An End to Evil: An Eschatological Approach to Security

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Abstract

In this article, a case for developing a Christian approach to (in)security is offered, hinging on the idea that there is an end to evil. It is argued that there still is merit in combining the human longing for *securitas* with a biblical sense of *certitudo*. First, a short selection of religious or ecclesiastical thought and action on the topic of security and safety is examined. Then, today's thinking about security is analyzed through the lens of Adam's timescape concept. Finally, I advocate the need for a biblically informed eschatological interpretation of security concerns that reorients the existing administrative, social scientific, or other academic approaches to fear, danger, threat, and insecurity.

Keywords

1 Introduction

In a recent article on human security, historian Steffen Patzold convincingly invokes the worries of the King of the Franks, Charles the Great – Charlemagne – in the autumn of the year 778 AD. As King of the Franks, he had expanded his kingdom to the edges of what is today Western and Eastern Europe. His wife

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Hildegard had just given him a pair of twins, Louis and Lothair. But major disasters were upon him. His army suffered a series of heavy defeats, the Saxon hordes appeared in the East for an attack, and the Basques had similar plans in the Pyrenees. The crops had failed and a famine was imminent. His people and nobles were afraid. What to do? To what and whom did this most successful political leader of the Middle Ages turn? He called on all bishops, cardinals, and abbots together and instructed them to celebrate masses in all of their cities, cathedrals, and monasteries. He forced his knights, counts, and lords to hand out extra alms to feed the hungry, and to do good deeds. Everyone, from the highest prelate to the lowest crofter, was called upon to unite in prayer and song, as a demonstration of dependence, trust, penance, and contrition before the divine authority. Only when that was done did the king take safety and security precautions that seem to us today a bit more practical. He reorganized and centralized the storage of goods and food, had additional barns built, limited the power of the guilds and the cities and appointed new, more competent governors. It took a while, but in about twenty years he had restored security, and on 25 December 800 he had Pope Leo III crown him Imperator Augustus – thereby turning himself into a legend for posterity (Patzold 2012; Hägermann 2000, 163–166; Fried 2013).

Charlemagne lived in uncertain times. But he had a firm belief in his own abilities, and especially in divine action. If we compare his attitude to our feelings and beliefs today, some remarkable differences stand out. People in the early 21st century live in uncertain and fearful times as well, with famines, terrorism, wars, and migration crises spreading across the globe. But there is seldom talk within the corridors of power today about tackling these worldly problems by means of religiously weighted imperatives.

In this article, I will make a case for developing a Christian approach to (in)security. Is there still merit in combining the human longing for *securitas* with a biblical sense of *certitudo*? Since Thomas Hobbes, security is safely and squarely embedded in the realm of a political philosophy that hinges on the concept of state, sovereignty, and populace. The unity of spiritual and secular leadership evident in Charlemagne's day has long been destroyed, although elements of it persist in symbols of political and clerical unity as in the United Kingdom and the Anglican Church. Nevertheless, it could be argued that Christian theology and Christian philosophy offer a specific approach to safety and security that is different from existing methods and disciplines in the realm of conventional social science or historical security studies. This added value pertains, for one, to the fact that this approach offers an alternative to the social-engineering and management perspective on modernist security crises and problems. Modern technologies are caught in the paradox of, on the one

hand, being used to control fear and uncertainty, while, on the other hand, projecting and propelling these fears and insecurities even faster and further by these very same technological means. In the postmodern, secular timescape (more on that below), which is characterized by the power of "images" and online mobilized sentiments, scientific and technological approaches based on positivistic, rational discourse and manageability fall short. So there is a need for an approach that transcends the paradox. Alternative approaches have been offered before, but not from a Christian philosophical angle.[1]

In this paper, I will first describe which forms of religious or ecclesiastical thought and action are or have been evident in the field of security and safety. Then I will highlight today's thinking about security. What does it look like, where does it come from? Finally, I will advocate the need for a (theological/philosophical) biblically informed interpretation that reorients the existing administrative, social scientific, or other academic approaches to fear, danger, threat, and insecurity.

An initial demarcation is in place. First, the focus of this paper is on "security" (on this concept more below), and not "war" or "peace." Regarding these latter, a plethora of age-old ideas is available; think of the doctrine of just war. Second, in this article I limit myself, primarily for practical reasons, to Protestant forms of religion. Geographically and sociologically, the examples are mainly from the Netherlands and further from the Western world. Obviously, it is highly desirable that similar attempts are undertaken from other religious and geographical contexts and perspectives, but that is beyond the scope of this article. I would also note in passing that this article is inspired by my desire to embed my day-to-day work as historian and terrorism researcher and commentator (De Graaf, Dimitriu and Ringsmose 2015a; De Graaf and Schmid 2016; De Graaf 2011b; 2015b) within a context of biblically inspired reasoning about God's way with humankind. In today's age, where the "power of nightmares" has caught so many in its grip, there is a need, also within the field of academic study and detailed research, not to lose touch with the eschatological perspective of grace and redemption in Jesus Christ – and the corresponding perspective on the end of all evil.

2   Churches and Their Take on Security

Many topics associated and overlapping with the concept and policy objective of security are already within the orbit of the activities and programs that the churches in the Netherlands, for example, engage in. Churches and religious

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1   The first part of this article is based in part on earlier lectures and texts (De Graaf 2010; 2011a; 2012; 2013a).

institutions provide a myriad of practical, psychological, and communicative services – including pastoral care - during disasters, traumatic events, and crises. These activities on behalf of refugees, asylum seekers, etc., and other diaconal work serve an important purpose in the light of physical or social security. Research shows that religious people display more trust in other people and in the government, and are on average more active as volunteers. To that extent, they can be counted upon as co-producers of social cohesion and security (Dekker 1999; Schnabel, Bijl and De Hart 2008, chapter 15).

As for the immediate enforcement of public order and national security, churches have opted for a secondary position within the epistemic community involved in this domain. Sometimes ecclesiastical or religious societies, mosques, or other religious communities are themselves the object of security investigations. Consider the investigation of sexual abuse within the Roman Catholic Church or the government's development of measures to ensure integrity and security in the religious domain (Ministry of Security and Justice 2012, 1–8). In the field of national security and public order, hate crimes, sedition, and fears about religious and radical orthodoxy have the attention of the media, public prosecutors, and intelligence and security services alike. After "9/11", when radical Islamists and jihadists began to use their faith to justify violence against apostates and "nonbelievers," fears about and the dislike of all sorts of orthodox forms of religion increased steeply as well. Every religion, including Christianity, became tainted by association (De Graaf 2013b). Discussions about the freedoms of religion and of expression and the abuses of these freedoms frequently dominate public debate, ranging from themes such as gun violence to the oppression of women and homosexuals. The tendency among some orthodox believers to absolutize their convictions is seen as an important source of coercion and a threat to a free public sphere (Den Boef 2008, 43; Cliteur 2004; Pels 2008; Kuitert 2008) – a threat that was further exacerbated by the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2014.

That some religious organizations and even individual believers are considered to be security risks is nothing new; that's been happening for ages. Here in the Netherlands, for example, the Ministry of Justice held the historical title "Ministry of Justice and Worship", to indicate that it could infringe on religious autonomy and religious freedom if national security or the public order was at stake. And the ministry still can do that. Even before the establishment of a central ministry, police forces fought religious fanatics and Anabaptists in the early modern era, they quelled the so-called Psalms Riot and tried to suppress the early 19th century secession (the *Afscheiding*) from the Dutch National Protestant Church (Hirsch Ballin, Knoope and Kennedy 2011).

Although churches have been present both as subject and as object in the security discourse, only a few contributions (beyond texts on just war theory) have appeared that speak to a Christian understanding of insecurity and uncertainty. A systematic approach to security from a Christian perspective is lacking. Before such an approach can be developed, a brief overview of recent sociological and historiographical literature on security thinking is called for.

3   Historical Security Thinking

To map out contemporary security thinking, one must first consider the definition of the term "security" – a common, but nevertheless controversial term. Not only are the ins and outs of public policies regarding security susceptible to fundamental changes over time, but this also holds true for the concept of security. Security is an 'essentially contested concept,' (Connolly 1993, 10) fluid and subject to all kinds of political and social trends.

In common parlance, safety or security refers in the first place to a feeling. We feel safe, i.e., not directly threatened, surrounded by a circle of people we trust, living in a safe home, and preferably also in a way that our existence is assured. Security is, secondly, also a state of being; for humans, but also for a country, society, or even for a continent as a whole. Wars, famine, terrorism, and climate change affect one's sense of security and threaten one's state of being. But these threats do not affect everyone equally. Even though security also pertains to a state of order, where the rule of law is upheld and secured in a constitution, the state of physical security is unevenly distributed, not only geographically, but also psychologically. For example, in various countries or certain areas the risk of homicide is much higher than in peaceful affluent societies like the Netherlands. But even in this country, the Central Bureau of Statistics keeps track of when and where groups of people feel unsafe. That ongoing research shows that women and older people, for example, feel threatened faster than do young men, and that this effect is more prevalent during the evenings and in some remote or quiet areas (CBS 2009, 14–15).

So the concept of security has a double meaning. On the one hand, it implies a desired state of affairs – the absence of threat. On the other hand, it also has a cognitive and emotional dimension, a state of being when we feel safe and can live without fear. This is not quite the same as the distinction between objective and subjective; it refers more to the physical and the psychological sides of security. That brings us to an important definition that brings these two dimensions together. The sociologist Willem Schinkel once described "security" as an intersubjective process that results in an 'anticipated state of

wellbeing in the future.' ('Veiligheid als medium'; unpublished lecture) This definition is interesting because it links the state of security with an awareness and sense of time. The philosopher Jeremy Bentham wrote in the 19th century: '[S]ecurity turns its eye exclusively to the future' (Zedner 2009, 29).

We see this element of temporality reflected in the design of security *policies*. These are directed toward a projected future. A theoretical approach to security must not only be about the current state of war or peace, about the presence or absence of threats in a given period, but also about one's ideas, emotions, and expectations regarding the future. Such projections are then directly relevant for the here and now, because they lead in the present to measures of control and risk management (Kaufmann 1973). The point is: how do we see the future, how do we understand ourselves, our interests and perceived threats over time? The way we project our fears, as well as the geographic and temporal scope of that projection, says something about the limits of our hopes and expectations. Where do we stand, how far do our fears take us, what threats and dangers do we see coming our way?

To elucidate the importance of the temporal element, it is good to look briefly at how people thought about security in the past. Therefore, we introduce here the concept of "timescape," which denotes the changing temporal context in which current discussions about safety and risk take place. According to sociologist and risk researcher Barbara Adam, our social and political life is staged in collective, specific, and historically determined cultural timescapes. Such a timescape describes the way people in a certain historical period experience their time horizon and see the future, the horizon of the time within which they live and work (Adam 1998). Here we could think of someone's life-expectancy, but also of the practical propensity and ability to plan ahead. A farmer in the early Middle Ages had fewer tools with which to plan, and also a different consciousness of dealing with the future, than does a farmer in the 21st century, for instance. The forms of intelligence gathering and contingency planning that a ruler like Charlemagne had at his disposal were quite different from those available to a commander of armed forces today.

Adam sees a succession of different timescapes in history that defined the way people dealt with threat and risk. These timescapes do not succeed each other seamlessly but can also overlap. In a for a real historian inadmissible and unforgivably generalist and simplistic fashion, it is possible to summarize these timescapes in an overlapping, tile-wise, three-layered chronology of stages. In the early modern period, people saw dangers, catastrophes, and threats as natural disasters sent by God. The human and the divine dimension of time ran seamlessly into each other, and the end of time was always near. Church and religion were inextricably part of social and public life (which

obviously does not mean that everyone was a devout believer). Belief in a higher being helped people to bear the consequences of disaster and adversity. If we consider the measures and activities Charlemagne undertook to secure his territories and avert a crisis, his highly practical and sensible precautions were embedded in a spiritual "policy program" of prayer and penance. For him, earthly and spiritual expectations regarding the future - one's physical and religious state of security - were inextricably intertwined and not even considered as different domains.

After the Enlightenment, the balance of political and religious regimes gradually shifted. The idea, possibility, and necessity of calculating and engineering the natural and the human environment weighed in on contemporary policymakers. The early timescape of a divine apocalyptic horizon persisted, but was joined by new visions and projections, based on new technologies (of calculation, planning, and forecasting), of an open, optimistic, and manageable future. The future could be tamed more systematically and by more secular means than in early modern times. Perhaps for many, projected crises in a distant future would still be in the hands of God, but since the 17th century, merchants could simultaneously learn to use and appropriate new mathematical and technological tools that enabled them to plan ahead with greater detail and nuance. Sophisticated collective insurance methods were developed, connecting widespread geographical territories, for example within the community of the Hanseatic League, in order to spread the costs of famine and fire, and to diversify food production (Zwierlein 2011).

In this period, from the 17th century onwards, political philosophers started to develop theories about the functioning of the state and society in which the possibility of human utopias gained salience. Thomas Hobbes, the famous 17th century philosopher, laid the intellectual groundwork for the rise of the modern nation state as the guardian of peace and security. He formulated the relationship between monarch and people in terms of security. 'The office of the sovereign, be it a monarch or an assembly, consisteth in the end, for which he was trusted with the sovereign power, namely the procuration of the safety of the people' (Hobbes 1996, 222). According to Hobbes, without such a government life would fall back into a 'state of nature', a state of being that he described as a 'bellum omnium contra omnes.' In such a state, without the protection of a political community and of a sovereign power that controlled that community, human life was doomed to be 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short' (Hobbes 1996, chapter XIII).

The divine timeline, culminating in an apocalypse, was thus accompanied by a more modern consciousness of human power over a future that could be colonized. Expectations of a secure future could also be placed in the hands of

a ruler or a parliament that could start to deploy new technological, scientific, and economic planning methods and tools. Various forms of governance and conflicting political philosophies were developed to reach 'perpetual peace' (Kant), a 'social contract' (Rousseau), 'the wealth of nations' (Smith), or other states of human well-being.

In the 20th century, however, it appeared that these social-control-utopias did not always offer a solution for disaster and risk reduction, but that they also (co-)created new hazards and catastrophes. The big "social engineering" projects of the 20th century - fascism, Nazism and communism - intentionally produced death and destruction on a hitherto unprecedented industrial scale. Technological advances produced their own disasters, as the accident of the nuclear reactor at Chernobyl made clear in 1986. Adam, but also sociologists such as Ulrich Beck, claims that the world has since entered a new timescape: that of an 'ever extended present' linked to a 'closing of the future.' While political philosophers since the Enlightenment thought we could calculate and control the future with modern theories and new technological ways and means, from the middle of the 20th century onwards it dawned on many that human action was at least as lethal to this future as had been the natural disasters that it had wanted to overcome. In the 21st century, with social media in hand, people live in an incessant present, relentlessly confronted with all kinds of imminent disasters and risks, close by or far away, real and imagined. And contrary to the early modern solace of redemption and salvation, today's people just have to cope with these insecurities on their own. The constant portrayal of the apocalypse is no longer accompanied with the divine consolation and the perspective of eschatological redemption that the Middle Ages still had to offer.

4   Contemporary Security Thinking

Those who, with Beck, Adam, and others, consider our present-day timescape to be a secular apocalyptic one, also have to acknowledge the fact that today's security policies are completely imbued with this way of thinking and living (Beck 1986; 1999; 2002; Adam and Van Loon 2000; Mythen and Walklate 2006). Governments and international institutions have to deal on a daily basis with the control paradox that calls for human and technological resources to solve problems that are themselves caused by new scientific discoveries and technological innovations or at least come to us via that route. Terrorist organizations, such as ISIS, which inundate the world "24/7" on YouTube and Twitter with images of death and destruction, quickly appropriate new technologies to further their cause. These wreakers of havoc and horror are, of course, themselves

products of modern times: they use the most modern weapons and means of communication and they are, as in the case of ISIS, sometimes the product of human intervention and military mismanagement in the Middle East.

An important characteristic of contemporary safety thinking is the expansion of security in time and space into the realm of the imaginary. Security is a linear concept. Old-fashioned security policy assumes a concrete threat, somewhere on the horizon, the harm of which can be assessed using all kinds of calculation and planning resources. How long will it take before the hostile army is at the gates, the rocket has reached its goal, the water level has risen so high that the dam will break - those kinds of calculations. A risk relates to probability and imagination. A risk cannot always be calculated, or the risk is so small that it is statistically insignificant, yet bad enough that it must surely be included in the plan, such as a terrorist attack or a solar storm. The current safety culture is more a risk culture in which imagined futures and worst-case scenarios are visualized, using the latest computer simulation techniques. This then leads to all kinds of exaggerated expectations that governments need to respond to with equally comprehensive and proactive measures - because before you know it, ...[2]

This brings us back to the definition of the beginning: security is not just about a physical state of being, but also about our future expectations and therefore about our feelings and the things that capture our imagination. And in the current timescape these feelings and images tend to get overheated quickly. The criminologist Hans Boutellier explained that today's feelings of insecurity and uneasiness are bolstered up by our post-Cold War condition of living in a "network society." This is a society that is characterized by the loss of familiar social settings, by increased diversity, and complexities greater than ever before (Boutellier 2002/2005; Castells 1996). Boutellier then states, following the sociologist Zygmunt Baumann (Baumann 2001a; 2001b), that the moral uncertainty that these shifting sands engender is exactly what generates additional calls for security (Oppelaar and Wittebrood 2006, 34). The disappearance of familiar hierarchies and institutions has made citizens more sensitive to insecurity sooner. The aforementioned Ulrich Beck likewise made the case that the post-materialistic citizens of the free West simply have difficulty coping with personal mishaps, failures, or setbacks. Individual development and manufacturability have a downside: breakdown and tragedies are no longer

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2 A right-wing Dutch politician's example: before you know it there is a 'Little Caliphate' in the Schilderswijk neighborhood in The Hague. See, for example, *De Telegraaf*'s article and video: 'Wilders daagt extremisten uit', 13 August 2014: http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/22959617/__ Wilders_daagt_extremisten_uit__.html (accessed 14 January 2016).

accepted. Modern citizens work harder at insuring ("protecting") themselves against damage, inconvenience, or misfortune. But they also increasingly demand of the state that it shelter them from threat and harm. Even though many neoliberal governments are not in a position to provide that level of security, all the while the reported number of threats (real and imagined) is increasing.

One security expert wrote cynically that the only thing left for authorities in this post-apocalyptic modern timescape to do is 'to feign control over the uncontrollable' – as though the only thing that seems to matter nowadays is the *appearance* of security and effective risk management (Beck 2002, 41; 1999). Risk management has thus also become a mode of governance; risk research-ers speak of 'risk governance,' (Van Asselt 2005; Van Asselt and Van Bree 2011) or of risk management as a paradoxical (because it is per definition uncontrol-lable) 'taming of the future' (Aradau and Van Munster 2008). In fact, primary risk management (trying to control the actual risk) is, as a result, increasingly being replaced by secondary risk management: a form of decision-making aimed at covering (up), or at least hedging, the secondary risk of administra-tive failure. What happens then is that a lack of clarity regarding who is accountable in uncertain situations – which is a typical characteristic of the "new security thinking" – tends to reduce decision-making to a set of standard protocols and security scenarios, which in effect offers a formalized, but often highly superficial, short-sighted and façade-like grid to allocate political responsibility for 'decisions which must be made in potentially undecidable situations' (Power 2004, 10). Although this may present itself as accountable and effective decision-making and control, the primary risk of the impending threat has, of course, not properly been addressed.

A safe society and a state that is acting against injustice and violence are certainly things to be thankful for. *Salus populi suprema lex esto.*[3] The demo-cratic system and our open society are fully worth defending. But I want to suggest that there are at least three features of modern security thinking that deserve careful consideration and critical scrutiny.

First, because today's security thinking focuses on comprehensive risk man-agement – in the present, in the future, and of our imagination – it is poten-tially totalitarian. Not only current risks "on the horizon," but also threats and dangers of an imaginary kind (the "unknown unknowns") are translated into a whole array of precautionary measures.

Second, and related to the first point, this security discourse is often uncom-promising and relentless, for it aims to identify increasingly larger categories

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3 'The welfare of an individual yields to that of the community,' Cicero, *De Legibus*, III.

and groups of threats and dangers in the here and now that must be made harmless in advance. Think of all forms of registration (from license plates for our cars to special permits for those traveling to the Middle East), of the categorization of "risk groups" (football supporters, youth groups, patients with diabetes, etc.) (Lyon 2002), of the dangers of "ethnic profiling" that some have noted (Open Society Justice Initiative 2009), and of all the breaches of privacy and personal freedom that arise from these efforts. So too, despite all the pleas for "harsher punishment," the reintegration and rehabilitation of the accused when they return to society is completely lost sight of (Burns 1998; Uggen, Manza and Behrens 2004).

Finally, today's security thinking, which bombards us continuously in the here and now with all sorts of supposedly apocalyptic threats, which can in turn easily capture our imagination and invade our collective immune system as being real, makes us especially vulnerable. Preaching doom can so quickly obstruct the path to practical solutions and alternative perspectives.

5   An Eschatological Approach to Security

Security thinking today is locked in a double bind: secular, unforgiving, and apocalyptic, but with little hope of a solution, let alone of redemption. It has no sound way of responding to the fundamental problem of dealing with evil. An eschatological approach may help us develop a deeper perspective.

We have found that security always involves a sense of uncertainty and insecurity, extending itself, as it does, to a future that is per definition uncertain and unknown. Today, good security policies are defined in terms of risk management: to do what it takes to control unforeseen and unexpected circumstances. This project can potentially take on totalitarian proportions. As a globalized world shrinks and accelerates, online people around the world are confronted daily with all kinds of atrocities. A secular-apocalyptic timescape holds sway. And therein lies a great risk for and shortfall in current thinking and action in the security field.

Petruschka Schaafsma has written a dissertation thesis about the unique value of theology and religion in thinking through the phenomenon of evil. I will highlight some of her conclusions, as they contain observations on "the end of evil" that provide a good starting point for developing a more biblical , and especially eschatological, perspective on security.

Schaafsma's study is a complex exercise in the philosophy of religion that aims to inquire into the nature and status of the notion of evil. Her goal was to investigate 'In what context is speaking of evil at home.' In this endeavor, she

makes the case that people need to 'become aware of what is lost when the term evil disappears from our thinking about humans and the world' (Schaafsma 2006, 287). I agree with that insight and connect it in this essay to the concepts of security, fear, and risk, without here giving a full justification of this connection. For now we will assume that thinking in terms of insecurity, defusing fear, and taking precautions against danger and risk implies a certain conception of the scope and especially the boundaries of these hazards and risks. Public and political debates on security almost always presuppose certain conceptions of evil, be that human evil or a more general understanding of suffering, misery, and natural catastrophes. We are particularly interested here in the negative side of security, namely, anticipating threats and dangers that can undermine our state of well-being.

Schaafsma states that the notion of evil is most at home in a religious way of thinking. She compares the ethical and moral conception of Immanuel Kant and the tragic-philosophical approach of Karl Jaspers with the symbolic approach of Paul Ricoeur and the theological approach of Karl Barth. With Ricoeur, she believes that wrestling with "the end of evil" is characteristic of religious thinking.

According to her, Barth and Ricoeur have a better response to evil. Kant's ethic really only leaves room for the independently responsible person who can make good choices; he does not develop a convincing view on radical evil. Karl Jaspers, on the other hand, is too accepting of radical evil as a general problem of human existence, with no beginning or end in sight. Karl Barth, from a theological perspective, reflects extensively on "das Nichtige" (the term Barth uses to denote evil), specifically emphasizing that evil has been conquered. However, according to Schaafsma, Barth's view is perhaps too abstract, and may be 'insufficient' when it comes to encouraging people to fight against evil. In contrast, Ricoeur emphasizes both the absurdity of evil and the possibility to anticipate symbolically the end of evil. He points, for example, to the importance of symbols like 'purification, forgiveness, and penance.' Schaafsma herself, combining insights from Barth and Ricoeur, concludes, that while evil is 'something that should not be there' and 'that we should resist and fight', (Schaafsma 2006, 242, 276) one must also realize that the 'critical weight of the religious view of evil [that the end of evil is something that is wholly in God's hands] consists in a fundamental doubt of the human ability to know and solve the problem of evil' (Schaafsma 2006, 286). The bad news is that evil exists, as something absurd in the sense that it was never intended to be. It is also something that transcends people. People have great difficulty even knowing evil, let alone controlling it. This calls for a radical solution to evil. The good news is that that solution is conceivable, and comes forth from the idea that God puts

an end to evil. We may look forward to the end of evil, chaos, and uncertainty, and anticipate that reality in symbols, but it is up to God to bring it about.

In other words, if we go back to the elements of contemporary security thinking that I have defined above, we get an inkling of the value of this biblically informed, eschatological approach to security. Security is an anticipated state of flourishing in the future that can inform and direct our efforts to control, reduce, or eliminate the evil that can hurt people (in the broadest sense, from natural disasters to terrorist attacks). Understood in this way, we can incorporate "security" into a theoretical framework and attitude that does not get hung up on a notion of evil as existential tragedy, but which also does not disregard evil as a real life phenomenon when dealing with ethical issues. In this approach there is room for both an understanding of the shortcomings in the human condition - we cannot comprehend or control evil - and a firm belief in the end of evil and the reality of true safety as realized by God. This biblically informed approach to security brings with it some answers to each of the three pressure points in contemporary security thinking within the said secular apocalyptic timescape that were highlighted above: 1) the totalitarian, 2) the irreconcilable, and 3) the fragile facet of current security thinking.

5.1   *The Totalitarian Facet of Current Security Thinking*

Striving for security – think of the concept of *shalom* in the Old Testament – is an ancient biblical notion. Andries Zoutendijk wrote a wonderful meditation about the shepherds in Ezekiel 34, who had been called upon to ensure the safety and welfare of their flock (Zoutendijk 2003, 55–59). Precautions are necessary and a prerequisite for a well-functioning society. However, they cannot provide the solution for all kinds of unarticulated fundamental problems that have to do with moral disquiet, rootlessness, and uncertainty. Worse still, when the government and social agencies themselves begin to step back from the assumption, common until recently, that citizens can be trusted, the disquiet on the part of citizens is only compounded. And while the decline of social control may require more and different control mechanisms, when we begin to replace societal ways of doing things that are founded on trust and presumed innocence with procedures and protocols that are based on institutionalized mistrust, the axe is laid to the root of our constitutional democracy. The risks often mentioned in order to legitimize those new measures (terrorism, child abuse, etc.) can never justify such far-reaching control mechanisms because they fail to address the underlying problems. The root causes of problems related to security cannot be eliminated with simply more security precautions. The eventual benefits and efficiency of these very expensive security measures are very difficult to prove. Moreover, these new security measures

comport poorly with other values that matter as well, such as equality before the law, due process, and protection of individual autonomy. It is the pre-political values of solidarity, mutual trust, and caring that make a society livable and safe. The rule of law provides a framework and sets boundaries for these. When these limits are transgressed, security measures define the sanctions called for, but they cannot provide democracy's public square with the quality of life and sense of trust that it stands in need of.

We do not know what tomorrow will bring, but the future *is* in God's hands. We don't have to solve the mystery on our own. As is the case with the end of evil, we do not have a handle on the end of time. In other words, the invitation to embrace a security agenda that calls for perspicuity regarding the distant future, and that promises a human solution to evil, is something that we, in the light of Scripture, may confidently reject out of hand. Christ has conquered the powers of darkness. Given the prospect of redemption, we do not need to kowtow to the secular horizon of the current timescape. Risk management has its limits. It does not have to, nor can it, embrace the totality of time, territory, people, and their thoughts. The end to evil is in sight, and security policies need not presume to repeat this radical deliverance.

5.2   *The Irreconcilable Facet of Current Security Thinking*

The end to evil is a given. Biblically speaking, we are talking here about human brokenness and grace, of having fallen and of being raised up. The possibility of renewal is real. The days of punishment and retribution are numbered. Putting too much stock in human retribution, of us punishing others, will simply not meet our expectations regarding – our longing for – security.[4] While these symbols of justice and rectitude, of judgment and truth, have their place in society, the increasing preference for longer sentences and for developing rather impersonal (often computer generated) risk profiles/categories/lists needs to be subjected to the human scale of our fallibility and to the call to forgive as we have been forgiven. We cannot know everything nor may we simply incarcerate or indefinitely exclude those with whom we disagree. Security policy must be rooted in a sense of justice and decency; narrow-mindedness will not do. (A similar balance is evident in the doctrine of the just war, which is based on the same premise.)

Roel Kuiper rightly argues in his book *Moral Capital* that the entire debate about freedom, civil rights, and security is characterized too much by

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4   Arjan Plaisier makes this same point in his striking commentary 'Commentaar bij de tijd – Misdaad en straf', 3 April 2014: http://www.pkn.nl/actueel/Nieuws/nieuwsoverzicht/Paginas/ Commentaar-bij-de-tijd---Misdaad-en-straf.aspx. (accessed 14 January 2016).

Hobbesian pessimism and by John Locke's emphasis on individual self-interest. Human beings are not wolves – at least not per definition – and we are not only simply interested in personal gain (Kuiper 2009, 80–83). We do not need to see everything or everyone as a threat, and we certainly may not lock up everyone who in our book has a blemish. Society is not made of glass. We should also not shy from putting some stock in the resilience and cohesion found within society. There is still abundant common grace to be found, to speak with Calvin. Without that we blind ourselves to moments of transcendence, selflessness, and self-sacrifice from the get-go. For social virtues to flourish, society must be secure. It is a condition that needs to be part and parcel of any properly decisive institution; but then we should always remember that there is a connection between what Ricoeur calls 'the good life' and 'just institutions' (Ricoeur 1992, 180, 262).

5.3   *The Fragile Facet of Current Security Thinking*

Knowing that security is not the greatest good will temper the vulnerability we ourselves have created. We live with the "burden" of great expectations in a free and prosperous country and continent. Yes, security does benefit our welfare, but it is not what life is all about. The push for security must know its limits, and may well, when called for, have to acquiesce to other values and principles that also matter, such as freedom, solidarity, equality, development, emancipation, or even economic progress. An airport preoccupied with security measures and risk management will hamper too many passengers, make air traffic slow to a crawl, will probably involve itself in group discrimination ("ethnic profiling," etc.), and not really promote the well-being of its customers. A neighborhood where the order is not maintained and the garbage is not collected is as intolerable as a street where people live behind closed doors and speak to each other only via the intercom. Wanting to map and nail down all kinds of potential and imaginable risks only ramps up the fear and confusion. There are truly vulnerable groups in all kinds of places that deserve our attention, be they the elderly or lonely people in deprived neighborhoods that cannot or dare not leave their houses, or persecuted Christians, or refugees on the run from war and famine in Iraq and Syria. In the light of the last things to come, this is what we should really care about. When adopting an eschatological perspective, we should not make ourselves needlessly vulnerable when there are enough others to care for.

6   In Conclusion

These three items together offer a first step towards thinking about a biblically informed eschatological perspective on security that also speaks to current

security issues and policy. What do they mean for the position that Christians and their churches can take in the current security discourse?

Firstly, when the push for security is so pervasive that it has the potential of becoming totalitarian or antidemocratic, it must be rejected. An eschatological approach can shed a clearer light on the role of minorities in society; for when it comes to prioritizing risks and bearing the burden of restrictive measures, they often lose out – we only need to point to the recent refugee crisis that is polarizing European societies around the issue of an "even" distribution of security and risk. The church and people of faith also need to keep an eye on the balance between the different values of security, freedom of religion and freedom of expression. Being well-versed in the moral and political values that underlie the rule of law may not be presumed. Christians should make certain that they have that kind of constitutional "literacy."

Secondly, in a time of uncertainty, when doomsday scenarios abound, it is important to continue prophetically to underscore the reality of the end of evil. We need not let ourselves or our organizations be sidelined to a trivial role somewhere on the fringes of society's service sector or consider ourselves an exception to the vocation of public discourse. There is a way to respond to the expanding and totalitarian power of fearmongering and scare tactics wielded by terrorists, terror regimes and sometimes even security agencies alike, which undermine trust and make people feel insecure, angry or afraid. Christians know about the end of evil. Their timescape is open. By providing balanced assessment frameworks, based on the democratic rule of law, and identifying the limits and limitations of the security discourse, Christians can - against the spirit of the times - help to defuse anxiety, promote justice, fight injustice, and make room for hope to triumph over insecurity and uncertainty.

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