 1904. Kuyper argued for the complete liberation of Christian higher education from the state

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monopoly on the granting of degrees. True, the present law allowed for the establishment of non-public universities, but students at those schools were still required to take state-administered exams in order to receive a degree. Thus, the students at the Free University—the only such private institution at the time—in effect had to earn passing marks not only from their school, but also from the state sponsored education program. Kuyper's bill would grant degree-granting status to all universities who met a certain set of state requirements, making the case-in-point that doctors, lawyers, and educators who were trained in a Reformed educational system were as qualified as those from a public school. Additionally, the bill provided some financial subsidies for non-public universities, and also established the provision for a technical university. Kuyper's bill argued for a pluralism that would place all universities on equal footing. In his arguments, he noted that important contributions were coming from non-public institutions throughout the world, like the Catholic University in Belgium, and Johns Hopkins and Harvard in the United States. As such, this was not just a particular concern for the Free University, but also would promote the creation of any number of religious or non-religious higher education institutions. As usual, the Catholics were a key ally in support of the bill, even though they would not open a university of their own in the Netherlands until 1923. But the debate over the bill was bitter. In March 1904 the Second Chamber succeeded in passing the bill, but it was rejected by the opposition-controlled First Chamber. Prime Minister Kuyper then made the unusual move of asking Queen Wilhelmina to dissolve the First Chamber and call for new elections. She obliged and new elections were held that summer. When the newly elected First Chamber convened, Kuyper reintroduced the bill and it passed on May 20, 1905. When the Queen signed the bill two days later, Kuyper had secured one of the crowning achievements of his life. He had helped to bring true justice and opportunity not only to Christian higher education, but also to all future private university institutions in the Netherlands (Langley, 1984, pp. 103-112).

Kuyper's Anti-Revolutionary Party suffered a narrow defeat in the elections of 1905. He had to step down as Prime Minister having not yet fulfilled all of his educational reform aspirations (not to mention his other political goals of expanding justice and pluralism). The confessional coalition won a decisive victory in 1909, however, and the ARP once again formed a cabinet – although this time without Kuyper. While he continued to be involved as an elder statesman in the Party, Kuyper would no longer hold elected office. In 1913, the ARP lost the elections and the new Prime Minister P. W. A. Cort van der Linden formed a Liberal coalition which ruled until 1918. This government sought to end the years

of political tension between the liberal and confessional-coalition parties and so introduced bills providing constitutional support of complete educational pluralism, including full state funding of private institutions. Additionally, a bill for electoral reform introduced proportional representation, where one percent of the national vote would elect one member to the Second Chamber of Parliament. Also as part of this bill, universal suffrage finally was granted for men. By 1917, Kuyper had lived to see the victory of his fifty year struggle for social pluralism and justice (Langley, 1984, p. 154). Although the work of equality and democracy would never be complete, Kuyper could find great satisfaction in seeing the tangible results of his hard-fought advocacy for his Christian principles.

Kuyper's involvement in politics had everything to do with his core beliefs and convictions, which stemmed from his commitment to the Reformed faith. Central to Kuyper's legislative goals was his understanding of God's sovereignty and grace. He fought so hard for pluralism in education not solely so he could have a Christian school, but also because his understanding of the Lordship of Jesus Christ meant that each sphere of society had a divine right to exist in its own form. Thus, the state could not hold captive the realm of education. The state certainly had a responsibility to support education, for the good of its citizens and for the good of society as a whole. But the state was not responsible for doing the educating. This should be left to the schools, and the schools should represent the pluralistic worldviews of the population. Kuyper articulated a unique concept of grace in order to support this understanding of pluralism from his Reformed perspective. It is here that Kuyper's notion of common grace can speak to the question of the common good.

Kuyper advocated for pluralism out of his Calvinist conviction that God's grace enabled the on-going cultivation of culture and society toward the ends of justice and liberation. Never one to be under-spoken about his Christian beliefs, Kuyper developed the notion of common grace over six years in the pages of *De Heraut*, beginning in 1895. He compiled these articles and published *De Gemeene Gratia* in three volumes, the first appearing simultaneously with his election as Prime Minister in 1901. His concept of common grace was not without controversy. Some of his fellow Calvinists accused him of inventing a new teaching. Kuyper insisted that he was only developing what had come before in Calvin. The result was a nuanced understanding of the relationship between the "saving" grace for the elect and the "common" grace which fell over the rest of creation. His comprehensive theological reasoning on these grounds provided, among other things, the framework

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for the ARP legislative platform, allowed for the cooperation with the Catholic and other confessional political parties, and also provided his own Calvinist constituency the means and encouragement to engage with the broader realms of society. Historian James Bratt (1998) writes: “Common grace was thus a theology of public responsibility, of Christians’ shared humanity with the rest of the world. It was also, in the words of one historian, ‘the valve through which Kuyper pumped fresh air into his people’” p. 165). Common grace built a bridge between Calvinists and the rest of the nation; it provided for the important contributions from the Calvinists in the areas, for example, of politics and scholarship, and it introduced the Calvinists to the wonders and beauty of the arts and sciences in the greater culture. To explain the existence of this bridge between Christians and the larger society, Kuyper, in part, presented his argument for common grace in two categories: creation and history, and church and culture.

Kuyper (1998a) looked first to the creation account in Genesis to deduce two manifestations of God’s grace. On the occasion of the first sin, he noted, “Death, in its full effect, did not set in on that day, and Reformed theologians have consistently pointed out how in this non-arrival of what was prophesied for ill we see the emergence of a saving and long-suffering grace” (p. 167). Both forms of grace worked for God’s glory. The first, a *saving* grace, in the end ultimately would overcome the effects of sin and its consequences of death and eternal separation from God. The second, a *common* grace, was a temporal restraining grace which held back the full effects of sin in the present world, and it was extended to the whole of human life (p. 168). Anticipating his detractors, who would argue in terms of the antithesis between the elect and non-elect, Kuyper explained that special grace must presuppose common grace if there was to be an appropriate focus on God’s glory. Such a focus emphasized the work of Jesus Christ not only as *Savior*, but also as *Creator* of the world. The Lordship of Jesus Christ thus demanded an inseparable connection between *grace* and *nature*. Kuyper explained:

You cannot see grace in all its riches if you do not perceive how its tiny roots and fibers everywhere penetrate into the joints and cracks of the life of nature. And you cannot validate that connectedness if, with respect to grace, you first look at the salvation of your own soul and not primarily on the *Christ of God*. (p. 173)

In keeping the concepts of nature and grace connected, Kuyper maintained that grace could then not function exclusively in the realm of

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the elect. In fact, all of history was a testimony to the sustaining work of grace for God's glory, which even for the elect remained a mystery. As he wrote:

[The work of common grace] encompasses the whole life of the world, the life of Kaffirs in Africa, of Mongols in China and Japan, and of the Indians south of the Himalayas. In all previous centuries there was nothing among Egyptians and Greeks, in Babylon and Rome, nor is there anything today among the peoples of whatever continent that was or is not necessary. All of it was an indispensable part of the great work that God is doing to consummate the world's development. And though a great deal in all this *we* cannot connect with the Kingdom or the content of our faith, nevertheless it all has meaning. None of it can be spared because it pleases God, despite Satan's devices and human sin, to actualize everything he had put into this world at the time of creation, to insist on its realization, to develop it so completely that the full sum of its vital energies may enter the light of day at the consummation of the world. (p. 176)

For Kuyper, common grace bore witness to the glorious and mysterious work of God's sovereignty over all creation and throughout all of history. And while some argued that the cross of Christ was "the center of world history," Kuyper wanted to keep an understanding of the creation and redemption of the world *together* in Jesus Christ (pp. 182-83). He sought to explain this tension by describing the church not as an *institution*, but as an *organism*.

Kuyper (1998a) felt it was important to make a distinction between the church as institution and the church as organism. As an *institute*, he explained, the church was an apparatus, "grounded in human choices, decisions, and acts of the will, consisting of members, officers, and useful supplies" (p. 187). However, the church in fact was an *organism*, "in its hidden unity as the mystical body of Christ existing partly in heaven, partly on earth, and partly unborn, having penetrated all peoples and nations, possessing Christ as its natural and glorious head, and living by the Holy Spirit who as a life-engendering and life-maintaining force animates both head and members" (p. 187). This is important for Kuyper because he understood that, more than anything, the church was social in nature. As such, the church accomplished two things in light of its witness both to special, saving grace and to common grace. The church certainly worked *directly* for the well-being of the elect, but it also worked *indirectly* for the well-being of the whole of civil society, constraining it

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to civic virtue” (p. 190). The church thus stood as a light shining on a hill in the very midst of society and culture. Kuyper felt that rather than fleeing from the world, the church needed to allow its light to shine ever brighter through its windows, illuminating all aspects of society and culture with the gracious reality of Jesus Christ, creator and savior of all.

At this juncture, two points are clear in relation to how Kuyper’s life and thought contribute to an understanding of the common good. Kuyper’s confessional commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ over both creation and salvation enabled an extremely robust engagement in the political structures of the Netherlands. It was his concept of common grace that allowed him to forge political partnerships through coalitions with the Catholics. While he was careful to maintain the dogmatic differences between other religious groups (Kuyper was ever an outspoken Calvinist), he recognized that the basis for their similar worldviews made them powerful allies against the rise of secularism in Dutch society. Further, Kuyper’s concept of common grace was the driving motivator for his efforts at pluralism in education reform. He saw God’s grace permeating all aspects of society and so felt it was the responsibility of Christians to help in the formation of and participation in culture. Creating the space for Christian education was not about isolating Christians from the influence of secularism; it was about affirming the rights of parents to educate their children in a diversity of worldviews and not allow the state to unquestionably advocate for just one particular ideology. This, at its base, was an issue of justice for Kuyper – which is why, although we focused almost exclusively on the education debate, Kuyper’s legislative program included (among other things) furthering the rights of the common people through expanded labor laws and voting rights. In short, for Kuyper common grace was the catalyst for a life-long career of promoting the common good for all people in the Netherlands. His policies were not for the exclusive benefit of the Calvinists, who were just one narrow segment of the population. Kuyper worked for the good of the nation, and he did so from a very clear theological conviction in the reality of God’s grace manifest in the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Confession of Guilt

1933 was the decisive year for Germany; January 30 marked the ascension of Adolf Hitler to power and the beginning of the National Socialist program of totalitarian rule. From the beginning, the young pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer had the foresight to resist the pseudo-pagan nationalistic haze settling in over the country. He urged the Evangelical Church in Germany to take a united stand against the encroachment of a nationalized Nazi-led Reich Church, and he

persistently attempted to make the Jewish question an essential aspect of the Evangelical Church response. By all accounts, however, Bonhoeffer was only marginally successful in his efforts at raising concern toward the Jewish plight; and 10 years later when he found himself in the throes of a conspiracy plot to assassinate Hitler, he recognized that the churches of Germany had utterly failed not only to speak out on behalf of the Jews, but also to proclaim faithfully the definitive Lordship of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer's is a story of hope as much as it is a story of tragedy. He had the faculties to make a powerful stand against the twisted ideology of National Socialism – and his stand was largely uncompromising and faithful throughout. And yet, in the midst of war, he realized that the churches had let down Germany, the Jews, and the world. As a longsuffering Christian in Germany, he knew that he bore the guilt of the nation. There are numerous possible episodes that could illustrate the complicity of the churches in Germany to the Nazi program, just as there are pages upon pages of Bonhoeffer's rich theology that could serve as a counter and prophetic voice to the churches. Nonetheless, for the present analysis of the common good, we will limit ourselves to two sources from Bonhoeffer's life: his efforts towards crafting the Bethel Confession in August 1933, and his *Ethics* manuscript "Guilt, Justification, Renewal" from 1941. Much would occur in Germany during these short eight years, but Bonhoeffer's commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ only strengthened his resolve to be ever with and for the world.

One of Hitler's first acts as Chancellor was the April 7, 1933 "Law for the restoration of the civil service." This law sought to ensure that public servants would be loyal to the Reich government and so called for the removal of all people of "non-Aryan" descent from public office, including churches. The law was specifically aimed at removing people of Jewish ancestry from legal participation in the state (Zorzin, 1997, p. 239). Bonhoeffer's immediate response was to write an article, entitled "The Church and the Jewish Question." Here is where Bonhoeffer (2009) famously argued that the church had a responsibility not only to aid the victims of state persecution, but also – if necessary – "to put a spoke in the wheel" of the state itself. This implies direct political action on behalf of the church, which, Bonhoeffer wrote, "[is] only possible and called for if the church sees the state to be failing in its function of creating law and order" (p. 366). More and more in the spring and summer of 1933, Bonhoeffer perceived that the state was failing in its mandate to create just law and order, particularly as it was depriving certain groups of citizens of their rights. He spent that season organizing opposition against the encroachment of the new Nazi policies on the church, including the leeching rise of the so-called German Christians to power in church

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government.

July was especially frantic, as the Reich government issued a decree ordering immediate church elections. The opposition had hardly a week to organize, and so the Reich-sponsored German Christians clearly had the advantage. The Gestapo even went so far as to raid the office of the Young Reformation movement—of which Bonhoeffer was a leader—to confiscate their election leaflets and hastily organized list of candidates. Bonhoeffer and his students had worked feverishly to prepare these materials for the election. After the confiscation, an indignant Bonhoeffer and his colleague Gerhard Jacobi made the bold move of visiting the office of the head of the Gestapo in Berlin. Bonhoeffer and Jacobi eventually recovered their documents, but were threatened with arrest if they libeled the German Christians. Their efforts were to no avail. The German Christians won the election and assumed administrative control of the German Evangelical Church; further, the soon-to-be Reich bishop Ludwig Müller called a national synod for September (Bethge, 2000, pp. 293-97).

In the midst of the church election crisis, Bonhoeffer was fielding offers for pastorates in London. He found himself torn between either moving to London for new opportunities in ministry and ecumenical work or devoting his time and energy to the emerging church struggle at home in Germany. After the loss of the July 23 church elections, Bonhoeffer was asked to take a retreat in Bethel to work on the first draft of a confession that the minority group could rally behind at the national synod. Before going to Bethel, Bonhoeffer visited interested congregations in London to try to discern whether he would stay in Germany or move abroad for a time. The events surrounding the drafting of the Bethel Confession would soon push him into a decision (Bethge, 2000, pp. 297-300).

During the month of August, Bonhoeffer worked closely with Hermann Sasse to draft what would become the Bethel Confession. Their intention was to confront the German Christians at the upcoming national synod with the question of truth. Church leader Martin Niemöller described the urgency of the situation:

Is there theologically a fundamental difference between the teachings of the Reformation and those proclaimed by German Christians? We fear: Yes! – They say: No! – This lack of clarity must be cleared up through a confession for our time. If this doesn't come from the other side – and there's no sign of it coming soon – then it has to come from us; and it has to come in

such a way that the others must say Yes or No to it. (Bethge, 2000, p. 301)

The drive toward establishing decisive church confessions during this time of turmoil was occurring throughout Germany. In May, a group in the Rhineland that included Karl Barth had published a “Theological Declaration on the Form of the Church,” and since June numerous groups in Westphalia had worked on similar projects. In addition, Bonhoeffer and his Jewish-Christian colleague Franz Hildebrandt had already produced an “Attempt at a Lutheran Catechism.” Bonhoeffer was energized and expectations were high for a clear and powerful statement to come out of Bethel (Bethge, 2000, pp. 300-01).

Bonhoeffer and Sasse were soon joined by others at Bethel to formulate a draft of the confession. They labored under measured anxiety, for they felt the pressure to address all of the issues that were emerging under the influence of the German Christians. For example, they felt that a statement on justification was needed “to unmask Ludwig Müller’s trite reduction of Christianity to trust in God and being good fellows” (Bethge, 2000, p. 302). Additionally, they needed to articulate a doctrine of the cross that would counter the Nazi nationalistic propaganda, and they needed a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, with a strong christological emphasis, that would counter the dangerous creation-based concept of revelation that Emanuel Hirsch and Paul Althaus used to justify racism against the Jews. For his part, Bonhoeffer was especially adamant that the confession include a response to the Jewish persecution. As such, he was delighted with the draft on this section produced by Wilhelm Vischer (Bethge, 2000, p. 302).

Vischer’s section on “The Church and the Jews” began by affirming the Jews as God’s chosen people and identified Jesus Christ as remaining true to Israel in his being of their flesh. Vischer then wrote that the mission of Christian church was to call the Jews to conversion and baptize them in the name of Jesus Christ, bringing them fully into the life and ministry of the church. For this reason, it was not acceptable—as the German Christians were demanding—to force Jewish Christians to form their own congregations. As Vischer explained:

What is special about Jewish Christians has nothing to do with their race or kind or their history, but rather with God’s faithfulness to Israel according to the flesh. In fact, so long as Jewish Christians are not set apart legally in any way within the church, they serve as a living monument to God’s faithfulness and a sign that the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles has

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been broken down, and that faith in Jesus Christ must not be distorted in the direction of a national religion or a Christianity according to race (Rasmussen, 2009, pp. 420-21).

Vischer then ended this section with a clear understanding of the responsibility facing Christians in Germany:

The Christians who are of Gentile descent must be prepared to expose themselves to persecution before they are ready to betray in even a single case, voluntary or under compulsion, the church's fellowship with Jewish Christians that is instituted in Word and Sacrament. (p. 421)

It is notable that Vischer knew this section would be a difficult sell to the other twenty theologians who would read and make comments on the draft. He wrote to Barth on August 21, "I put together what I hear the Bible saying on [the church's position toward the Jews]. I am not surprised that the people who made this request (with the exception of Bonhoeffer) do not agree with what I have written" (pp. 416-17). Indeed, when the draft was circulated on August 25, it was quickly watered down—in many instances quite dramatically.

The changes were so disturbing that Bonhoeffer refused to work on the final version. Vischer's section on the Jewish question had been stripped, the section on the state had been revised to confess "joyful collaboration" with the state's aims, and perhaps most disturbing, "a statement about sharing responsibility for the country's guilt had been changed to express the church's part 'in the glory and guilt of her people'" (Bethge, 2000, p. 303). Bonhoeffer escaped to London in utter frustration. Niemöller was informed that Bonhoeffer "has declared himself wholly dissatisfied with the new version and [is] opposed to its publication in its present form" (Bethge, 2000, p. 303). In Bonhoeffer's mind, the German Evangelical Church had squandered a pivotal opportunity to stand firmly in opposition to the Reich Church. Instead of being "prepared to expose themselves to persecution" for the truth and reality of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, Bonhoeffer saw only cowardice and deception among too many of his colleagues. It is true that Bonhoeffer would return to the front lines of the German Church Struggle, becoming a leader in the Confessing Church, and his sensitivity to the Jewish question—even calling it an issue of *statu confessionis*—would remain steadfast (Bonhoeffer, 2009, p. 366). He would also remain committed to the necessity of the personal, corporate, and national confession of guilt for the shameful acts of the church.

In Bonhoeffer's mind, the German Evangelical Church had squandered a pivotal opportunity to stand firmly in opposition to the Reich Church.

Bonhoeffer's 1941 *Ethics* manuscript "Guilt, Justification, Renewal" was in many ways a culmination of his commitment to justice, peace, and solidarity – he recognized that these elements of God's gracious reign were not possible outside of confession and repentance. In addition, Bonhoeffer was able to formulate a concrete understanding and practice of confession due to his concept of God's sovereignty manifest in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Earlier in *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer (2005a) described how the nature of reality was the very existence of Jesus Christ at the center of the world (p. 54). The implication in this manuscript, then, was that humanity found its identity in Jesus Christ, and so "falling away from Christ is at the same time falling away from one's own true nature" (Bonhoeffer, 2005b, p. 134). Bonhoeffer understood that the only way back to Christ was in acknowledgement of guilt toward Christ, an acknowledgment that was both personal and corporate. And it was the church that uniquely held the responsibility for the witness of confession and renewal for the world. Bonhoeffer declared that the church was where Jesus Christ made his form real in the midst of the world, and so it was the church community who, "grasped by the power of God's grace, acknowledge, confess, and take upon themselves not only their personal sins, but also the Western world's falling away from Jesus Christ as guilt toward Jesus Christ" (p. 135). Certainly, Bonhoeffer had in mind the atrocities of his own country, and the complicity not only of the Confessing Church, but also of the nation as a whole, in perpetuating violence, envy, and war. But these sins could not be denied even at the personal level. Bonhoeffer recognized the guilt and shame of his own acts as a human citizen of the world:

I cannot pacify myself by saying that my part in all this is slight and hardly noticeable. There is no calculating here. I must acknowledge that my sin is to blame for all of these things. I am guilty of inordinate desire; I am guilty of cowardly silence when I should have spoken; I am guilty of untruthfulness and hypocrisy in the face of threatening violence; I am guilty of disowning without mercy the poorest of my neighbors; I am guilty of disloyalty and falling away from Christ (p. 137).

Sin was first a personal matter, and so required personal admission and confession. It was as individuals that came together as community that the church then acknowledged its collective guilt.

The church, to be sure, had much to confess. With poised insight, Bonhoeffer (2005b) based the church's confession on the Ten Commandments, and he did not shield the church from the gravity of its

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sin. The church, he wrote, confessed that it was mute when it should have cried out; it disavowed its duty to show compassion to the despised and rejected; it did not resist to the death the falling away from faith and so was guilty of the godlessness of the masses. The church confessed that it misused and was ashamed of the name of Christ; it shamefully looked on as injustice and violence were done under the cover of the very name of Jesus Christ. Further, the church was guilty of weak public worship. In doing so, it was guilty of not protecting its young and thus abandoning them to the fall away from Christ. What is more, the church refused to raise a voice against the oppression, hatred, and murder that it witnessed in body and soul of countless innocent people: “It has become guilty of the lives of the weakest and most defenseless brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ” (p. 139). The church also confessed that it had no message of purity and wholesomeness in the relationship of the sexes to each other; it did not know how to proclaim that individual bodies were members of the body of Christ. The church confessed that it was silent in the face of the exploitation of the poor, and it confessed its weakness in not condemning slander and defamation. Finally, the church confessed it had coveted security, tranquility, peace, property, and honor – all of to which it had no claim (pp. 138-40). “By falling silent,” Bonhoeffer concluded, “the church became guilty for the loss of responsible action in society, courageous intervention, and the readiness to suffer for what is acknowledged as right. It is guilty of the government’s falling away from Christ” (p. 141). Bonhoeffer’s confession was poignant, powerful, and offered no excuses.

He acknowledged that even though seemingly all worldly powers were against the church, “binding it up on all sides,” the church still needed to confess its guilt. To make excuses avoided the possibility of regaining the form of Jesus Christ—“who bore all the sins of the world” (p. 141). Yet, free confession of guilt made way for the inbreaking of Christ into the world, who alone justified both the church and the individual. Through the gift of forgiveness of sin, individuals and the church could finally break free from guilt, and the nations could begin the slow process of healing. Yes, even in the nations, who bore the heritage of their guilt, war could turn to peace, and the scar of shame and violence could begin to heal, by the gracious rule of God in and through history. Bonhoeffer was adamant that the “justification and renewal” of the West could only happen “in the restoration of justice, order, and peace, in one way or another” and then in the confession and forgiveness of past guilt (p. 144). It was through concrete confession that the individual and the church could experience the assurance and reality of Christ’s work on the cross. The guilt that Christ bears is for all of history, and his resurrection

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and ascension ushered in new life and hope that was always definitively in and for the world.

Bonhoeffer understood the power of the cross to bring healing, hope, and justice for the world because he saw in Jesus Christ a commitment to a better worldliness. In Jesus Christ, Bonhoeffer no longer viewed reality in terms of the traditional Lutheran doctrine of a two kingdoms split—where the sacred realm has no bearing on the secular realm. Such thinking too often encouraged Christians to separate their religious lives from their public lives, and at the extreme, enabled the Christian church to disassociate itself from the gross human rights violations perpetuated by the National Socialist regime. Bonhoeffer (2005a), however, insisted that Jesus Christ existed at the very center of life:

Just as the reality of God has entered into the reality of the world in Christ, what is Christian cannot be had otherwise than in what is worldly, the “supernatural” only in the natural, the holy only in the profane, the revelational only in the rational’ (p. 59)

In other words, what is commonly good in the world was so because God had entered into the world through Jesus Christ. To be sure, Bonhoeffer did not equate the sacred with the secular, but he held the two in unity because of the ultimate reality of Christ in the world. The cross, guilt, forgiveness, justification, and renewal all pointed to this reality. That Christ existed for the world—for its healing, hope, peace, and redemption—meant that Christianity must proclaim the reality of Christ against the worldly “in the name of a better worldliness” (p. 60). As the reality of Christ is understood to be with and for the world, the concrete practices of confession and working for renewal become vital avenues of truth and healing.

As the reality of Christ is understood to be with and for the world, the concrete practices of confession and working for renewal become vital avenues of truth and healing.

The Common Good and Just Peacemaking

The historical drama from episodes of the life and thought of Abraham Kuyper and Dietrich Bonhoeffer thus bring us to a crossroads. We can see how strong commitments to their most basic theological convictions guided each of them to specific and tangible practices for the promotion of the common good. Kuyper’s Reformed emphasis on the sovereignty of God energized his advocacy for educational pluralism, democracy, and human rights. Because Jesus Christ was Lord over *all* of life, Kuyper found in the concept of common grace the fortitude to work across political party boundaries in order to make real legislative changes in the Netherlands. Bonhoeffer, too, worked from a very strong commitment to the centrality of Jesus Christ to try to rally first the

German Evangelical Church and then, later, what became the Confessing Church to take a strong and definitive stance against National Socialism. Further, because of Bonhoeffer's uncompromising focus on Christ, he was able to speak and write in the most concrete of terms the necessity of confession of guilt and the subsequent reality of justification and renewal. What is notable about both Kuyper and Bonhoeffer, then, is how their vibrant Christian faith led quite naturally to—more so, indeed demanded—direct action for the cause of peace and justice in the wider society. Kuyper and Bonhoeffer, in their unique ways to be sure, both have dynamic theologies of the common good. Their Christian faith is not isolated within a sacred “realm” that is cut off from the rest of life. Rather, their faith compels the tireless action of working for “a better worldliness.”

I find it no coincidence that these conclusions from Kuyper and Bonhoeffer correlate so strongly to the new paradigm of Just Peacemaking. The Christian tradition – at its best – has always had a clear commitment to human rights; Kuyper and Bonhoeffer are not the exception. The Just Peacemaking Initiative is unique because it seeks to see beyond the traditional categories of Just War Theory, Pacifism, and Crusade in order to articulate a concrete and broadly collaborative effort at making real contributions to the development and experience of the common good among the nations. While originally conceived based on the transforming initiatives in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Just Peacemaking now enjoys an international and even interfaith following. For example, the Interfaith Just Peacemaking project is an ongoing effort by 30 Muslim, Jewish, and Christian religious leaders and scholars who have worked together “to craft and refine a practical and inspiring interfaith model to address ongoing conflicts as well as build sustainable peace” (Thistlethwaite, 2011, p. 1). And the contributions of this initiative are effecting real change on the global stage. Susan Thistlethwaite (2011) has noted that “the prominence of the Just Peace paradigm and all ten practices of Just Peacemaking in President Barack Obama's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech surprised many in the United States, but in fact Just Peace work has taken place over nearly three decades, and this consistency of effort is partly responsible for a foreign policy shift toward practices of Just Peacemaking” (p. 1). Indeed, the ten Practice Norms of Just Peacemaking provide specific and tangible guidance for working toward concrete solutions to the wide variety of conflict scenarios around the world. The specific insights that we have drawn from our narrow look at Kuyper and Bonhoeffer speak directly to two of Just Peacemaking's Practice Norms. Drawing these connections enable us to make a very concrete move from talking about the common good to seeing how it can

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work out in practice.

As we saw earlier, Kuyper worked from a commitment to God's sovereignty in the Lordship of Jesus Christ to advocate for democracy and human rights in the Netherlands, specifically in the area of pluralism in education, but also including suffrage and workers' rights. Just Peacemaking's Practice Norm 5 also seeks the Advance of Democracy, Human Rights, and Interdependence. This Practice Norm attests to the historical and socio-political reality that democracies with human rights simply wage less war. In fact, "no democracy with human rights fought a war against another democracy with human rights in all the twentieth century (although some funded or fomented wars by others)" (Thistlethwaite, 2011, p. 87). This Norm also recognizes that international institutions can help strengthen democracies while providing support for human rights organizations. And the concept of interdependence helps keep a check on the balance of power between countries and their mutual well-being. At the turn of the 20th century, Kuyper's Netherlands—along with England and the United States—was one of a very few emerging democracies. Kuyper was at the forefront of this commitment to justice, equality, and human rights. It thus seems fitting that The Hague—where Kuyper debated while a member of Dutch Parliament and served as Dutch Prime Minister—would today house so many of the world's international bodies for the promotion of peace and justice, including the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and the Permanent Court of Arbitration (which was founded in 1899). Kuyper's commitment to the realities of common grace, inherent in the sovereignty and Lordship of Jesus Christ, continue to promote a legacy of the common good. Kuyper's Calvinism may not be the shared worldview of the Netherlands today, but certainly its influence in matters of justice and human rights remains deep within the fibers of democratic society.

Similarly, Bonhoeffer's conviction as to the necessity of confession of guilt is remarkably similar to Just Peacemaking's Practice Norm 4: Acknowledge Responsibility for Conflict and Injustice and Seek Repentance and Forgiveness. The definition for this Practice Norm identifies the capacity for empathy as vital when working toward peace. Just as empathy requires a putting aside of a person's own interests in order to understand the other side, "peacemaking also calls us to move beyond our desire for retaliation and revenge, and focus instead on the possibilities for future reconciliation" (Thistlethwaite, 2011, p. 69). Further, in the act of forgiving, we both acknowledge our past wrongs and complicity in injustice, and also "experience empathy, a capacity for forbearance from revenge, and a transformed sense of the future

... in the act of forgiving, we both acknowledge our past wrongs and complicity in injustice ...

possibilities for Just Peace” (p. 69). For Bonhoeffer, the work on the Bethel Confession ended in such a frustrating failure in part because it gutted statements designed to encourage empathy toward the Jews. By ignoring the grave injustices that were bearing down on the Jewish population in Germany, the Evangelical Church was only perpetuating the injustice toward the marginalized and persecuted. Bonhoeffer recognized the dire necessity of confessing this guilt. Without such a confession, the church could not bear faithful witness to the reality of Jesus Christ at the center of life. Not only did the cross of Christ demand an acknowledgment of injustice, it also provided for the reality of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. For Bonhoeffer, confession is ultimately about renewal—it is about a renewed vision of and participation in God’s gracious reality that is in and for the world. As such, Just Peacemaking provides a paradigm with concrete Practices that faithfully show the way toward a better world for the common good.

Conclusion

The stories of Abraham Kuyper and Dietrich Bonhoeffer focus our attention on a critical aspect of discipleship: Following-after Jesus Christ is not only about the inward journey. Instead, Bonhoeffer’s language of “a better worldliness” focuses our attention on the world. And Kuyper agrees. His understanding of common grace coupled with Bonhoeffer’s concern for worldliness provide a unique perspective into the notion of the common good. The point is, as Christian disciples, we are called to live, work, and witness radically in and for the world. Neither Kuyper nor Bonhoeffer are calling for an abandonment of Christian conviction or identity in order to be for the world. On the contrary, they engage in the pursuit of the common good because that keeps their focus ever on Jesus Christ, the Lord of all. We make the connections from discipleship to the common good to Just Peacemaking, then, to demonstrate the concreteness of discipleship that is for the reality of Jesus Christ in the world. Discipleship for the common good is a call to make real our most precious beliefs about the power and grace of God. Such a call extends the grace, peace, mercy, and justice of the God of ultimate redemption into the farthest reaches of the earth.

Discipleship for the common good is a call to make real our most precious beliefs about the power and grace of God.

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