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An anarchistic reading
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The state, it seems, can be seen most of all in the biblical story as simply existing, for better and for worse. It should not set the agenda in either a positive or negative way. Theo-politics is about peace work is all its forms, generally independent of territorial kingdoms or modern nation-states. There can be some common ground; more often there will be tension and even conflict between God's people and the nations.

The main point, though, which seems fully compatible with anarchism at its best, is working for human flourishing in local communities and global connections of resistance wherever it may be enhanced. Perhaps this will lead to a whole new global order (we may hope, the current order is doomed). More importantly, is the much more modest affirmation that this is the only way to embrace life in healthy and sustainable ways—or at least it's the best we can hope to do.

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existence in the promised land. As the story tells us. In the end, after the Babylonian conquest, Israel again is presented with the tension between territoriality and theo-politics. This time, in tentative ways, the tension is resolved on the side of theo-politics. Certainly, the strand of the biblical tradition that culminates in the ministry of Jesus clearly resolves the tension in this way. The result is a political vision that profoundly shares many characteristics with modern anarchism.

When we reread the Joshua story in the light of these later developments, we can't help but recognize that the violence there is quite stylized and exaggerated. In exaggerating that violence, the story of Joshua helps display the inevitability of the dead end of power politics and the impossibility of the promise being channeled through the state. That is, Joshua itself points toward anarchism by helping to clear away the illusion that theo-politics ultimately could find expression in a territorial kingdom.

"Biblical anarchism"

The story the Bible tells, then, becomes precisely a story pointing toward a kind of anarchistic politics—decentering the state (rejecting empire and the coercive maintenance of geographical boundaries) and (self-) organizing for shalom apart from the state through decentralized communities of faith that are open to all comers.

"Biblical anarchism," if we want to try to claim such a term, is not, however, the same as the "classic" anarchism expressed in the thought of such as Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Goldman. The Bible does not underwrite a focus on actually overthrowing the state and doing without human authority—though even more certainly the Bible strongly repudiates the kind of obeisance toward the state all too characteristic of post-Constantine Christianity.

In fact, what we learn from the second Joshua is that such a state is most likely to be hostile toward God—and in fact such a state does execute God's true human emissary.

The biblical story concludes with the New Jerusalem, established not through the sword but through the self-giving witness of the Lamb and his followers. Babylon is overthrown by this witness, and the result is the healing of the nations, even the healing of kings of the earth. Politics are utterly transformed.

The role of the Joshua story

The Joshua story is crucial—and what it shows us is that territory is not possible without violence. As we read the movement of the biblical story, we get the sense that what Joshua sets up is a kind of experiment. Will it be possible to embody Torah in concrete life through controlling a particular territory that might be administered in just and peaceable ways? Such an embodiment could indeed serve as a means to bless all the families of the earth. That Israel could envision such a blessing through territoriality is seen in the vision recorded twice, in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4: People from all the earth come to Israel to learn the ways of peace.

As the story proceeds, though, we see that the very means of establishing Israel in the land carried with them the seeds of failure. Indeed, the land could not be secured without violence—but once the land is secured, the dynamics of violence do not disappear. The initial tension between a decentralized, theo-politics on the one hand and territoriality on the other hand came to resolved on the side of territoriality. That is, Israel could not be sustained apart from the centralized authority of kingship and its attendant power politics.

However, as Deuteronomy 17 and 1 Samuel 8 warn, such a politics of domination cannot help but undermine Torah. Such a politics cannot help but be corrupt and violate the very conditions of

One of the more challenging passages in the Bible is the story told in the book of Joshua. God's chosen people enter the "promised land," meet with opposition from the nations living there, and proceed—with God's direction and often miraculous support—the kill or drive out the previous inhabitants. The book ends with a celebration that now the Hebrew people are in the Land, poised to live happily ever after.

Probably the most difficult aspect of the story to stomach is the explicit command that comes several times from God to the Hebrews to kill every man, woman, and child as part of the conquest. This element of the story is horrifying, even more so in light of the afterlife of this story where it has been used in later times to justify what are said to be parallel conquests—such as the conquest of Native Americans and nature southern Africans. So what do we do with it as pacifists? Or, really, even if for those who are not pacifists, how could any moral person want to confess belief in such a genocidal God?

The dismissal strategy

Probably the easiest response to the Joshua story is simply to dismiss it. To say, this is not part of our story. The God of conquest is not the God of Jesus Christ. One way to think of this is simply to say that the Bible here contains stories that cannot possibly have been true. We can't know why these stories were included in the Bible, but we can know that we need to repudiate them—or at least agree to ignore them.

I hope some time in the not too distant future to reflect in more detail on this problem. There are various strategies to read Joshua in ways that don't go to the total dismissal extreme but to in fact see some truths expressed there that may be appropriated for peace theology (this may be said to be the strategy taken by Mennonite scholars such as Millard Lind and John Howard Yoder). And there

are other strategies, not necessarily with a peace theology agenda, for coming to terms with the story in ways that do not require its repudiation but still allow us to place our priority in reading the Bible on the message of Jesus.

For now, though, I simply want to reflect on a particular reading strategy I just thought of. To me, it's quite different than the total dismissal strategy, though since I do not accept the historicity of this story, some might see it as pretty close to dismissal. I don't actually feel much of a need to protect the Joshua story from dismissal—however, I still tend to want to see if we can find meaning in the story that at the least will help us put it in perspective and protect us from the uses that find in the story support for our violence. More than defending Joshua per se, I am interested in defending the larger biblical story of which it is a part—an essential story for faith-based peacemakers.

An anarchistic agenda

I am in the midst of an exercise, to look at the Bible through an anarchistic lens. This fall semester (2014), I have been teaching a class called "Christian Anarchism." We looked at the "classic anarchists" (thinkers such a Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Goldman—plus a brief glance at contemporary primitivists and post-anarchists) and at various attempts to think about whether there is a "Christian anarchism" (writings by Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, Mark Van Steenwyk, Jacques Ellul, Tripp York, and Ted Troxell). The final third of the class has been a quick run through of the Bible to test whether the Bible makes sense in light of anarchistic sensibilities (thinking especially of two central ideas: the de-centering of the state and the affirmation of the principle of self-organization).

Over the next several weeks, I hope to write a series of blog posts summarizing some of what we discussed. We talked about

the sustenance of peoplehood and the vocation of blessing the families of the earth.

Though the story line that follows continues to be centered in the "holy land" with its rebuilt temple, it evinces little hope for re-establishing a territorial kingdom of Israel there as the condition for the sustenance of the peoplehood. Though little noted in the biblical texts, the Judaism of this time continued to spread and solidify its diasporic existence.

The politics of the second Joshua

When we get to the story of Jesus, we are introduced to a political vision that takes non-territoriality for granted. Jesus shares with his namesake, Joshua, a message about God's salvation. And he brings a message about the kingdom of God and is, in fact, ultimately understood as a royal or messianic figure. But his message repudiates the coercion and centralization of power politics that a territorial kingdom would require. In that sense, he becomes a kind of anti-Joshua.

Jesus's community embodied a politics of servanthood vis-a-vis domination, free forgiveness vis-a-vis the centralized control of access to God, and non-possessiveness vis-a-vis accumulated wealth. He set his notion of God's rule over against the Pharisaic purity project, the centralized Temple, and brutal Roman hegemony. Rather than the eradication of the impure that we see in Joshua, with Jesus we see the healing of the impure. Rather than the sense that God's intervention on behalf of the promise requires violence that we see in Joshua, with Jesus we get the clear message that God's intervention on behalf of the promise is decidedly and necessarily nonviolent.

Victory through suffering love replaces victory through violent conquest. The difference is that now the promise does not need a state with justifiable violence that requires defending boundaries.

There is, earlier in the story, a brief account of how human kingship might work in harmony with Torah—Deuteronomy 17:14–20. This kind of king would be subordinate to Torah and would refuse to centralize military power and wealth in his and his main supporters' hands.

As the story continues, though, it becomes clear early on that neither Samuel's warnings or the strictures from Deuteronomy 17 would be heeded. Kingship in Israel does indeed lead to centralized power, wealth accumulation in the hands of the few, disenfranchisement for the many, and a militarized society. The prophets makes it clear that the on-going departure from Torah would have terrible consequences. And when their warnings are borne out, their words were remembered and provided a theological rationale for continued faith.

The disasters that befell Israel, the destruction of the kingdom and the temple, were not signs of God's failure but indeed were vindications of God's warnings. Because of the recovery of the long-forgotten books of the law during the ill-fated kingship of Josiah, the people did have resources to sustain their sense of identity and the sense of the promise given to Abraham and Sarah.

As a consequence of the failures and, at the same time, the sustenance of the core vision, the community was able to respond to the disasters with creativity and resilience. As it turned out, the loss of territory opens the possibility to revisit the initial tension between a community established with decentralized power dynamics and the need for territoriality. This time, the community was able move toward the decentralized power side of the tension instead of the territoriality side.

Beginning with Jeremiah 29 there is an embrace (or at least an explicit acknowledgement) of a vision for carrying on the promise in a way where scattered faith communities would "seek the peace of the city where they found themselves" rather than harking back to a vision of a geographical kingdom as the necessary center for

creation and fall, the exodus, and Torah (the motive clause the precedes the Ten Commandments, Torah's spirit of empowerment, the concern for vulnerable people in the community, the sense of being over against Egypt, and the Sabbath regulations [day of rest, forgiveness of debts, anti-centralization and stratification, return of land]).

Then we talked about Joshua.

After Joshua, we talked about the Judges, the turn toward kingship, the prophetic critique, the impact of exile, and then the New Testament picture of Jesus in the gospels and apostolic witness in Paul and Revelation.

The discussion on Joshua triggered some new thoughts about how to think about that vexing text. On the one hand, in the Joshua story we may see an emphasis on what Millard Lind called "theopolitics" over against state-politics or power-politics. There is, in anarchist fashion, a de-centering of *human* power structures in Joshua along with a sense of conditionality concerning the Hebrews' status in the land that will be based on their faithfulness (or not) to Torah.

On the other hand, in the Joshua story we come face to face with overwhelming violence and its celebration. The Hebrews in the story may have been marginalized recently liberated slaves and the "Canaanites" in the story may have mainly been kings and oppressors (see Norman Gottwald's account in his famous book, *The Tribes of Yahweh*). Yet the story that was written and then retold became a story that kings and oppressors could use to justify their conquests during the era of Christendom—an utterly devastating story.

Reading Joshua as part of the bigger story

Here is part of what I came up with in our discussion (and in a fruitful after-class conversation with Thomas Millary). How do we

understand the Joshua account to fit with the bigger biblical narrative, thinking in terms of something like what Walter Brueggemann has called the Bible's "primal narrative", and approaching it with what we could call an anarchistic lens?

We may start with God's promise to Abraham and Sarah when they are first called to start something new—ultimately, their descendants will "bless all the families of the earth" (Genesis 12:3). This promise may be seen as the core element of the biblical story. What follows is the path, at times quite tortured, that God's people take in trying to carry out the vocation implied in that promise. In the Christian Bible, this path leads ultimately to the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21–22 where the nations are healed by the leaves from the tree of life.

Abraham and Sarah's immediate descendants face various adventures that culminate, by the end of Genesis, with their relocation in Egypt. The settling in Egypt turns ominous by the beginning of the book of Exodus. The Hebrews are enslaved. They have multiplied far beyond the clan of Abraham's and have little sense of identity. They cry out, God hears, Moses arises, and they are delivered (without any generals or a king!).

After their deliverance, the people are given Torah as a gift to guide their common life as a counterculture in contrast with the ways of empire. Torah details a just and peaceable society with decentralized power and a sense of the value of each person (which involves a special focus on protecting the well-being of marginalized people in the community).

We are given the sense that to live out Torah, the people need a particular place, that this vision of human flourishing must be embodied and lived out in the flesh in order to lead to the promised blessing. However, we are also given the sense that the only way to imagine such an embodiment of Torah would be in a territoried community, a geographical region with boundaries and sovereignty as a people. However, also, from the start we get the sense that this existence in a territoried community is contingent

upon faithfully embodying Torah—the landedness is meant to serve the vocation, not to be an end in itself.

As it turns out, to be established in a particular land will require violence. People will need to be displaced, and the community will require coercive force to maintain its borders. There seems to be no way to have landedness without also having violence, even if from the story of the exodus it is clear that this necessary violence is not meant to be the monopoly of a centralized human power structure. Instead, at the beginning the necessary violence comes in the form of God's direct intervention.

So, when Joshua leads the Hebrews into the promised land, the land of Canaan, inevitable violence takes place—on a large scale, as the story is told. The story makes it clear that this violence is God's and, at most, the human role is quite secondary. The on-going human leadership in the community is not based on gathered military might but on faithfulness to God's commands.

The growing problem with territoriality

Throughout Joshua as the people enter the land, Judges as the people settle and establish their on-going community, and the first part of 1 Samuel, the necessary violence remains ad hoc and does not lead to permanent structures of power—no standing army, no collection of generals, no human king.

As it turns out, the tension and sense of insecurity without such structures of power prove to be intolerable for Israel's elders. These elders (and note in 1 Samuel 8 that the call for a kind is not a popular demand from "the people" but a demand from the elite, the "elders") make a decisive move to restructure Israel's politics to "be like the nations." According to the story, the main representative of God among the people, Samuel, argues vehemently against this restructuring, but he is ultimately told to accept it by God.