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THE PACIFISM OF THE MESSIANIC COMMUNITY:
THE CHRISTOLOGICAL SOCIAL ETHICS OF
JOHN HOWARD YODER

by

Craig Alan Carter

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Theology of the University of St. Michael's College and the Department of Theology of the Toronto School of Theology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology awarded by the University of St. Michael's College

Toronto 1999

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ABSTRACT
The Pacifism of the Messianic Community:
The Christological Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder
by
Craig A. Carter
The Department of Theology, Toronto School of Theology and the
Faculty of Theology, University of Saint Michael's College
1999

This dissertation examines the theological foundations of the social ethics of John
Howard Yoder. Yoder is interpreted as a postliberal who, despite his non-foundationalist
epistemology, was an unambiguous advocate of theological realism in the tradition of
Karl Barth. Yoder's thought is found to be very coherent and his social ethic is logically
derived from his theological system.

Chapter One places Yoder in his historical context by examining the two major
influences on his thought: "the recovery of the Anabaptist vision" and the "Biblical
Realism" of Karl Barth. Yoder is seen as creatively uniting Barth's theological method
with themes from his Anabaptist-Mennonite theological heritage to create the most
theologically sophisticated account of social ethics to emerge so far from postliberalism.

Chapter Two examines Yoder's Christology as the source of his social ethics. His
narrative Christology calls for a form of discipleship centered on community and
pacifism. Yoder challenges mainstream Christian ethics by making a strong case for
viewing pacifism as the ethical meaning of classical, Christological orthodoxy.

Chapter Three examines Yoder's eschatology as the context of his social ethics.
His "disavowal of Constantine" is rooted in his understanding of Constantinianism as the
denial of New Testament eschatology and thus as a heresy with highly negative
consequences for Christian ethics. Yoder argues that it is Constantinians, not pacifist dissenters, who are actually sectarian.

Chapter Four examines Yoder's ecclesiology as the shape of his social ethics. He makes a clear distinction between the church and the world and views the church as a new society and a foretaste of the future Kingdom of God. The ad hoc witness of the church to the state is made possible because of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the powers, including the state, in this present age. Yoder's believers' church ecclesiology, rather than promoting irrelevance and withdrawal, actually provides a solid basis for true cultural engagement and transformation, while avoiding the tendency toward accommodation to the world inherent in Constantinianism.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have incurred a number of significant debts over the past nine years of pursuing my goal of a doctorate in theology and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge them publicly. I want to thank the members of my committee: Dr. John Webster, Dr. A. James Reimer and Dr. George Schner for their patient guidance and genuine concern. I especially want to thank John for agreeing to continue to supervise my thesis from England after his move from Wycliffe College, University of Toronto to Oxford University. I have especially appreciated the prompt and encouraging feedback I have received from him all along the way. Most of all, however, I want to thank John for teaching me to appreciate the thought of Karl Barth by pointing out the most important thing about Barth's theology, namely, the utter and sustained seriousness with which he took the reality of God.

I want to thank the staff of the George A. Rawlyk Library at Atlantic Baptist University for efficient and helpful service in obtaining necessary materials for this project. Diane Trail, my Administrative Assistant, also has gone far above and beyond the call of duty to help in this project and I appreciate her assistance very much. I also want to thank the president, Dr. Ralph Richardson and the Board of Governors of Atlantic Baptist University for providing me with a leave of absence in the Fall of 1998, during which time I was able to complete the writing of the first draft of this thesis. Without that time to focus exclusively on this project, I would never have been able to finish it. I also want to thank Dr. Gary LeBlanc for filling in for me as Academic Dean during my leave and Dr. Seth Crowell and Diane Trail for taking on extra work during that time. I also want to thank the faculty of the university for supporting me in my
pursuit of this goal and in my work as Academic Dean, in general, over the past four years.

I want to thank Dr. Douglas Harink and Mark Thiessen Nation for reading parts of this dissertation while it was at the revision stage and Dr. Ronald Mercier and Dr. Gayle Gerber-Koontz for serving as examiners for my dissertation. They were most kind to share their expertise with me. Mark Thiessen Nation was also a help in obtaining certain unpublished materials by Yoder. They would not necessarily agree with all that I have written and the remaining imperfections are my responsibility alone.

The biggest debt of gratitude I owe is to my family. My children, Rebecca, Elizabeth and Stephen have gone through two moves during their school years and have spent, quite literally, years waiting for Dad to finish his thesis so that our family could live without it hanging over every holiday and every vacation. My wife Bonnie, however, is the one who deserves the credit for making it all possible. Her unselfish willingness to see her calling as including the provision of support for my academic calling has taught me more about biblical servanthood than all the books I have ever read put together. Her confidence in my ability when I seriously doubted that I would ever finish was essential to my ever getting to this point. It is to Bonnie that this work is dedicated, with more thanks and love than I know how to express.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviation will be used in this work. The books all are authored by John Howard Yoder unless otherwise noted. See the bibliography for details.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BP</td>
<td>Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Karl Barth - Church Dogmatics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGR</td>
<td>The Conrad Grebel Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWS</td>
<td>The Christian Witness to the State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTN</td>
<td>For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KBW</td>
<td>Karl Barth and the Problem of War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MQR</td>
<td>The Mennonite Quarterly Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NV</td>
<td>Nevertheless: Varieties of Christian Pacifism (all page references are to the third edition of 1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POJ</td>
<td>The Politics of Jesus (all page references are to the second edition of 1994 unless otherwise noted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK</td>
<td>The Priestly Kingdom: Gospel as Social Ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td>The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical</td>
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<tr>
<td>WPR</td>
<td>Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton</td>
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INTRODUCTION

The Christological social ethical thought of John Howard Yoder represents a major contribution to Christian theological ethics in the second half of the twentieth century, but it has not yet been taken with the seriousness it deserves at the level of disciplined scholarship. Yoder's impact can be seen in the influence which his thought has had on the increasingly vocal left wing of North American Evangelicalism and on main-line Protestants who have grown weary of Liberalism and are developing various non-Fundamentalist ways of being postliberal. Ten years after the publication of Yoder's most important book, The Politics of Jesus, Edward Leroy Long Jr. stated that it "has become as frequently cited in discussions of social ethics as Paul Ramsey's Deeds and Rules in the discussion of norm and context." An indication of the interest in

1 Yoder has contributed to Sojourners magazine and has influenced groups like Sojourners, Church of the Saviour and the group which publishes The Other Side. Yoder gave a keynote address at the founding meeting of "Evangelicals For Social Action" in Chicago in 1973. See a revised version of this address: "The Biblical Mandate For Evangelical Social Action" in For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 180-98. Philip Thorne describes Yoder as a "New Evangelical" who, as one of the few Anabaptist Evangelicals to have interacted seriously with Karl Barth, has exerted an important influence on the North American Evangelical tradition. See his Evangelicalism and Karl Barth: His Reception and Influence in North American Evangelical Theology (Allison Park, Pa.: Pipwick Publications, 1995), 171. See also Dale Brown, "Communal Ecclesiology: The Power of the Anabaptist Vision" Theology Today 36 (April 1979): 22-29.

2 Stanley Hauerwas writes of the influence Yoder has had on him in The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), xxiv.


Yoder's thought in American graduate schools can be seen in the fact that twelve doctoral dissertations have been completed in North America between 1984 and 1997 which deal at least in part with Yoder's thought in a substantial way. Marlin VanElderen, in the World Council of Churches magazine One World, said that The Politics of Jesus was one of the most influential North American theological works of the 1970's and spoke of how it had provided the theological underpinnings for renewed social engagement among a large number of evangelicals. He also credited the book with opening up dialogue between Anabaptists and representatives of the mainline Protestant groups. Paul Ramsey stated that Yoder is "widely recognized as the leading contemporary American exponent of Christian pacifism." James McClelond has noted that Yoder's life work remains a serious but unanswered challenge to Christian thinkers and has called Yoder a "largely unsung American theologian."

A. The Purpose of This Essay

This scholarly neglect of an influential theologian has occurred for several reasons. First, Yoder's recent death has only now made it possible to survey the impact of his life work as a whole and to assess it objectively. We are still in the early stages of assessing the overall and permanent contribution of this highly original thinker. Much

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5 These dissertations are all available from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Mich. and will be referred to at appropriate points in this essay. They were done at Boston University (2), Duke University (2), Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (2), Baylor University, Catholic University of America, University of Chicago, Claremont Graduate School, Northwestern University, and the University of Virginia.


research into his thought needs to be done and a great deal of debate needs to go on
concerning the importance of his ideas. This essay will attempt to make a contribution to
both of these tasks.

Second, Yoder wrote no major, systematic treatise in which the
comprehensiveness, logical rigor and originality of his theology could be readily
ascertained. One has to read a large number of his essays, which are scattered in various
journals and books and which are uneven in terms of style and vocabulary, before one
begins to grasp just how powerful his analysis is and how coherent his overall system is.
Yoder himself had substantive reasons for using the essay format as his primary vehicle
for communication and those reasons will become clear in the course of this essay as
integral to his epistemology, his concept of his role as a writer and his style of
ecumical dialogue. Although he considered the possibility of writing a basic
introduction to ethics or to his thought as a whole, he rejected the idea as being
inconsistent with his firm rejection of foundationalism or methodology. Yoder could
acknowledge the educational value of an introduction to a subject, but he points out that
one must have a clear picture of the student in mind; in other words, one must begin
where the potential reader is and work from there. This type of conversational and
occasional writing is what he has done throughout his career.

Even though Yoder himself rejected the shaping of his thought into a system, he

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9 Yoder's most famous work, The Politics of Jesus, is not really an exception, although it comes the closest
to being a systematic presentation of his position.
10 FTN, 9.
11 See Yoder's "Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism" in Theology Without Foundations:
Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth, ed. Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy and Mark
Nation (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 77-90. Yoder says that he cannot write a book from "scratch"
because, in his opinion, there is no "scratch" from which to begin. (FTN, 10.)
12 FTN, 10.
was, nevertheless, a very logical and systematic thinker. The coherence of his essays written over a period of a lifetime is extremely impressive.\textsuperscript{13} It is, therefore, necessary that this task of systematically analyzing his thought be undertaken by scholars in order that a complete, accurate and fair assessment of his thought can be made possible. This essay intends to make a contribution to that task.\textsuperscript{14}

Third, Yoder has often been pigeon-holed as a representative of one (extreme) type of Christianity which needs to have a place at the ecumenical discussion table (to show how open we are), but which is known in advance to have the specific function of representing the extreme end of the spectrum and therefore not to be a viable option for mainstream Christianity. In other words, the value of the Mennonite/Anabaptist (or radical reformation or believers' church) perspective that Yoder is taken to represent is not that it can be taken seriously as a debating partner, but that it defines a sectarian extreme that rounds out the spectrum of positions under consideration.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13}See, for example, The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical, ed. Michael Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), which includes essays written between 1954 and 1990. The excellent introductory essay "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity: John Howard Yoder's Vision of the Faithful Church" by Michael Cartwright cites no major examples of inconsistency of thought or self-contradiction. In fact, Cartwright affirms that one of the purposes of this collection of essays is to show the "substantial unity of Yoder's work over the past four decades." (3) This does not mean that Yoder's thought never evolved, but the differences in emphasis are mostly explicable by the situation of the various essays and that fundamental reversals never occurred.

\textsuperscript{14}It could be argued that to turn Yoder's thought into an ahistorical system of ethics would be to distort it seriously and, as an interpreter first and critic second, one has to be very sensitive to this concern. For this reason, the exposition is preceded by an introductory chapter which seeks to situate Yoder historically; that is, within his denominational and intellectual context. It is not possible to understand the thought of such a conversational theologian without keeping in mind who he was conversing with, reacting to, debating and learning from while writing his essays.

\textsuperscript{15}Yoder expressed his frustration at being misinterpreted as a "pure type" by others who could then use that as their foil. See The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 1. Criticisms of Yoder's position range from reasonable concerns expressed in moderate tones about issues such as reductionism, sectarianism and responsibility and concerns about balance, on the one hand, to rather extreme accusations often tossed off without attempts at documentation and supported by \textit{ad hominem} arguments. For example, Yoder has been accused of legalism, perfectionism, Marcionism, secularism, unitarianism and politicizing a spiritual Gospel. For the sake of ecumenical dialogue these accusations need to be examined calmly and in light of Yoder's entire corpus of writings.
This attitude is alluded to by James Gustafson in his *Ethics in Theocentric Perspective*, where he says of Yoder’s social ethics:

> It is patronizing to say that it is useful, in the mix of Christian communities and views of morality, to have this stringent tradition alive, just as it might be seen to be useful to have Marxists around to remind the exponents of the free market that there are some matters that seem lost in the outlook of the capitalist. Such a view assumes that that value of a position is its contribution to discourse on a moral plane, that the reason for interest in the position is that it represents a moral ideal which wiser persons know is "unrealistic" but nonetheless need to be reminded of from time to time. The issue that has to be joined is theological, not simply ethical. *Theological integrity more than moral distinctiveness is the challenge of the traditional radical Protestant view ... My conviction is that all constructive theology in the Christian tradition needs to be defined to some extent in relation to this radical option.*

Gustafson here lays out the challenge which this essay attempts to take up: to engage Yoder's thought in a way that seeks to expound, analyze, and critique his theology as a serious option for constructive Christian ethics today. It is interesting to note that, even though Gustafson admits that Yoder’s theological ethics constitutes one of the most cogent challenges to his own approach, he himself does not engage Yoder's thought extensively in his book. This seems inconsistent of Gustafson, but it is typical of the way that the position represented by Yoder has been treated over the centuries. Some grudging respect is expressed and a bit of verbal praise is given; nevertheless, it remained possible to write one’s *magnum opus* on Christian theological ethics in the 1980's without refuting in detail Yoder's position.

Yoder's Calvinist dialogue-partner Richard Mouw makes an interesting observation in his "Foreword" to Yoder's collection of essays on ecclesiology, *The Royal*
Priesthood. After renouncing, like Gustafson, the attitude that treats the Anabaptist perspective as "a series of compensatory emphases whose ecumenical usefulness lies in their ability to modify other theological schemes," he then points out that the Anabaptists "have often left themselves open to this kind of treatment" because they have neglected systematic theology in favor of biblical and historical studies. This neglect has meant that others do not have to deal with the Anabaptist perspective as a systematic challenge to their own dogmatics. He praises Yoder for having led the way in setting forth the systematic challenge. But, as we have seen above, the type of writings Yoder has produced do not focus this challenge as sharply as they could if his position were expressed more systematically. As an aid to informed ecumenical debate, therefore, this essay aims to expound the logic and depth of Yoder's theological social ethics in such a way that, in the future, refuting Yoder's position will be seen as a task to be undertaken by those who disagree with him and ignoring his position will not be seen as a viable option for those who wish to engage in serious Christian social ethical debate.

In evaluating Yoder's thought (stance? system?) it is necessary to distinguish between two perspectives from which an evaluation could be carried out: the internal and the external. The external critique is often carried out by those mentioned above who use Yoder as a foil or as a representative of a type. They employ axioms derived from elsewhere than Yoder or the radical reformation (or believers' church or Anabaptist) tradition to use in testing the adequacy of his formulations. They cannot be blamed for using whatever axioms they believe to be correct to evaluate the thought of other

17 "Foreword," RP, viii.
ethicists, but neither can they claim thereby to have demonstrated the logical inconsistency or incoherence of Yoder's thought. In order to do that, they would have to employ an internal critique, which is what this essay attempts to do. By situating Yoder in his denominational and intellectual context, and then by examining the logic of his response to that context as expressed in the total corpus of his writings, it is hoped that a balanced and nuanced evaluation of his importance as a twentieth century Christian ethicist can be developed.  

B. A Brief Overview of Yoder's Life and Writings

Yoder was a significant figure in Mennonite studies, in ecumenical discussions and in Christian ethics in Europe and North America for over forty years. He entered into significant dialogue with Evangelicals, Catholics, the World Council of Churches, Latin American Liberationists, Christian Realists, Conservative Calvinists and Jewish theologians, including such figures as Karl Barth, Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr, Paul Ramsey, Albert Outler, Jose Miguez Bonino, Richard Mow, James Turner Johnson, Michael Walzer and Rabbi Steven S. Schwarzschild. He lived for a number of years each in France and Switzerland, as well as spending a year each in Argentina and Israel.

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18 This essay should be regarded as a preliminary step in the evaluation of Yoder's thought in that understanding a thinker as fully as possible must precede evaluation. It may be that Yoder's thought turns out, on the basis of an internal critique, to be strongly argued (in the sense of logical consistency), very coherent (in the sense of systematic consistency) and highly comprehensive (in the sense of taking into account all the relevant data) and yet, one would still not be justified in declaring Yoder's position to be true. Two different systems of thought may both exhibit all of these internal characteristics and yet arise from vastly different foundational assumptions or worldviews. In order to choose between such alternatives, a person must make a decision about the worldview or the foundational assumptions at the root of the two systems. The best way to facilitate such a choice, however, is to display the system as fully as possible, exploring its own inner logic.

Yoder was a polyglot who was fluent in several languages besides English, read several others and delivered lectures in languages other than English on many occasions.  

The book, *The Politics of Jesus*, was the work which first brought his thought to the attention of most ethicists and theologians generally. Although his doctoral work was in historical theology, he demonstrated enough competence in biblical studies and ethics to engage scholars in those fields in serious debate. The breadth of his scholarly endeavors is very impressive. Although he was involved in the editing and translation of historical texts, teaching historical and systematic theology, ethics and missiology, as well as mission board administration and seminary teaching and administration, Yoder's primary contribution to scholarship probably was in the area of ethical methodology.

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21 His doctoral dissertation at Basel was published as *Taufertum und Reformation in der Schweiz: I. De Gespräche zwischen Täufern und Reformatoren 1523-1538* (Karlsruhe: Buchdruckerei und Verlag H. Schneider, 1962). See also *Taufertum und Reformatoren im Gespräch: Dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung der frühen Gespräche zwischen Schweizerischen Täufern und Reformatoren* (Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1968). He also translated and edited *The Legacy of Michael Stattler, Classics of the Radical Reformation*, vol. 1 (Scottdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1973) and with H. Wayne Pipkin, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism, Classics of the Radical Reformation*, vol. 5 (Scottdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1989). He also translated and edited *The Schleitheim Confession* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1977) and has translated other monographs and written many essays on the radical reformation and historiography. Furthermore, he has also produced two large collections of class lectures on Christology and on war, peace and revolution, consisting of over 900 pages of historical theology. (Preface to *Theology: Christology and Theological Method and Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton*) Unfortunately, these two works have only been informally published at this point in time. Another important work in historical theology, *Nevertheless: Varieties of Christian Pacifism*, is much more readily available. Readers of Yoder who only consult *The Politics of Jesus* and the three main books of essays: *The Priestly Kingdom, The Royal Priesthood* and *For the Nations* can certainly ascertain the main points of Yoder's thought. However, much of the background, rationale and working out of the implications of his thought are found only in the 1000+ pages of historical theology in the works mentioned above, especially in the unpublished class notes. Any serious interpreter or critic of Yoder has to come to grips with this material and let it temper rash conclusions about Yoder's theology being not well thought out, heretical, one-sided, unrealistic etc. For example, the critic tempted to jump to the conclusion that Yoder is Manichean and totally negative toward the state would be well-advised to discipline his or her criticism by showing how it does justice to Yoder's discussion of William Penn and the Quaker experiment in colonial Pennsylvania. Or, again, the critic tempted to conclude that Yoder is preaching an unrealistic form of perfectionist legalism would be well-advised to try and reconcile that view with Yoder's balanced, sober, nuanced account of the rise of various forms of sectarian dissent in sixteenth century Europe. The point is not that Yoder is beyond criticism or right on every point; but rather, that he has developed a case for pacifism which has unprecedented and unparalleled historical and theological depth and, therefore, cannot be dismissed lightly.
After the Second World War, Yoder was one of a group of young Mennonites who went to Europe to work in refugee relief ministry with the Mennonite Central Committee. While in Europe, he participated in various ecumenical discussions as a representative of the Mennonite tradition and studied at the University of Basel. He eventually obtained his Doctor of Theology degree in historical theology, specializing in sixteenth century Reformation studies. He also studied with Karl Barth and was drawn to Barth's ecclesiology and to his theological ethics in general.22

Yoder returned to North America in 1957 and spent a number of years working for the Mennonite Board of Missions. After taking up a full-time teaching post at Goshen Biblical Seminary in 1965, Yoder completed a book on Barth's view of war, which contains one of the best early expositions of Barth's ethics available in English.23 In 1972 his classic, The Politics of Jesus, was published. During the next quarter century Yoder emerged as the leading spokesperson in North America for the Anabaptist (or believers' church) vision of Christianity and for Christian pacifism in particular. From 1967 (part-time) and from 1984 (full-time) until his death in late 1997, Yoder taught at the University of Notre Dame. In 1988 he served as the president of the Society of Christian Ethics.

C. The Central Thesis of This Essay

At the heart of this essay lies the conviction that Yoder's work shows us how the

22 See "Karl Barth: How His Mind Kept Changing," How Karl Barth Changed My Mind, ed. Donald McKim (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans: 1976), 166-71 and "Karl Barth, Post-Christendom Theologian" (unpublished paper presented to the Karl Barth Society; Elmhurst II., June 8, 1995, 10 pp.). Many other references to Barth are scattered throughout Yoder's writings and will be noted at many points in this work.

Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy of the fourth and fifth centuries contains the key to the surviving and flourishing of the church's witness to Jesus Christ in the post-Christendom era which is now dawning. The central thesis to be defended in this essay is that Yoder creatively unites aspects of his Anabaptist theological heritage with the theological method and major themes of the thought of Karl Barth to create a distinctive postliberal alternative to Christian Realism, Liberation Theology and privatized evangelical religion. Yoder's pacifism of the messianic community is not only a development of the theology of Barth, but it is also the most adequate account of social ethics to emerge thus far in the brief history of postliberalism. Furthermore, it is also, as Gustafson was quoted above as saying, the most important alternative to the revisionist theology which currently dominates many parts of the modern, Western academy.

The theology of Karl Barth, once "widely dismissed by American theologians in the 1960's as a remnant of a discredited neo-orthodoxy" has recently come to light as the inspiration for a whole new generation of "postliberal" scholars who have in common an opposition to what they term "revisionism." Centered in the work of a number of scholars associated with Yale University over the past thirty years, postliberalism has become a significant force on the current theological scene. Yale professors George Lindbeck and Hans Frei and many of their former students, including William Placher,

George Hunsinger, Ronald Thiemann and Stanley Hauerwas, have been identified with this approach to theology. Influences on the genesis and development of this approach makes for an eclectic list, including such diverse figures as: Gilbert Ryle, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Thomas Kuhn, Clifford Geertz, Peter Berger and Erich Auerbach, as well as a number of other figures at Yale such as Brevard Childs, Wayne Meeks, Paul Holmer, William Christian and David Kelsey. It would be misleading to overstate the degree of unity among the this group of theologians. What is clear, however, is that the work of Karl Barth stands in the background and has been a major factor in making this new mood in theology possible.27

This essay will interpret the thought of Yoder as "postliberal" in the sense of constituting a rejection of theological liberalism28 and in the sense of having been influenced greatly by the theology of Karl Barth, but not in the sense of having been influenced by the "Yale theology." One of the differences between Yoder's thought and that of Frei and Lindbeck is that Yoder has engaged biblical texts more extensively than they have, even though postliberals tend to criticize revisionists for becoming preoccupied with prolegomena and strongly advocate the constructive engagement of

28 "Liberalism," as used in this sentence, means both classical and contemporary liberal theology. Nineteenth century "culture Protestantism," as expressed in the thought of Troeltsch, Ritschl, Harnack, and, in North America, in the Social Gospel movement, was highly optimistic about human potential and used idealistic philosophy as a way to express the progress that it saw in history as Western culture moved toward the Kingdom of God. It saw a correlation between Christian teachings, on the one hand, and secular science and the best insights of culture in general, on the other. Twentieth century liberalism has been greatly chastened by the horrific events of this century (world wars, genocide, nuclear weapons, ecological threats) and has abandoned the assumption of progress and renounced undue optimism concerning all forms of utopia. Revisionism is chastened liberalism, still concerned to correlate Christians belief with the highest wisdom of secular culture, but largely purged of shallow optimism and inclined to take the reality of sin far more seriously. Twentieth century liberalism is more inclined to look to existential, rather than idealistic, philosophy and views liberation as a more realistic metaphor for the goal of Christian social ethics than Christianizing the social order or bringing in the Kingdom of God.
Scripture.39 Another key difference is the prominence given to pacifism in Yoder's thought.30 A third key difference between Yoder, on the one hand, and the Yale theologians, on the other, is that Yoder's theological realism is much more clear cut.31 Yoder's non-foundationalist approach to epistemology does not lead him to a relativist position when it comes to affirming the ontological reality of God and this essay attempts to show why and how this is so. Yoder studied with Barth in the 1950's and published a book on Barth's ethics in the early 1970's, which makes him a rough contemporary of Lindbeck and Frei. There appears to be little, if any, evidence of influence either way in the early development of their respective positions.32

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29 William Placher urges contemporary theologians to abandon their preoccupation with methodology and to get on with constructive theology - in the preface to a book on method! Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 7. It is interesting to note that the Yale theology has developed as discussion of method first and is only beginning to be applied in the construction of theology. The explanation for this fact may well be that the phenomenon of Karl Barth's massive theological corpus sits in the background of the development of postliberal theology and that what has occurred in North America between the 1960's and the present is the belated, gradual coming to terms with the massive challenge to modernity presented by Barth and reflection on the methodological moves more implicit than explicit in the Church Dogmatics. It is significant to remember that Frei's doctoral dissertation was written on Barth. What Frei wrote about Schleiermacher and Barth remains true: "A great man condemns the rest of us to the task of understanding his thought." "Eberhard Busch's Biography of Karl Barth," Types of Christian Theology, ed. G. Hunsinger and W. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 147.

30 Of course, the major exception here is Stanley Hauerwas, who has embraced pacifism and made it central to his work. George Hunsinger has also written in support of pacifism, but has not so far produced major writings in which pacifism plays a central role. See Douglas Gwyn, George Hunsinger, Eugene Roop and John H. Yoder, A Declaration of Peace: In God's People the Renewal of the World Has Begun (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1991). Pacifism does not appear to play a role in the thought of Lindbeck or Frei.

31 This is not to say that the Yale theologians are not theological realists. This is a point on which it is hard to generalize. Hunsinger's commitment to realism seems to be clear, while that of Lindbeck and Frei is less so. That of Hauerwas is still more ambiguous. All that is being claimed here is that Yoder's commitment to theological realism is more straightforward than that of most of the theologians associated with postliberalism from Yale.

32 In the few references to Lindbeck so far noted in Yoder's work, Yoder refers positively to him: "The reason it is so hard for critics from within these foundationalist games to be fair to 'realism' is that they assume, as it does not, the need to justify one's recourse to Scripture by appeal to some other criterion outside it. For my 'straightforward' posture (and intrinsically for the account given by George Lindbeck, and the similar one presupposed without much analytical argument by Brevard Childs, or the one given with enormous analytical argument but less content by Alasdair Maclntyre) the presence of the text within the community is an inseparable part of the community's being itself. It would be a denial of the community's being itself if it were to grant a need for appeal beyond itself to some archimedean point to justify it." See his "How To Be Read By the Bible," 65, cf. 28. In a 1992 article "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation," Faith and Philosophy 9/3 (July 1992): 285-300.
Stanley Hauerwas is the only other major ethicist so far to have written extensively from a postliberal perspective and he claims to have been greatly influenced by Yoder's thought. Therefore, it is natural that many commentators tend to assume that both Hauerwas and Yoder can be interpreted together as "narrative ethicists" and, of course, there are many significant points of similarity. However, there are some serious and deep differences between Hauerwas and Yoder as well, which need to be taken into account in any discussion of the relationship of their respective positions. For now, some of these differences will be listed without comment. They will be documented in the course of the essay. First, Yoder engages the text of Scripture to a much greater degree than Hauerwas. Second, Yoder takes history much more seriously than Hauerwas does in his theology. Third, Yoder does not share Hauerwas' interest in character; his doctrine of the imitation of Jesus is sharply focussed on the cross. Fourth, Hauerwas does not appear to share Yoder's Biblical Realism. There are other differences in areas such as ecclesiology, but this list surely can serve to make the point that the two thinkers cannot simply be lumped together. Nor can Yoder be interpreted through the grid of Hauerwas.

Yoder makes what many of us today think of as "stuffy old orthodoxy" as fresh and relevant as the latest, trendy, theological fad. It is fascinating to observe that, unlike many who derive a conservative social ethic from a conservative theology and many others who derive a radical ethic from an unorthodox theology, Yoder derives a very

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35 See below (Chapter I, 59, n. 134) for Yoder's understanding of the term "Biblical Realism."
radical social ethic, centered on pacifism, from a classically orthodox Christology. This essay will present an interpretation of Yoder's thought as containing a highly coherent theological social ethic which has a contribution to make to Christian faith and practice in the coming century. Yoder's "disavowal of Constantine" allows him to develop a Christocentric eschatology which views the church as an eschatological community which participates both in the old age of the fallen creation and also in the new, messianic age inaugurated by Jesus. The Christian community is distinguished from the world by its confession of Jesus Christ and thereby is a foretaste of the coming age. The pacifism of the messianic community allows it to bear witness to the Lamb who was slain, but who, nevertheless, reigns in heaven.

D. An Overview of this Work

This work is divided into four chapters plus the Introduction and Conclusion. Chapter One sketches the background necessary for understanding Yoder's theological method. It focuses first on the Mennonite struggle for self-definition, which has been intricately connected to the scholarly re-examination of the historical roots of Anabaptism during this century. Yoder has also been influenced in significant ways by the theology of Karl Barth and this chapter seeks, secondly, to summarize the important areas of similarity and agreement between their respective positions.

Chapter Two, Three and Four expound the source, context and shape of Yoder's Christological social ethics respectively. A major criticism of Yoder's thought is considered in detail in each chapter. Chapter Two describes Yoder's Christology as the "source" of his social ethics. It does so by examining his reading of biblical Christology,
the New Testament teaching on discipleship as the ethical meaning of New Testament Christology and the historical development of Christology. Yoder's claim that the Jesus of the New Testament is not only relevant, but normative for contemporary Christian social ethics, is unpacked and analyzed.

In this chapter, the charge that Yoder's theology is reductionistic will be considered. A reading of Yoder which views him as deriving the content of his ethical claims from his understanding of the doctrine of the Incarnation will be defended. This reading of Yoder argues not only that he does affirm classical, orthodox Christology, rather than reducing Christology to ethics and spirituality to politics, but also that such a catholic affirmation is absolutely essential to the logic of his overall position.

Chapter Three describes Yoder's eschatology as the context for his social ethics. Yoder considers his understanding of New Testament eschatology to be normative for us today and as being both partially-realized and future-oriented. The Old Testament roots of Yoder's eschatology are also explored. A proper understanding of Yoder's eschatology is impossible apart from an in-depth analysis of his understanding of Constantinianism as the reversal of New Testament eschatology and a significant misreading of the Old Testament.

In this chapter, the charge that Yoder's theology is sectarian will be considered. A reading of Yoder as a radically catholic, ecumenical theologian will be defended and the political and epistemological implications of the charge of sectarianism will be examined. This reading of Yoder will make it clear that his theology is not denominational apologetics, but a radical critique of the praxis (and the theory) of all denominations (including his own) which is based on, and rooted in, the historical mission of the church
as Yoder understands it. That mission is incomprehensible apart from the understanding of history which governs Yoder's eschatology and the Christological foundation of Yoder's eschatology.

Chapter Four describes Yoder's ecclesiology as the *shape* of his social ethics. It does so by expounding Yoder's view of the believers' church as the most faithful form of the New Testament view of the church and by contrasting it to the theocratic and spiritualist types of ecclesiology. The ecumenical potential of Yoder's believers' church ecclesiology will also be explored. The practices of the Christian community which enable it to build up and maintain unity will be described. The believers' church vision involves viewing the church as the new humanity, a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. The thoroughly eschatological and Christocentric character of Yoder's ecclesiology will be stressed.

In this chapter, the charges that Yoder's social ethics promotes the withdrawal of the Christian from society and makes the church irrelevant and ineffective in terms of social change will be considered. A reading of Yoder as unfolding a coherent, though deliberately *ad hoc*, vision of social witness will be defended. Yoder's critique of, and alternative to, H. R. Niebuhr's model for "Christ Transforming Culture" will be reviewed. Yoder's believers' church vision will be described as an alternative to strategies which compromise a faithful witness to Jesus Christ in the hopes of short-term effectiveness in terms of social change.

The conclusion will assess the coherence of the theological basis for Yoder's social ethics and suggest how the interpretation of Yoder's thought presented in this essay is relevant for the contemporary Christian church. The overall interpretation of Yoder's
thought will be summarized and a new profile of this much misunderstood thinker will be sketched. It also will assess the validity of various criticisms of his social ethics and make a few suggestions as to how Yoder's thought could be developed further to address these criticisms.
CHAPTER I
THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF YODER'S THOUGHT

The purpose of this chapter is to place Yoder's thought in its proper historical context so that his theological method can be discerned clearly and his occasional and conversational writings can be interpreted more accurately. This will be done, first, by looking at Yoder's Anabaptist and Mennonite roots and, in particular, his role in the Mennonite identity debate which has taken place during the second half of this century as a result of factors such as the "recovery of the Anabaptist vision" and the critique of pacifism mounted by Reinhold Niebuhr between the world wars. Secondly, Yoder's relationship to Karl Barth will be examined. The surprisingly numerous, and profoundly significant, similarities between the theological method of the Swiss Reformed theologian and that of the American Mennonite ethicist will be discussed and Yoder's "Barthian" method will be proposed as a second key to understanding his thought, along with his Anabaptist roots. This chapter thus will set the stage for the systematic exposition of Yoder's thought in the next three chapters.

Of course, there were many other influences on Yoder's theology which could be considered. The impact of his decade in Europe, from 1949 to 1957, was significant. In particular, Yoder's role as spokesperson for Mennonites in ecumenical discussion led him into contact with the leaders of the World Council of Churches. Mid-century European

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Protestant theology, however, was dominated by the influence of Karl Barth and that fact, combined with the fact that Yoder was so sympathetically-inclined to the theology of Barth, whom he saw as moving in a free church direction during the fifties, makes Barth by far the most important influence to consider from that period. Yoder was also significantly influenced by the movement called "Biblical Realism," which flourished mostly in Europe and which overlapped with what B. S. Childs would later label "the Biblical Theology Movement." Yoder saw Biblical Realism as an extension of the attitude of Karl Barth toward the Bible as the source of Christian theology and an alternative way of expressing loyalty to the authority of Scripture to the way of scholastic theories of inspiration.

Yoder also could be interpreted in the wider context of North American Protestant social ethics. He interacted intensively with the thought of Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr, Paul Ramsey, James Gustafson and Stanley Hauerwas and he also was involved with Evangelical groups such as Sojourners, Evangelicals for Social Action and Regent College. And, of course, he taught at Notre Dame for many years and so inevitably was shaped by the experience of dialogue with Catholic ethicists and theologians. But Yoder's primary source of identity was never mainline Protestantism, Evangelicalism or Roman Catholicism. He very consciously and deliberately identified himself with the "Anabaptist Vision" and attempted to critique all expressions of Christianity, including his own Mennonite denomination, from that perspective. His doctoral studies in the origins of Swiss Anabaptism constituted not only an academic vocation, but were also a (successful) search for spiritual roots. In his dialogue with representatives of the

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Christian Realism which dominated North American social ethics as he grew up, the Evangelicalism which only gradually found its own social ethical voice during the seventies and the post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism of Notre Dame, he always adopted a believers' church, Anabaptist or free church stance. He consciously spoke for a certain tradition of Christianity and took very seriously the responsibility for doing so. Therefore, understanding Yoder's role in the "recovery of the Anabaptist vision" and the resulting Mennonite identity debate of the second half of the twentieth century is crucial for understanding his position.

His year of teaching and lecturing in Argentina (1970-71), where he encountered Latin American Liberation Theology first hand, was significant to the development of his thought, and his sabbatical year in Israel at the Tantur Institute in 1976 stimulated his thinking on the Jewish roots of the Anabaptist vision. When one reads his writings on Liberation Theology, however, one gets the same impression as one gets from reading his writings on Christian Realism, Evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism; namely, that of a thinker consciously and carefully drawing lines and making comparisons between his own, well-thought-out position and the positions of other traditions. One never gets the impression that Yoder is synthesizing Christian Realism, Evangelicalism or Liberation Theology with his own thought, at least not to any great extent. His deepening appreciation of the Jewish roots of the free church vision meshed with his interpretation of the biblical foundations of his social ethic and affected his thought at the level of helping to shape his biblical exegesis.

On the one hand, then, we have what might be called formative influences on Yoder's thinking: the Anabaptist vision, Karl Barth and Biblical Realism. On the other
hand, we have what could be termed dialogue partners or even debating partners: Christian Realism, Latin American Liberation Theology and North American Evangelicalism. The rest of this chapter will concentrate on the formative influences on Yoder's thought and attempt to demonstrate that the theological bases of his social ethics were developed from two main sources, namely, from the Anabaptist vision and from the theology of Karl Barth.

A. Yoder and the Anabaptist-Mennonite Tradition

Yoder's relationship to his own Mennonite denomination was complex. On the one hand he was probably the foremost spokesperson for the Mennonite position on pacifism in the twentieth century and his influence on younger Mennonite intellectuals, church leaders and missionaries was extensive. His defence of pacifism in the wider world was inspirational to other Mennonites struggling with their identity. However, he was also iconoclastic and critical of his own denomination in ways that offended some people. At times, the position Yoder stood for appeared to be an embarrassment to academically upwardly mobile, young Mennonites because of his unrepentant biblicism and his persistent defence of pacifism in the ecumenical and academic world. But to sociologically conservative Mennonites, who were in the process of being drawn into mainstream North American society and therefore preoccupied with the problems of holding on to their youth, Yoder's social activism and his strong critique of the Mennonite tradition seemed less than helpful. In order to understand Yoder's complex relationship to his own denomination, we begin with an examination of the development

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3 Gayle Gerber-Koontz deserves the credit for drawing my attention to this aspect of Yoder's influence.
of Anabaptist historiography and the debate over identity which it sparked among twentieth century Mennonites.

1. The Development of Anabaptist Historiography: The development of historical scholarship on the left wing of the Reformation, the Anabaptist movement, can be divided into four periods. The first period (1525-1850) was the age of Roman Catholic and Protestant vilification of Anabaptism and Anabaptist hagiography. The Reformation and post-Reformation era saw heated polemics and the polarization of positions as scholarship was pressed into the service of denominational apologetics. The term "anabaptist" (re-baptizer) was used by their enemies to identify them with the ancient Donatist heresy, which had been condemned by imperial law, thus creating a legal basis for the death penalty. The original Anabaptists themselves preferred to be called simply "brethren." The Belgic Confession required its adherents to "detest the Anabaptists and other seditious people." On the other hand, works such as Thieleman van Braght's *Martyr's Mirror* and the *Hutterite Grand Chronicle* held up a very different interpretation of the meaning of the Anabaptist movement as the history of saints and martyrs.

The second period of historiography (1850-1925) saw the publication of many archival source materials, which allowed the Anabaptists to speak for themselves through confessions, court records and other primary sources. At this point, at least four different approaches to understanding the Anabaptist movement emerged: first, the older denominational apologetics which continued to see Anabaptists as "fanatical heretics,"

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5 In this section we follow the work of Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 1995). See the "Appendix: A Review of Anabaptist Historiography," 397-
second, minority apologetic interpretations which saw Anabaptism as the continuation of certain medieval traditions such as the Waldensians, the mystical and spiritualist traditions or the radical Franciscans, third, socialist historiography (e.g. Friedrich Engels) which saw in Anabaptism the beginnings of a proletarian, revolutionary consciousness, and fourth, sociological historiography (e.g. Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch) which labeled Anabaptism as a "sect type" as opposed to more "churchly" and "spiritualist" types of religion. The most influential of these schools in North America was the fourth, which Mennonite historians found useful in countering the continuing Lutheran "spiritualist fanatics" stereotype.

The third period of historiography (1925-1975) was initiated by a flurry of Mennonite historical writing beginning in the 1920's, which was all out of proportion to the size of this tiny group. The leading figure in what came to be called "the recovery of the Anabaptist vision" was Harold S. Bender (1897-1962), church historian and founder of the Mennonite Quarterly Review. In a presidential address to the American Society of Church History in 1943 entitled "The Anabaptist Vision," Bender presented Anabaptism as "the fulfillment of the original vision of Luther and Zwingli" and as a "consistent evangelical Protestantism seeking to recreate without compromise the original New Testament church, the vision of Christ and the apostles." Bender excluded from his definition of Anabaptism Thomas Müntzer and the Peasants War, the Munsterites and other "aberrations." He identified as its central theological themes: first, the Christian life as discipleship, second, the church as a brotherhood and third, a new ethic of love and

408. See Yoder's "The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision" Concern 18 (July 1971): 5-23 (esp. 7) for his comments on the development of Anabaptist historiography up to the early seventies.
6 See Richard Mouw's comments on this fact in his "Foreword" to RP, vii.
nonresistance. Bender was joined by historians such as Roland Bainton\(^8\) of Yale and George Williams\(^9\) of Harvard in the task of classifying and distinguishing between different kinds of sixteenth century dissent. Williams' classification of the "Radical Reformation" as including Anabaptists, Spiritualists and Evangelical Rationalists became standard.\(^10\)

The fourth period of historiography (1975-present) is characterized by Snyder as a move from monogenesis to polygenesis in terms of the understanding of Anabaptist origins.\(^11\) Bender's view of Anabaptism as beginning in Switzerland and spreading from there (sometimes being corrupted in the process) has been challenged by numerous scholars (especially in Europe) who now see multiple points of origin for the movement.\(^12\) Also, many scholars in North America (both Anabaptist and other) have challenged the picture of Anabaptism as Protestantism taken to its logical conclusion. Many of them would interpret it, in the words of Walter Klaassen, as "neither Catholic nor Protestant."\(^13\) In 1979, Werner Packull proclaimed the demise of the normative Anabaptist vision.\(^14\) Current trends in Anabaptist research include the search for pan-Anabaptist commonalities in such areas as economic principles and apocalyptic expectation. But such discussions are carried on without losing sight of the amazing

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\(^8\) See his influential article, "The Left Wing of the Reformation" _Journal of Religion_, 21 (1941).
\(^10\) Ibid.
\(^11\) Snyder, _Anabaptist History and Theology_, 402f.
\(^12\) In an article entitled "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins," _MQR_ 49 (April, 1975): 83-122, by James Stayer, Werner Paukull and Kaus Depperman, three movements with distinct origins are posited: the Swiss, the South German/Austrian and the North German/Dutch.
variety and vitality of the various radical reformation movements in the sixteenth century and later.\(^{15}\)

2. The "Anabaptist Vision" and Mennonite Identity: The relationship between Yoder and Bender was complex. Yoder agreed with Bender's use of the "Anabaptist vision" as the hermeneutical key to the interpretation of Mennonite history because he believed that, in the words of Rodney Sawatsky, "Anabaptism caught the essence of Jesus like no Christian movement did in the centuries before or since."\(^{16}\) Yoder did his doctoral research on the origins of the Swiss Brethren and has written on Michael Stattler, a key figure in the movement leading to the Schleitheim Confession.\(^{17}\)

According to Sawatsky, Yoder was even more conservative (perhaps "radical" would be a better word?) than Bender in his interpretation of Anabaptism insofar as Yoder was less open than Bender to "the grafting of Anabaptist ideas onto Protestant polity to produce modern, denominational Mennonitism."\(^{18}\) Yoder stated that nineteenth and twentieth century Mennonites have received much of their identity from sources other than the sixteenth century Anabaptists and he interprets the twentieth century renewal of interest in the Anabaptists as "an institutional and psychological rallying cry," as opposed to a study of the actual history of the Mennonite denomination.\(^{19}\)

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, North American Mennonites began to emerge from their immigrant enclaves and interact with the wider culture. During this period, the "Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy" came to a head

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\(^{15}\) Snyder's book, mentioned above as the source of the material in this section, is an excellent example of this type of scholarship.


\(^{17}\) See above "Introduction," 8, n. 21.

\(^{18}\) Sawatsky, "Quest," 1-2.

\(^{19}\) WPR, 168.
and its effects were felt within Mennonite circles in the form of the identification of most Mennonites with fundamentalist concerns. Scholars who followed Bender in embracing "outside influences" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as revivalism, Sunday schools, mission boards, church colleges and periodicals, and Conference bureaucracies, included John C. Wenger and William W. ~ean. This process resulted in what can be termed the "denominationalization" of the several branches of the Mennonites (with the exception of those who followed the Old Order strategy). The Mennonite move from an "ethnic sectarian" to an American denominational identity can be understood as an adaptation to the North American cultural situation. Bender termed this an "awakening," promoted it as a via media between sectarianism and liberalism and strove mightily to use his conception of "evangelical Anabaptism" as the normative center.

For Yoder, however, the ideal of Anabaptism stands in judgment on modern, denominational Mennonitism. He contends that Mennonitism in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, by ceasing to be missionary, became a mass church itself. Moreover, as the Mennonites emerged from cultural isolation in this century (the process of denominationalism), the movement lost much of its true identity. He goes so far as to

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20 Yoder, "The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision," 5. This statement applies primarily to the Mennonite Church. A minority of Mennonites, especially those in the General Conference Mennonite Church, however, adopted a more liberal stance. Gayle Gerber-Koontz pointed out this distinction to me.

21 Swatsky, "Quest," 4.

22 Bender editorialized about the Swiss Brethren of 1525 as the "purest and most original form of Anabaptism" and as "consistent biblicists, evangelical, soundly moderate and practical, free from fanaticism or doctrinal aberration." ("Editorial," MQR 5 (April 1931): 85 and 5 (January 1931): 5 as quoted by Swatsky, "Quest," 6.) It is noteworthy to observe how similar his description of the Anabaptist norm is to the "Evangelical" movement which would emerge out of American Fundamentalism in the 1940's.

say that, out of faithfulness to the Anabaptist vision, the Mennonite denomination should cease to exist as a denomination. 24

But how can Yoder presume to make such claims? We have outlined above the development of Anabaptist historiography and the end result of that process of "relativizing historiography"25 is the disappearance of a single, monolithic "Anabaptism." The problem is not just the current state of Anabaptist historiography, but the nature of historical study itself. Sawatsky puts the question precisely:

   How can one moment in history which is the product of the cultural relativities of agents and interpreters stand in judgment upon another moment in history similarly shaped? Must not such moments in history assume the category of revelation to become normative of history?26

The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century were only fallible human beings and sinners like us. Within history, the church has never been perfect yet and never will be perfect. So how can Yoder use the "Anabaptist vision" as a standard to which the contemporary church can be held? The answer to this question is quite complex, involving a description of Yoder's hermeneutic, which includes both his understanding of history and his way of reading Scripture. Since he develops his hermeneutic in the context of the Anabaptist identity debate, we need to extend our understanding of this debate in the next three sub-sections, before coming back to the crucial question raised by Sawatsky as to how Yoder can possibly hope to avoid the relativizing effects of historiography in developing a norm by which contemporary Mennonitism can be critiqued at the end of this section on Yoder and the Anabaptist-Mennonite Tradition.

24 Ibid.
25 This phrase is applied to the situation by Arnold Snyder, "Reflections on Mennonite Uses of Anabaptist History" in Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types, John C. Burkholder and Barbara Nelson Gingerich, eds. (Akron, Pa.: Mennonite Central Committee Peace Office, 1991), 84 as quoted by Sawatsky, "Quest," 15.
26 Sawatsky, "Quest," 10.
3. The Concern Movement: The article by Yoder quoted above was published in the journal Concern, an "independent pamphlet series dealing with questions of Christian renewal." This publication venture arose out of a meeting of young Mennonites held in Amsterdam in 1952. This group of conscientious objectors who were doing denominational relief work in Europe after World War II, as well as studying in European universities, met for two weeks "to gain a better understanding of their own Mennonite experiences and current theological issues." They were all young, well-educated and the anxious to relate their Mennonite heritage to the wider Christian heritage of Western culture. They all had been inspired by Harold Bender's "Anabaptist vision" and were concerned to bring that norm to bear as a critique both of Western Christianity and their own Mennonite denomination. This group read papers to each other during this retreat and then began to publish Concern, a venture which lasted into the early 1970's before breaking up.

The themes of two of the papers presented at that original retreat give an idea of the tone and spirit of the group. Paul Peachey's "Toward an Understanding of the Decline of the West" criticized the Protestant Reformation for failing to repudiate the corpus christianum ideal. This led to the assimilation rather than the prophetic critique of the world, and, thus, contributed to the secularization of the humanist tradition and ultimately of Western culture itself. The post-Christendom situation of post-war Europe offered a second chance for the church to develop a radically different social ethic. Orley

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27 The publication's self-description taken from the inside cover of Concern, no. 18 (July 1971).
29 Concern, 1 (June 1954), 8-44.
Swartzentruber's paper "An Estimate of Current American Mennonitism" offered a severe criticism of the home church as having become a little *corpus christianum* all its own.30

Yoder's contribution was "The Anabaptist Dissent: The Logic of the Place of the Disciple in Society,"31 in which he attempted to "elaborate a doctrine of social responsibility logically consistent with the concept of discipleship as understood and interpreted within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition."32 The goal of the *Concern* movement was to call Mennonites to take their Anabaptist heritage seriously in order to be prepared to be engage the wider world more effectively33 and Yoder's contribution in this context, typically for him, was to undergird the critiques of Protestantism and Mennonitism as given in the two papers mentioned above with a biblical basis.34

Yoder's essay (and his position as a whole) is open to two misinterpretations by those who do not approach it in context. He could be misread as engaging in denominational apologetics, that is, defending the Mennonite denomination as true Christianity as over against other denominations, especially given his use of the term "Mennonite" synonymously with the term "Anabaptist"35 and his critique of Roman Catholicism, Luther and Calvin.36 But to read his essay as a whole, in the context of his thought as a whole, leads to a different interpretation. What Yoder is doing here is

30 This paper was never published but a copy is in the Guy F. Hershberger papers, Box 16, Folder 2, Archives of the Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana. It is described by Toews, "The Concern Movement," 111.
31 *Concern* 1 (June 1954): 45-68.
32 Ibid., 45.
33 Mark Thiessen Nation, "He Came Preaching Peace: The Ecumenical Peace Witness of John Howard Yoder" CGR, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Spring 1998): 69. Paul Toews points out that they were concerned for theological, not sociological, boundaries. Just as sixteenth century Anabaptist sought to evangelize, the members of the *Concern* group felt that a movement which remained withdrawn in its own ethnic enclave was not being a faithful witness. "The Concern Movement: Its Origins and Early History," 122-3.
34 "He Came Preaching Peace," 69. Nation notes that, over the years, Yoder contributed more to *Concern* than anyone else.
35 Ibid. See, for example, his reference to "the Mennonite view," 51.
36 Ibid., 51-54.
critiquing both his own denomination and all Western Christianity by means of a standard drawn ultimately from the Bible, not from the sixteenth century. Yoder is interpreted by many commentators as promoting "sectarianism" and this is taken as a descriptive, not necessarily pejorative, fact. However, Yoder is actually extremely critical of sectarianism. In another early article, "Biblicism and the Church," Yoder has a section called "The Denominational Problem" in which he uses the New Testament (specifically I Corinthians 1 and 2) to reject both sectarianism and denominationalism. Part of the confusion over this issue arises from a failure to distinguish between ecclesiastical and political sectarianism. Too often, in a Constantinian framework, no distinction is made and one is thought automatically to imply the other. But Yoder, while eschewing ecclesiastical sectarianism, views political sectarianism as a good thing. In other words, Yoder is arguing that Christians ought to seek to be unified with other Christians, but not at the cost of supporting such things as militarism, racism and the routine use of violence to achieve the economic goals of the nation-state.

A second misinterpretation would be to read too much into Yoder's endorsement of the language of "perfectionism" in this article. Yoder says: "Biblical perfectionism affirms not a simple possibility of achieving love in history, but a crucial possibility of participating in the victory of Christ over the effects of sin in the world." Yoder is contrasting what he takes to be the biblical position with the ethics of responsibility, in which the love norm becomes an unrealizable ideal, thus rendering Christian witness invisible. What Yoder calls the "perfectionism of the cross" means being empowered by

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37 See, for example, a critic as friendly as Sawatsky, "Quest," 16.
38 John Howard Yoder and David Shank, "Biblicism and the Church" Concern 2 (1955): 56.
39 This issue will be discussed more fully in Chapter III of this essay.
40 Yoder, "The Anabaptist Dissent," 59.
the Holy Spirit in the context of the resurrection of Christ to take up one's cross and bear witness to Christ. The issue here is not whether the Christian life can be perfect in the sense of being completely free of sin, but whether a Christian witness can become visible in history or not. Yoder goes on in this article to reject legalism explicitly. He notes that two very different definitions are often given to legalism: first, the belief that "by observing a set of rules, which in principle are within human possibilities, we will be just in the sight of God" and second, "the belief that it is possible, as a guide to discipleship and discipline for Christians, to know adequately what God demands of those who have received His grace." Yoder calls the first view "unscriptural" and incompatible with "the sin in even the Christian's heart." Yet, he goes on to note, critics of his position often use the term legalism in both senses at once in order to condemn the second definition along with the first. To do that, says Yoder, is to advocate what Paul calls sinning "that grace may abound" and what Bonhoeffer referred to as "cheap grace." Yoder actually is advocating here, and continued to advocate throughout his career, a third way between the extremes of the doctrine of the invisible church and the doctrine of sectarian perfectionism. He argues for a church which, despite its imperfections, is enabled by grace to make visible a true witness to Jesus Christ. He is not really writing here as a "Mennonite" and he is not ultimately writing either as an "Anabaptist." The best description of his stance, though it too can be misinterpreted, is "ecumenically biblicist" or in Cartwright's terms: "radically catholic." Further justification of this interpretation of Yoder, however, must await further examination of

41 Ibid., 62.
42 Ibid., 60.
43 See his essay which introduces Yoder's writings in RP, "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity: John Howard Yoder's Vision of the Faithful Church."
Yoder’s thought in the context of the debate over Mennonite identity after the second world war.

4. Reinhold Niebuhr’s Critique of Pacifism: The theoretical justification of withdrawal and separation from social ethical engagement with the wider culture, which the Concern group found it necessary to critique in the Mennonite tradition in which they had been raised, goes back to developments which took place between the two world wars, and in particular, the critique of pacifism by Reinhold Niebuhr in the late 1930’s. Until the first World War, Reinhold Niebuhr was a typical, liberal pacifist. He abandoned pacifism to join in Woodrow Wilson’s crusade: "the war to end all wars," but swung back to his former pacifism after the war when the stupidity and futility of the whole enterprise became clear to everyone. But it was the failure of liberal pacifists to find an adequate way to respond to Hitler in the 1930’s which drove Niebuhr to abandon pacifism decisively once and for all.44

By World War II, Niebuhr was what he would remain for the rest of his life, "an Augustinian liberal."45 He had made peace with the necessity of war and, in the process, worked out his overall theology. His mature theology was basically a "chastened liberalism," that is, the liberalism of the Social Gospel corrected by a doctrine of original sin informed by Augustine and Luther, a doctrine which recent events in Western culture had once again made relevant. Yoder notes that Niebuhr’s major work in systematic


45 Stone, Professor Reinhold Niebuhr, xiii. Yoder agrees with the view of Niebuhr as a liberal (WPR, 344f).
theology, The Nature and Destiny of Man, was an exercise in applied anthropology and says of this work: "All the great themes in the classic tradition are transposed into ways of saying something about human nature or human hope." In a pamphlet originally published in 1939, Niebuhr attacked the liberal pacifism which he himself had formerly embraced. His thesis in this essay is that "the refusal of the Christian Church to espouse pacifism is not apostasy and that most modern forms of pacifism are heretical." Niebuhr distinguishes between heretical and non-heretical kinds of pacifism. The heretical kind is the liberal humanist type, the "secularized and moralistic versions of Christianity," which deny the Christian doctrine of sin and labor under the "utopian illusion" that "there is some fairly simple way out of the sinfulness of human history." This type of pacifism is dangerous because it never stops war, but only delays and hinders defence preparations which could prevent war. What is worse, by failing to discriminate between tyranny and democracy, it inevitably gives a "morally perverse preference" to tyranny.

On the other hand, Niebuhr states, there is another type of pacifism, "a version of Christian perfectionism," which arises out of "a genuine impulse in the heart of Christianity, the impulse to take the law of Christ seriously and not to allow the political strategies, which the sinful character of man makes necessary to become final forms." This type of pacifism can be seen in medieval ascetic perfectionism and Protestant

47 WPR, 345.
49 "Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist," 32.
50 Ibid., 29.
51 Ibid., 36.
52 Ibid., 30.
sectarianism of the type of Menno Simons. In this type of pacifism, according to Niebuhr, "the effort to achieve a standard of perfect love in individual life was not presented as a political alternative." Instead, "it was content to set up the most perfect and unselfish individual life as a symbol of the Kingdom of God."\(^{53}\)

This "apolitical"\(^{54}\) type of pacifism is not heretical, according to Niebuhr, because it does not call the whole church to embody the ideal of pacifism, even though Niebuhr is very adamant that nonviolence is both the teaching of Jesus and the ultimate norm of Christian faith. He says: "It is very foolish to deny that the ethic of Jesus is an absolute and uncompromising ethic."\(^{55}\) But "human egotism makes large scale cooperation on a purely voluntary basis impossible" and so human society requires coercion. Thus "the collective life of man undoubtedly stands on a lower moral plane than the life of individuals."\(^{56}\) This is precisely why it is important to have a reminder of the ultimate norm of love among us in the form of individuals who choose the higher way. As "a principle of indiscriminate criticism upon all forms of justice," the law of love reminds us that there is sin in us as well as in the enemy and it can help us come as close to the ideal as possible within history.\(^{57}\)

5. Yoder's Response to Niebuhr: Yoder assesses Niebuhr's critique of pacifism in a pamphlet "Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism"\(^{58}\) and he discusses the effect of Niebuhr's critique on Mennonites in his Christian Attitudes Toward War, Peace, and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton.\(^{59}\) We will first look at his critique of Niebuhr's

\(^{53}\) Ibid.
\(^{54}\) This is Yoder's term. See WPR, 365ff.
\(^{55}\) "Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist," 32.
\(^{56}\) Ibid., 35.
\(^{57}\) Ibid., 40.
\(^{58}\) Heerewegen Pamphlet #1 (Zeist: Netherlands, 1954). See also WPR, 319-55.
\(^{59}\) See 356-420.
position and then examine Yoder's discussion of the effect this critique had on Mennonites.

Yoder's critique of Niebuhr's thought is presented on four levels, with the fourth being the most significant. The first level responds to Niebuhr's ethical reasoning by which he justifies war as the lesser evil. Yoder sees two fallacies: first, a factual one: the false judgment that modern war is actually less harmful to civilization than tyranny and second, a moral one: the failure to distinguish between agents in which Niebuhr fails to take account of the position that it may be better to suffer than to inflict injustice. The second level has to do with unexamined presuppositions of Niebuhr's ethical reasoning such as the notions of "impossibility," "necessity" and "responsibility." "Responsibility" in Niebuhr's thought, Yoder argues, becomes an "inherent duty to take charge of the social order" which is dictated, not by love, but by the social order itself. Thus "responsibility" becomes an "autonomous moral absolute" which overrules the law of love.60 The third level of Yoder's critique proceeds from this analysis to note three errors in Niebuhr's ethical reasoning. First, Niebuhr makes the mistake of deriving an "ought" from an "is." The fact that all are sinners is not a justification for sinning. Second, Niebuhr's approach does not define the good; rather, it "finds grounds for calling good any policy which was chosen for other reasons." Third, this kind of ethical pluralism presupposes that God's will for all can not be known; both pacifism and non-pacifism are equally valid. Yoder says, "This must presuppose that there is no one knowable good."61 Many contemporary liberals, acknowledging the failure of society to agree on the nature

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60 "Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism," 17-18. Yoder offers a similar analysis of the concepts of "impossibility" and "necessity."
61 Ibid., 19-20.
of the good for human beings, have renounced the search for a common good and advocated a form of political and social structure in which individuals are free to pursue their own visions of the good to the greatest extent which is compatible with the freedom of other individuals to do the same.62

But Yoder's deepest critique of Niebuhr's position, the fourth level, is a theological critique. Zeroing in on Niebuhr's supposed strongest point, Yoder argues that Niebuhr's doctrine of sin "is not the Bible's." Despite the use of biblical language and the appeal to classical Christian sources, Niebuhr "derives his ethics from the fact of man's predicament, and the Bible derives not only ethics, but everything, from the fact of God's redemption."63 Yoder points to four key biblical doctrines which are missing in Niebuhr's theology. First, whereas the New Testament never speaks of the cross except in the light of the resurrection, Niebuhr does so repeatedly. The resurrection, for Niebuhr is merely "a mythological symbol" for "the superhistorical triumph of the good."64 Second, Niebuhr has no doctrine of the church, which makes the nation state, by default, the bearer of the meaning of history. Yoder points out that the church is the only group which exhibits a higher morality than the individual and thus constitutes a crucial exception to Niebuhr's thesis in Moral Man and Immoral Society. Third, Yoder points to the biblical doctrine of regeneration, which implies a change in the sinner so basic as to be called a new birth. Niebuhr's theology views the sinner as basically unchanged by Christian profession, at least as far as ethical performance is concerned. Fourth, the common denominator of the three doctrinal omissions mentioned so far is that they are all

64 Ibid.
works of the Holy Spirit; but Niebuhr has no doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Yoder points out that, in the New Testament, the coming of the Holy Spirit means the imparting of power and that power is "a working reality within history."\textsuperscript{65}

We are now in a position to understand the root of the difference between Yoder's and Niebuhr's theological ethics. Niebuhr's student, Ronald Stone, says that Niebuhr "had learned from Ernst Troeltsch that a final Christian ethic is not achievable. .... The ideal of love could not be realized in human history."\textsuperscript{66} This is exactly the point at which Yoder challenges both Niebuhr and Troeltsch. The ideal of love has been realized in human history in the man Jesus and, because of the power of his resurrection flowing into the church through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, it is possible for admittedly sinful and imperfect people to bear a visible witness to the ideal of love, not in their individual piety or goodness, but insofar as they covenant themselves together into an alternative community which lives (and suffers) without resorting to violence.

Turning from Yoder's response to Niebuhr to his discussion of the effect of Niebuhr's critique on Mennonites, we find Yoder contending that it was Niebuhr's critique of pacifism which provided the theoretical justification of social withdrawal and apoliticism for Mennonites during World War Two. It drove a wedge between those who accepted vocational pacifism and irrelevance, on the one hand, and those who believed they should try to make the world more peaceful, on the other.\textsuperscript{67} World War Two

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{66} Professor Reinhold Niebuhr, 106.
\textsuperscript{67} Yoder, WPR, 412. See also Chapter 16 "The Nonpacifist Resistance of the Mennonite Second Wind" in NV, 107-14.
brought these issues to a head in a number of ways. For one thing, it shattered the peace movement in the Anglo-Saxon world\(^{68}\) and gave liberal pacifism a bad odor from which Mennonites naturally wanted to distance themselves. For another, it joined "the issue of what kind of pacifists Mennonites wanted to be" to the larger issue of "what kind of Americans and what kind of Christians Mennonites were becoming."\(^{69}\) Niebuhr's offer of a respectable place in the grand scheme of things could not help but be attractive to Mennonites. By embracing a Niebuhrian dualism they could affirm that war was wrong for them, but not really wrong for the state or for the majority of Christians outside the historic peace churches. For many Mennonites, a conservative, patriotic, pro-America stance was totally compatible with their pacifism. One is reminded of Origen's argument that Christians were more valuable to the state by praying for victory than if they actually fought in war.\(^{70}\)

Mennonites from across the theological spectrum found Niebuhr's "deal" attractive. Donovan Smucker was a well-educated Mennonite who had worked for the "Fellowship of Reconciliation" before losing faith in liberal pacifism, along with so many others, in the 1930's. He wrote an article entitled: "A Mennonite Critique of the Pacifist Movement,"\(^{71}\) in which he presented four basic criticisms of the modern peace movement, to which he had come after a re-study of the Bible and Mennonite history. First, true peace can only be the fruit of the Christian Gospel so the first priority is to bring individuals to Christ.\(^{72}\) Second, the modern peace movement is too optimistic

\(^{68}\) Yoder, WPR, 357.
\(^{69}\) Ibid., 412.
\(^{70}\) Ibid., 412.
\(^{71}\) See Yoder's discussion of Origen in WPR, 31.
\(^{72}\) MQR, Vol. XX (January 1946): 388-95.
\(^{73}\) Ibid., 389.
about the possibility of genuine world peace.\textsuperscript{73} Third, modern pacifism compromises with coercion by trying to effect non-violent change. For this reason, it is different from biblical nonresistance.\textsuperscript{74} Fourth, the modern peace movement gets involved in politics and tries to Christianize the social order using all means short of violence, but this is inconsistent. Christians should withdraw from politics because the state is no more than a "necessary evil" to prevent anarchy among those who do not accept the Gospel.\textsuperscript{75} Smucker thus accepts an apolitical stance of withdrawal as the only means of being faithful to the Gospel.

On the other end of the Mennonite theological spectrum, John Mumaw, a long time president of Eastern Mennonite College, which was the most sociologically and theologically conservative of the Mennonite colleges at the time, wrote a pamphlet in which he defined nonresistance as biblical, realistic and the historic Mennonite position and then contrasted it to pacifism, which he defined as heretical, utopian and modernist.\textsuperscript{76} Whereas Smucker came from a liberal perspective to embrace Niebuhr's dualism, Mumaw came from the conservative perspective to do the same thing. Yoder comments:

the Mennonite dualism which says we can't do anything in the wider world because we want to be different from those pacifists who are naïve about the possibilities of good, was not learned so much from four centuries of minority history as it was by accommodation to Reinhold Niebuhr . . . so our theology of separation in its most current formulation was derived from a professor of Applied Christianity in Union Theological Seminary.\textsuperscript{77}

Yoder here is making the point as forcefully as possible that Niebuhr's dualism is not historic Mennonite theology. From his theological critique of Niebuhr, we can see that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 391.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 392.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 394.
\item \textsuperscript{76} "Nonresistance and Pacifism," (1944) as reproduced in WPR, 372-87.
\item \textsuperscript{77} WPR, 360.
\end{itemize}
he believes that Niebuhr's dualism is not biblical either. Yoder's rejection of Niebuhr's critique of pacifism and his rejection of Niebuhr's liberal theology are integrally related, just as his positive restatement of pacifism and its rootedness in historic orthodoxy are integrally related, as shall be demonstrated in the following chapters. We now turn to the contemporary Mennonite identity debate, having sketched enough of the background of it to be able to see where the various sides are coming from historically.

6. The Contemporary Mennonite Identity Debate: Contemporary Mennonites are involved in a debate over which direction the Mennonite tradition should take in the coming century and evaluations of Yoder's thought vary. Should Mennonites embrace both theological and political liberalism and join the mainstream as the culmination of the process of emerging from their cultural enclaves over the past century? In other words, should the Dutch Mennonite experience become a model for the North American Mennonite experience? Or should Mennonites attempt to maintain their sectarianism, accepting it as the price of preserving a viable link with their past history? Even if this is the preferred choice, is not this type of sociological isolation already a lost cause, in any case? A third option is for Mennonites to attempt to engage the modern world critically, moving into the mainstream of Christianity as a denomination which eschews both liberalism and isolation at the same time. Can such a delicate balance be maintained and what will happen to the Mennonite peace witness in the process?

Scholars such as J. L. Burkholder, Gordon Kaufmann and John W. Miller could be labeled "Mennonite Revisionists" because they believe that the Mennonite denomination must be revised in more or less fundamental ways in order that Mennonites
might join the mainstream.\textsuperscript{78} The interpretation of Yoder which emerges from this group tends to be negative and labels Yoder's thought as "sectarian," "perfectionist" and "premodern." Theologians such as J. Denny Weaver and Mark Thiessen Nation, on the other hand, could be labeled as "Peace Witness Advocates" because they believe that the emphasis on peace must continue to be emphasized, even if that results in a continuing minority stance for Mennonites. The interpretation of Yoder emerging from this group tends to be positive and regards Yoder's thought as a major contribution. The difference between Nation and Weaver, however, is that Nation (in conjunction with such non-Mennonite scholars as James McClendon, Nancey Murphy, Michael Cartwright and Stanley Hauerwas) would view Yoder's thought as a major contribution to ecumenical Christian thought, whereas Weaver would tend to see it as more of an alternative to the theology of Constantinian Christianity. Scholars such as Ronald Sawatsky, Walter Klaassen, James Reimer and Arnold Snyder could be called "Classically Orthodox Mennonites" because they believe that the Mennonite tradition needs to be moved toward the mainstream of classical, orthodox, Christianity.\textsuperscript{79} Each of these scholars would want to appropriate the Mennonite heritage in a critical way and also engage the mainstream of Christianity in a critical way as well. Some, like Sawatsky, would agree with Bender that Mennonites should move toward Evangelical Protestantism, while others, notably Reimer, would look more to the Catholic/Eastern traditions. Klaassen would be reluctant to see Mennonites as either Catholic or Protestant if one is thought to exclude the other.

\textsuperscript{78} It should be noted that this diverse group of scholars would not agree on precisely which features of the Mennonite beliefs and/or practice need to be revised. But for all of them the revision would be major, not merely shifting emphases.

\textsuperscript{79} This would be the group which would most closely represent the spirit of Harold Bender's approach. The other two groups obviously represent the trends to the right and to the left of Bender's approach about which he worried so much and tried so hard to head off in the interests of denominational unity.
This essay enters into critical dialogue with all three of these approaches to the interpretation of Yoder's thought. It also brings the work of non-Mennonite scholars, such as Stanley Hauerwas, James McClendon, Nancey Murphy, Richard Hays and Michael Cartwright, who appreciate the value of Yoder's thought for the wider church, into dialogue with the Mennonite interpreters of Yoder. The hope is that understanding and common ground between Mennonite and non-Mennonite scholars may be found as we deal with the question of what, if any, significance Yoder's thought has for the church as a whole today. We now turn to an examination of some of the key issues raised by these various approaches to Yoder interpretation.

First, we need to consider the "Revisionists." Some of these scholars have questioned, not only Yoder's thought, but also the Mennonite movement itself. Most have gone so far as to question the viability of a continued emphasis on pacifism as more than the vocational calling of the minority in the modern world, (such as John W. Miller80 and J. L. Burkholder),81 and some have even left the denomination itself, (such as original Concern member, Orley Swartzentruber).82 We will examine briefly the position of John

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81 See Burkholder's The Problem of Social Responsibility From the Perspective of the Mennonite Church (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1989).
82 Since his Concern days, Swartzentruber has moved out of the Mennonite denomination to become an Episcopalian priest. He explains his perspective on the Anabaptist movement he has chosen to leave in terms of a coming to a wider vision of the church. For him, the best description of the Swiss Anabaptism in which he was raised is "a form of married monasticism in the Benedictine tradition." He argues that where the Anabaptists went wrong was claiming to the "The True Church" instead of seeing themselves as voluntary communities within the broader church, distinguished by a more disciplined life, but in fellowship with the wider church. This approach is one way of understanding the essence of what Reinhold Niebuhr was proposing for the historic peace churches, as was described above. See the article "Concern Reflections: A. Orley Swartzentruber," CGR, 8:2 (Spring 1990): 193-200.
W. Miller as one representative of this general approach.\textsuperscript{83}

Miller expresses a desire to "bring the Mennonite pacifist posture more into line with current modes of theological and historical-critical awareness"\textsuperscript{84} because the defence of Schleitheim pacifism mounted by such people as Yoder is unconvincing to all but a "tiny circle of the already convinced."\textsuperscript{85} He calls for a shift away from the insistence that "our pacifist theology is what Jesus taught" to an "awareness that our thinking . . . only partially derives from the first century Gospels."\textsuperscript{86} This relativizing of the peace witness would allow Mennonites to view pacifism as their particular heritage and calling, but also allow them to see those who choose the non-pacifist way as not being "outside the perfection of Christ."

In a recent article on Yoder, Miller paints him as a Marcionite who has a "monotheism of the Son" and who downplays the Old Testament with "supersessionist beliefs and attitudes toward Israel's story, Israel's Scriptures and Israel's God."\textsuperscript{87} It is not clear what point Miller is trying to make in driving a wedge between Yoder and the Old Testament. Is he implying that Yoder does not do justice to the full range of biblical revelation? Does he mean to claim that a more respectful approach to the Old Testament part of the canon would require Yoder to moderate his pacifist imperative? Marcion's rejection of the Old Testament was rooted in his assessment that the vengeful deity of the Old Testament could not be the loving God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But Yoder's point is that the Jesus is the messiah, the fulfillment of the Old Testament

\textsuperscript{83} For a brief discussion of Kaufmann and Burkholder see Beulah Stauffer Hostetler, "Nonresistance and Social Responsibility: Mennonites and Mainline Peace Emphasis, ca. 1950 - 1985" MQR, 64 (January 1990): 55-7.
\textsuperscript{84} Miller, "Schleitheim Pacifism," 157.
\textsuperscript{85} ibid., 156.
\textsuperscript{86} ibid., 163.
\textsuperscript{87} Miller, "In the Footsteps of Marcion," 89.
promises and when Jesus is interpreted in any other context his significance is distorted. Yoder's rejection of Constantinian Christianity is rooted in the Old Testament; the call of Abraham is the beginning of God's work in creating a separate people to be a light to the nations. Constantinianism is nothing more than a revival of the "Solomonic temptation," which had already been condemned by the Old Testament prophets. Ironically, it may be Miller who is closer to Marcion at this point insofar as what the church condemned Marcion for was, not his attempt to create a canon, but his attempt to drive a wedge between the God of the Old Testament and the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

The "Revisionist" approach involves a series of variations on the Niebuhrian theme of viewing vocational pacifism as tolerable for a minority, but viewing a call to the whole church to follow Jesus in the way of peace as intolerable. Mennonites who place a high priority on being part of the Constantinian, wider church in the future will find a

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88 See Yoder's "War as a Moral Problem in the Early Church: The Historian's Hermeneutical Assumptions," The Pacifist Impulse in Historical Perspective, ed. Harvey L. Dyck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 90-110, esp. 95f where he points to the Jewish-Christian worldview as basic to understanding the pacifism of the early church. Also see his "Jeremianic" reading of the Old Testament in "See How They Go With Their Faces to the Sun" in FTN, 51-78. If Miller wants to pin an early Christian heresy on Yoder, he might have better luck trying ebionitism, given Yoder's strongly Jewish-Christian emphasis, although that would fail to do justice to Yoder's high Christology. Yoder goes so far as to identify the beginning of the fall of the church with the church's abandonment of its Jewish character: "It is with the beginning of an apologetic approach to the wisdom of the Gentile world, that the meaning of the Christian mission had been radically shifted... The apologists are missionary in that they try to show the Gentiles that they can have the God of the Jews without the Jews. That shift, somewhere between the New Testament canon and the middle of the next century is the real change in character in the Christian community, the sell-out to Greek or Roman provincialism instead of Hebrew universality. This is then what we would have to call the Fall of the Church." "Tertium Datur: Refocusing the Jewish-Christian Schism," (paper read before the Notre Dame Graduate Union, 13 October, 1977): 3 as quoted by Gayle Gerber Koontz, "Confessional Theology in a Pluralistic Context: A Study of the Theological Ethics of H. Richard Niebuhr and John H. Yoder," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1985): 218.

89 OR, 27f.

90 See Yoder's "The Power Equation, Jesus, and the Politics of King," FTN, 141-2 and "How To Be Read By the Bible," 59.

91 On the other hand, it may not be accurate to speak of Miller believing that God is revealed in Jesus Christ in any kind of decisive sense at all, given his remarks about having been "released" from having to believe in "so-called 'high' Christologies" and his adoption of a "theocentric" Christology. "Concern Reflections" CGR 8:2 (Spring 1990): 149.
place under the ecumenical tent, but they should not delude themselves about their witness having any wider appeal or greater degree of logical power to non-pacifist Christians. The most important question with which those who accept some version or other of vocational pacifism will have to wrestle, is whether or not they are actually maintaining a clear witness to what they believe Jesus calls his disciples to do.

The "Peace Witness Advocates" tend to interpret Yoder as standing up for the Mennonite tradition and express puzzlement when other Mennonites feel such a strong need to criticize Yoder. Mark Thiessen Nation, for example, says that he is used to hearing non-Mennonites criticize Yoder's thought as sectarian, but finds it "startling" to hear such accusations coming from Mennonites. He says that he gets the impression that some Mennonite scholars "believe we have outgrown Yoder." Nation depicts Yoder as seeking to work out a theology of peace in a faithful way and as engaging in extensive ecumenical dialogue throughout his career. He quotes Jim Wallis, who said: "John Yoder inspired a whole generation of Christians to follow the way of Jesus into social action and peacemaking."

J. Denny Weaver, in an article entitled "Peace-Shaped Theology," eschews a defensive posture of trying to justify the orthodoxy of the Mennonite tradition to the wider church. Instead, he goes on the offensive and argues that classic doctrines like Christology and atonement, which developed after the church had reached its accommodation with war, need to be reformed in accordance with the norm of Jesus Christ. For example, Weaver says that the formula of Chalcedon is not wrong in

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affirming that Jesus Christ is true God and true man. But such ways of speaking of the humanity of Jesus and the ethical content of discipleship are extremely "thin." Weaver's real complaint boils down to a concern that "Jesus' life and teaching is not affirmed to be normative for Christian ethics" in classical Christology. Similarly, with respect to the doctrine of atonement, the highly influential satisfaction theory "separates salvation from ethics."95 Weaver does not accept the relegation of the "normativeness of Jesus and rejection of the sword" to the status of a denominational distinctive; he considers them to be part of the core of the Christian Faith.96 He suggests that theologians writing systematic theology for peace churches should rethink the classic doctrines in such a way as to bring to the surface ethical implications which have been there all along, but which have been hidden because the right questions have not been asked. As a start in this direction, Weaver offers a brief account of "a historicized version of the Christus Victor motif"97 as a narrative approach to Christology.

Clearly, what Weaver is trying to do is compatible with Yoder's project.98 He and Nation both think Yoder's thought is of significance for the future. Weaver is more concerned about developing a peace-church theology, while Nation is more interested in Yoder's potential contribution to the wider church in a post-Christendom historical situation. Perhaps Yoder's paradoxical understanding of social change would imply that Nation's goal would be achieved best through Weaver's strategy, but that is not a question to be resolved at this point.

95 Ibid., 23.
96 Ibid., 24.
97 Ibid., 25f.
98 He makes this claim explicitly. (Ibid., 22)
The "Classically Orthodox Mennonites" appear to critique Yoder, not so much as a theologian per se, as they critique him as a Mennonite theologian. In other words, their concern seems to revolve primarily around what it would mean for the Mennonite community to embrace Yoder's theology, or whether what it would mean for Yoder's theology to be taken as representative of Mennonite theology in general, and whether that would be good or bad. None of these scholars would want to repudiate Yoder's pacifism, but all are interested in developing Mennonite theology in an ecumenical and orthodox direction. All see both good and bad in their Mennonite heritage and wish to retain what is good, while rejecting what prevents Mennonites from identifying with classical orthodoxy. In this section, we return to the views of Rodney Sawatsky, which were discussed above in the section on the recovery of the Anabaptist vision.99

Sawatsky outlines the dissolution of the normative Anabaptist vision in the relativizing historicism of modern scholarly study of sixteenth century Anabaptism and then asks: "If the old norm has lost its validity, how are Mennonites to determine the essence of Mennonitism?"100 We saw above that, in evaluating Yoder's claim that the Anabaptist vision can be used to judge contemporary Mennonite practice, Sawatsky asked the important question:

How can one moment in history which is the product of the cultural relativities of agents and interpreters stand in judgment upon another moment in history similarly shaped? Must not such moments in history assume the category of revelation to become normative of history?101

Sawatsky is thinking of the sixteenth century Anabaptists standing in judgment on the

99 Reimer's important critique of Yoder will be discussed in Chapter II when the charge that Yoder's theology is reductionistic is considered.
100 "The Quest For a Mennonite Hermeneutic," 9.
101 Ibid., 11.
twentieth century Mennonites. If that is the proposal, the accusation of "sectarian perfectionism," that is, of seeing oneself as being "free from the relativizing of history, or if you will, of sin" is perfectly valid.  

Sawatsky suggests that three approaches are possible to the construction of a post-Anabaptist vision hermeneutic for the contemporary Mennonite community. One approach (which he labels "neosectarian") emphasizes history and tries to distance the vision from the "facts" of history so as to keep history from contradicting the vision. A second approach (which he labels "neoevangelical") is to emphasize theology and enter into ecumenical conversation with the wider church in order to fashion a Mennonite theology adequate for today. A third approach recognizes a dialectic or a tension between history and theology out of which a normative vision is defined.

Turning to a discussion of Yoder, whom Sawatsky recognizes as the Mennonite theologian who has pursued this problem more vigorously than any other, he says that Yoder uses sixteenth Anabaptism as a norm to the extent that it embodies Scripture. Anabaptism, for Yoder, is "the recourse to Scripture as an authoritative guide for church renewal."  

To the extent that sixteenth century Anabaptism embodied the norm of Jesus Christ as testified to in Scripture, Anabaptism can function as a norm, which can be used to judge contemporary Mennonite reality. Above we noted that Yoder used biblical arguments to support the Concern Movement's critique of modern, denominational, Mennonite reality and that he referred to the power of the Holy Spirit as "a working reality within history" as what was missing in Niebuhr's liberal theology. While Yoder

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102 Ibid., 12.
does not hesitate to apply his historicist method to both the Bible and history, he
nevertheless is confident that relativism is no danger so long as the normativeness of
Jesus Christ is confessed in the doctrine of the Incarnation:

Jesus, the prophets before him, and the apostles after him, as a base for evaluating
what has been done since in their name, are to be found fully within the
researchable, debatable particularity which according to the New Testament
witness is the meaning of Incarnation.\(^{104}\)

For Yoder, the ultimate Anabaptist hermeneutic is not the sixteenth century, but the first.
precisely because in the Incarnation a moment of history has assumed the category of
revelation and become normative.

Sawatsky does not seem to realize the full implications of Yoder's position,
however, because he goes on to ask how Yoder can justify choosing one sixteenth
century Anabaptist over another as the model for today.\(^{105}\) Does this mean, he asks, that
each Mennonite church should choose its own hero and declare him normative? The
answer to this question is clear, at least as far as Yoder is concerned. The Incarnation
provides a basis for the evaluation of all norms and models, including Anabaptist and
Mennonite ones. Yet, Sawatsky categorizes Yoder as retaining a "sectarian perfectionist
vision."\(^{106}\) By way of contrast, Sawatsky quotes Walter Klaassen as wanting to ground
Anabaptist identity in a shared Christian theology: "Trinitarian theology remains a very
important tenet of Anabaptism that is relevant for today."\(^{107}\) Sawatsky points to A. James
Reimer as one who is systematically developing Klaassen's "more theological, less

\(^{104}\) "Anabaptism and History," PK, 128.
\(^{105}\) "The Quest For a Mennonite Hermeneutic," 14.
\(^{106}\) Ibid., 16.
\(^{107}\) Walter Klassen, "The Quest for Anabaptist Identity," Anabaptist-Mennonite Identities in Ferment, ed. L.
Driedger and L. Harder (Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1990), 19 as quoted in Swatsky, "The
Quest For a Mennonite Hermeneutic," 18.
historical quest for a post-Anabaptist vision hermeneutic." Klaassen and Reimer are seen by Sawatsky as shifting away from a sectarian perfectionism and as being more open to "outside influences," as was Harold Bender. Sawatsky ends his article by saying:

A Mennonite hermeneutic adequate for today thus is both/and rather than either/or. It learns from its Anabaptist past as it formulates a Mennonite theology in conversation with other Christian traditions in the common pursuit of faithfulness to Christ in the present and in the future.

Sawatsky is left with a conversational hermeneutic which has no readily specifiable norm.

Sawatsky's view of Yoder is understandable if one takes into account the fact that he speaks of Yoder primarily as a Mennonite to other Mennonites. He wants to open a relatively closed community to the catholic truth of the wider church and encourage dialogue and mutual enrichment. Yoder's thought would seem to be a hindrance to the achievement of this goal because Yoder is insisting on things like pacifism, congregationalism, Christocentrism and the social relevance of Jesus, which the wider church is not perceived as wanting to hear. Because of his use of terms like "the believers' church," "radical reformation," "Anabaptist," and "free church" as descriptive of his position in ecumenical dialogue, Yoder can appear to non-Mennonites to be merely the representative of a smallish sect with some extreme views. Sometimes his arguments are not dealt with because it is too easy to dismiss him as the representative of a position in which "nobody" believes anyway.

108 "The Quest For a Mennonite Hermeneutic," 18-19.
109 Reimer would resist Sawatsky's interpretation of his intentions at this point in that he would see his appeal to the historic Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy of the ecumenical creeds as the ontological foundation for ethics. (Personal correspondence, James Reimer to Craig Carter, December 14, 1998.)
110 Ibid., 20.
On the other hand, part of the strength of Yoder's position is that he can point to the existence of disciplined communities in history which, at various times and places and to varying degrees, have lived out the ideals of pacifism which he speaks of as being biblical. If he was saying that sixteenth century Anabaptism was perfect or calling all Christians to become Mennonites, then it would be fair to write him off as a "sectarian perfectionist." But asking all Christians to take seriously their own confession of Jesus Christ as true God and true man is hardly sectarian. If contemporary Mennonites decide to replace the relativizing historiography of the Anabaptist vision with the historic orthodoxy of the ecumenical church, they will need to reckon with the fact that the same relativizing process has been going on for centuries in the wider church with respect to orthodoxy, as has been going on in Mennonite circles recently with respect to the Anabaptist vision. In other words, unbridled historicism is as much a threat to credal orthodoxy as it is to pacifism.

In a 1995 article, Alain Epp Weaver looks back on The Politics of Jesus nearly a quarter of a century after its publication and offers an interesting and ironical thesis: that just as Yoder is being claimed by the larger academic community, Mennonite theologians are becoming increasingly critical of his approach. Epp Weaver mentions Mennonite theologians such as J. Lawrence Burkholder, A. James Reimer and Gordon Kaufmann as examples of those who, from different perspectives and for different reasons, criticize Yoder for maintaining pacifism too absolutely, for not being orthodox enough or for being too orthodox to be meaningful to modern people. Epp Weaver calls attention to wider trends such as liberation theology, which makes it easier today than twenty years

ago to think of Jesus as political, and the postliberalism of Lindbeck and Hauerwas, which today echoes Yoder's forty-year old warning about setting Jesus aside in favor of "other lights." He ends his article by raising, but not answering, the crucial question of whether the "the growing historicist consciousness" among Mennonite theologians will make it impossible to sustain a pacifist commitment such as Yoder's.

Epp Weaver has put his finger on the problem with which Sawatsky is left at the end of his article. What, in the end, acts as the Christian norm, given the "growing historical consciousness" which faces us today? Sawatsky and other Mennonites are, naturally, concerned about what functions as norm for the Mennonite community. But with all due respect, non-Mennonites are not that interested in that debate per se. Rather, non-Mennonites are interested in a norm for evaluating what constitutes Christian faithfulness today and to what extent Yoder might be helpful in answering that question in the coming century. Yoder's position is that there is no norm to judge the Christian community except "Jesus Christ as he is known through scripture." Is that not the position of historic Christian orthodoxy? And is that not at least implied in Sawatsky's goal of "faithfulness to Christ in the present and in the future"?

7. Yoder's Critique of His Own Tradition: The extent to which Yoder is critical of his own tradition is not well enough known outside of Mennonite circles. If it were better known, it would make it more difficult to dismiss Yoder as merely a spokesperson for a small, pacifist sect. Yoder's critique of his own tradition is also

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113 For example, a recent dissertation by Won Ha Shin, "Two Models of Social Transformation: A Critical Analysis of the Theological Ethics of John H. Yoder and Richard J. Mouw," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1997) shows no awareness of Yoder's critique of his own tradition. As a result, it concludes that "the danger of self-righteousness" exists with regard to Yoder's theology and that the way to overcome this danger "may lie in a more serious reflection on the import of social reality." (232) This criticism of Yoder simply misses the mark.
important because it shows us how radical he is in attempting to employ a Christological norm to critique contemporary church life. Finally, Yoder's critique of his own tradition gives us some idea of what he thinks, concretely, faithfulness to Jesus Christ would look like today.\(^{114}\)

While Yoder criticizes the Lutheran and Roman Catholic positions for advocating a sub-Christian standard of justice for the state, which is not derived from revelation, he also criticizes the "traditional Amish-Mennonite" positions for having "a distinct and definite level of normative sub-Christian justice," which they apply to the state.\(^{115}\) Yoder also criticizes those in his own tradition who advocate nonresistance and reject pacifism for falling prey to an "unavowed and uncritical acquiescence in nationalism."\(^{116}\)

Yoder also criticizes the Mennonite tradition for becoming Constantinian itself under the pressure of persecution.\(^{117}\) The first step in this process for a particular group of Mennonites was accepting the deal of toleration under the protection of a local lord, often displacing the local serfs, in return for a promise not to proselytize. This kind of deal was often the basis of the group gaining an opportunity to emigrate and thus escape persecution. This decision led to the next step, which was the group losing its missionary fervor and ceasing to evangelize. The result of taking that step was that the community recreated itself through its progeny, some of whom were only superficially and grudgingly committed to the ideals of the community.\(^{118}\) This meant that the world was now inside the church. The result of this development is that the church becomes a mini-

\(^{114}\) This type of attention to concrete, historical specificity is what one misses in the writings of Stanley Hauerwas and constitutes a significant difference between the two thinkers.\(^{115}\) CWS, 71.\(^{116}\) NV, 141. The difference between pacifism and nonresistance in Mennonite thought is defined above.\(^{117}\) WPR, 198ff.\(^{118}\) NV, 104.
Constantianian establishment. Ironically, that from which the founders withdrew ends up being recreated in the alternative community they founded.\textsuperscript{119} Yoder summarizes his critique of his own tradition at its worst:

The defensiveness and authoritarianism with which conservative mini-Constantinian establishments sometimes govern a rural colony or a church agency, the way in which immigrant farmers can without intending it be allied with authoritarian rulers against the interests of the previous less technically advanced subjects of those same rulers, and the readiness to buy into some elements of the dominant culture while claiming to be clearly nonconformed on others, represent besetting temptations and at times direct moral failures in the Mennonite experience.\textsuperscript{120}

The other side of Yoder's criticism of his own tradition is his ability to see the Spirit at work as the Anabaptist vision appears in settings other than those denominations traditionally associated with Anabaptism. For example, he is very positive about the development of ecclesial base communities in Latin America, which have made possible "community life, prayer, praise, moral solidarity, the training and recognition of leaders, and growing social awareness" even without the availability of enough priests. He notes the positive symbiotic relationship between these communities and the theology of liberation.\textsuperscript{121} Yoder contends that sixteenth century Anabaptism intended to be a corrective and never claimed to be any more than "the rest of the Reformation."

Therefore, he says, "those who represent the Anabaptist vision should be open to welcome every possible occasion to feed their corrective witness back into the mainstream of Christian thought."\textsuperscript{122} Yoder would agree with Dale Brown who says: "Consistent with its message that the church needs to be reborn in each generation, the

\textsuperscript{119} A similar irony is seen in the Puritan persecution of religious dissenters in New England after they themselves had fled England to escape religious persecution.
\textsuperscript{120} "Introduction," PK, 4.
\textsuperscript{121} "The Wider Setting of Liberation Theology," The Review of Politics 52 (Spring 1990), 286.
\textsuperscript{122} "The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision," 22.
Anabaptist vision will continue to become flesh in places where it may be the least expected.\textsuperscript{123}

Yoder allows himself to be identified with the Anabaptist vision, not because he believes it gives him a position of superiority from which to judge everyone else, but because he believes that everyone must start where they are situated historically. It is an act of humility, not self-righteousness, to eschew Olympian heights of objectivity and to admit that one comes from a particular historical tradition which has strengths and weaknesses.\textsuperscript{124} For Yoder, the important thing is to place all Christian theology and ethics, all faith and practice, under the norm of Jesus Christ. This is what it means to embrace both "radical reform" and "radical catholicity" at the same time. In the next section of this chapter, we will probe more carefully into the question of what it means to do theology under the norm of Jesus Christ.

Yoder should be seen as a critical heir of the Anabaptist theological heritage, not as either an uncritical Mennonite partisan or as a modernist subverter of the tradition. It seems clear that Yoder identified strongly with the ideals of the radical wing of the sixteenth century reformation as expressed in the Swiss Brethren. He endorsed the "recovery of the Anabaptist vision" because he judged that it expressed the true spirit of the teachings of Jesus as no other movement before or since has done. He used "the Anabaptist vision" to critique not only non-Anabaptist forms of Christianity, but also his own Mennonite denomination as well. Despite his historicism, Yoder took the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ as the criterion by which all Christian

speech and action needs to be evaluated. He asks rhetorically: "What becomes of the meaning of incarnation if Jesus is not normative man?" How and why he did this can not easily be explained with reference to his own Mennonite theological tradition, or even the evangelical and neo-orthodox theology of mid-century North America. In order to understand Yoder at this point, it is necessary to turn to the thought of the theologian who probably influenced his thought more than any other, namely Karl Barth.

B. Yoder and the Theology of Karl Barth

The theology of Karl Barth has been misunderstood by many North Americans for most of this century. Those who read Brunner in the 1940's and assumed that Barth was saying basically the same thing, those who read the commentary on Romans and were so put off that they never bothered to open the Church Dogmatics, and those who believed that Neo-orthodoxy was a useful label to apply to theologians as diverse as Tillich, Bultmann and Barth, all failed to grasp the radical implications of Barth's approach to doing theology after the end of the modern (or Enlightenment) era of Western culture. Yoder was one of the few North Americans, not only to study with Barth, but also to read him seriously and sympathetically during the 1950's, before the fourth volume of the Church Dogmatics was translated into English. We know that Yoder's book on Barth's view of war, which was published in 1971, actually was written in the mid-1950's because Yoder tells that a "text substantially similar to the present one was read by Professor Barth in the summer of 1957." Although some changes were made to the text to guard against possible misunderstandings, we are informed that "at no point

125 POJ, 10.
did the paper's argument rest upon a mistaken understanding of Professor Barth's position and intention." Yoder has been a pioneer in making Barth's ethics, and particularly the radical implications of his social ethics, known in North America.

Yoder, however, did not merely understand Barth better than most North Americans of his generation; he also found himself in sympathy with Barth's theological method. It is, of course, dangerous to speak of Barth's "method" without remembering that Barth would be the first to be horrified at the suggestion that he had a "method," in the nineteenth century sense of the term, which determined his system of thought. Yet reason played a significant role in Barth's thought. It would be accurate to say that Barth had a highly rational "faith seeking understanding" method which consisted of critical reflection upon the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In this section, we will observe the amazingly high degree of convergence between the theological method of the American Anabaptist-Mennonite social ethicist and that of the Swiss Reformed

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126 KBW, 17. Yoder also warns the reader that his description of Barth's position is based upon personal conversations with Barth and may appear to contradict the apparent sense of certain passages in Barth's writings.

127 Philip Thorne says that "one of the signal contributions" which Yoder and the Wesleyan theologian Donald Dayton have made to American Evangelicalism is to "introduce Barth as a model for 'radical' social ethics in the face of a visible absence of Reformed Evangelical discussion of Barth's ethics." See his Evangelicalism and Karl Barth: His Reception and Influence in North American Evangelical Theology (Allison Park, Pa.: Pipwick Publications, 1995), 150. Outside of Evangelicalism, only the work of George Hunsinger immediately comes to mind as doing something similar. See his Karl Barth and Radical Politics (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

128 This fact is being recognized by practically all interpreters of Yoder today, but as with most generalizations, it is necessary to unpack in detail exactly how it is true before it will be of much use to those wishing to evaluate Yoder's social ethics. This section aims to contribute to this task.

129 Eberhard Busch notes Barth's complaint that the students in his discussion keep coming back "again and again to the question raised by some young know-alls . . . as to what the characteristic 'thought-form' of the Dogmatics is. They feel that if they knew that, they could then decide whether or not to get on to the train which is apparently travelling inexorably from its specific starting point to its destination." Karl Barth: His Life From Letters and Autobiographical Texts (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 403. Yoder cites this passage in the context of his essay rejecting "the search for first principles." See "Walk and Word," 77, n.1.

130 Barth's theology is rational without being rationalistic or falling into rationalism. Rationalism rejects all truth which is not accessible to the unaided human reason. Barth's theology, however, is not irrational. He investigates the speech of the church about God and evaluates it by the criterion of Jesus Christ as He is testified to in Scripture. Concepts, ideas or arguments which are not consistent with the confession of Jesus Christ must be revised or rejected and it is this sense that Barth's theology is rational.
theologian of the Word of God.\textsuperscript{131} We will consider eight points of agreement or similarity in method between the two theologians and the one major methodological point on which they disagreed. Then, in the final section of this chapter, we will be in a position to summarize the importance for Yoder's theological method of the encounter between his Anabaptist theological heritage and the theology of Barth.\textsuperscript{132}

1. Areas of Agreement and Similarity: In this section we summarize briefly eight key points of agreement or similarity between the methods of Yoder and Barth. It must be understood, however, that it is very difficult to speak of the method of theologians like Barth and Yoder without also speaking of issues of substance. Both Barth and Yoder minimize the space they devote to discussions of method as such in their writings and both reject the call to justify their method in some rationalistic way prior to employing it in the exposition of Christian doctrines. They both believe that the best way to convince someone of the truth of the faith is to display the inner logic and coherence of the content of the faith as fully and as clearly as possible. So, in what follows, it will often be necessary to illumine methodological issues by referring to issues of substance.

1) Yoder, like Barth, reads the Bible as a narrative centering on Jesus Christ and rejects the seventeenth-century scholastic doctrines of verbal inspiration and inerrancy.\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{131} Thorne also notes not only the influence of Barth's thought on Yoder, which everyone acknowledges, but also the "convergence he [i.e. Yoder] discerns between the Anabaptist position and certain developments in Barth's own thinking." (Evangelicalism and Karl Barth, 173.)

\textsuperscript{132} It should be stressed before proceeding that the similarity of method being described here should not be taken to imply that the two theologians agreed on most issues of substance. Indeed, Yoder's Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage influenced the substance of his theology more than did the theology of Barth. Yet at the point of method, Barth's influence on Yoder reached its peak. In many cases, the use of a similar method did not lead to identical conclusions, such as on the issue of war. This disagreement on conclusions is normal in the development and growth of a theological tradition (not "school") and should not cause the methodological similarities to be overlooked or downplayed.

Yoder has expressed concern about how easily those who, like himself, seek to be "guided by the Scriptures in more natural and intellectually responsible way, can be written off as 'fundamentalist' without being heard."\textsuperscript{134} He calls his position "Biblical Realism\textsuperscript{135}" and rejects both scholasticism, which he characterizes as "a dogmatic insistence on the authoritative dignity of the biblical texts, concurrent with a relative disinterest in studying them very closely, since we already know what they say,"\textsuperscript{136} and humanism, which is inadequate because when the texts are read critically, they "say things which the humanist cannot handle."\textsuperscript{137} Yoder says that the essence of Biblical Realism is the attempt to read the texts with all the critical tools, but without knowing ahead of time "where we want it to fit into a pre-existent larger systematic scheme."\textsuperscript{138}

The Bible, for Yoder, exhibits a unity, but it is a unity of a narrative which "goes somewhere" as opposed to a flat unity in which every text in every part of the Bible is to be read in exactly the same way as every other text.\textsuperscript{139} The radical Protestant, he says,

\textsuperscript{134} "How to Be Read By the Bible," 26.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 12-13. The term "Biblical Realism" originated in the "Biblical Theology Movement" which flourished in the 1950's. Yoder defines it carefully as meaning maximally (for Tresmontant and Cherbonnier) that there is a biblical world view which once discovered and explicated will be seen to be true forever and as meaning minimally (for Minear, Piper, M. Barth) that, as a methodological presupposition, the biblical text is supposed to contain a coherent testimony which it is the reader's task to discern. Yoder's version of Biblical Realism is minimalist. He simply approaches the Bible with the assumption that, once the best critical tools have been employed to establish the original meaning of each text in its proper context, the texts will all fit together. He says that he learned from Paul Minear and Karl Barth "the great value of approaching a text with the assumption that it might have something to say, so that the hermeneutically most valuable suspicion is not doubting the text but doubting the adequacy of one's prior understanding of it." (8)
\textsuperscript{136} WPR, 424.
\textsuperscript{137} "How To Be Read By the Bible," 11-12.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 13. He rejects as inappropriate "subjecting it [i.e. the Bible] to the superior authority of our own contemporary hermeneutical framework." (116) However, he does not deny that there is hermeneutical problem, as fundamentalism does. See his The Fullness of Christ: Paul's Vision of Universal Ministry (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1987), 90. Yoder's "communal hermeneutic" is rooted in exegesis and makes use of all available critical tools. New Testament scholar Richard Hays credits Yoder's interpretation of texts with being informed by "detailed and sophisticated interaction with historical-critical scholarship." The Moral Vision of the New Testament, 245. See Chapter IV of this essay for a discussion of communal hermeneutics.
\textsuperscript{139} "One of the marks of the 'believers' church' heritage is that it sees movement within the canonical story, and therefore a difference between the Testaments. Instead of a timeless collection of parabolic anecdotes
will always have a "canon within the canon," namely Jesus. On the other hand, he also claims that the free church stance is the most ecumenical one possible because it "means a commitment to a constant recourse to the entire testimony of the New Testament, rejecting the concentration upon any one doctrine as a "canon within the canon" and rejecting, as well, the choice of any one normative post-canonical development." The apparent contradiction in these statements disappears once one realizes that, for Yoder, there is only one proper "canon within the canon." There is only one true center of the Bible and it is not justification by faith or predestination or any other doctrine. It is nothing other than Jesus Christ Himself. Like Barth, who taught that "revelation does not differ from the person of Jesus Christ" and that "revelation engenders the Scripture which attests it," Yoder views the Bible as cohering in Jesus and springing from Jesus. Barth gives priority to the New Testament in terms of interpretation in that the fulfillment of the Old Testament is taken into consideration in the interpretation of the Old Testament. According to Nigel Biggar, Barth also interprets the whole Bible from its center, which is for him Jesus Christ, that is, "the salvific work of God in Jesus Christ as broadly conceived by classical orthodoxy."
2) Yoder's "Biblical Realism," like Barth's, leads him to adopt a "high" Christology and to reject liberal views of Jesus as less than divine.\textsuperscript{146} Yoder looks at five New Testament texts (John 1, Philippians 2, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1-2, and Revelation 4:1-5:4) which all make a similar move in relating Jesus to the cosmology or worldview of the people they are addressing.\textsuperscript{147} Each time the writer uses the language of the new linguistic world into which the Gospel is being proclaimed, but instead of fitting Jesus into the slots the cosmic vision has ready for him, the writer places Jesus above the cosmos, in charge of it. In each case, suffering in human form is that which accredits Jesus for lordship. Instead of salvation consisting of our being integrated into a salvation system the cosmos has ready for us, we are called to enter into the path of self-emptying, death and resurrection of Jesus. Behind the cosmic victory of Jesus, enabling it, is what later confession called preexistence, co-essentiality with the Father, possession of the image of God and the participation of the Son in creation and providence. Finally, the writer and the readers shared by faith in all that this victory means.\textsuperscript{148} Christians are called to proclaim the lordship of Jesus Christ over the cosmos. The extent to which Yoder has a stake in maintaining a high Christology is revealed when he says: "Only this evangelical Christology can found a truly transformational approach to culture."\textsuperscript{149}

The function of the high ontological claims made for Jesus is that they guarantee the truth

\textsuperscript{146} For a similar interpretation of Yoder on this point see Joel Zimbleman, "Theological Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Juan Luis Segundo and John Howard Yoder," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1986), 196-7. He says: "Biblical Realism establishes the normativeness of Scripture and its dependence for legitimacy on the Word of God." (196)

\textsuperscript{147} "But We Do See Jesus: The Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth," PK, 50-2.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 53.

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 61.
of his teaching and make putting one's faith in him totally appropriate because his teaching is in conformity to the true nature of reality.\textsuperscript{150}

In *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder claims that his use of the human life of Jesus as the norm for Christian ethics is simply the logical reflex of the high Christology of classical orthodoxy. He asks:

What becomes of the meaning of incarnation if Jesus is not normative man? If he is a man but somehow not normative, is this not the ancient ebionite heresy? If he be somehow authoritative but not in his humanness, is this not a new gnosticism?\textsuperscript{151}

We have to take Yoder's claims at face value unless we can show incoherence in his thought, and this issue will be addressed in Chapter Two. The point here is that Yoder claims explicitly to have a "high" Christology, rooted in Nicene and Chalcedonian orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{152}

This point is important because the term "Anabaptist" is sometimes assumed to refer to what George Williams would call the "Evangelical Rationalists," the followers of Michael Servetus and other unitarians who denied classical, orthodox Christology. For example, Nigel Biggar contrasts Barth's Christology as "Nicene and Chalcedonian," with

\textsuperscript{150} Yoder has been accused of reductionism at this point and of not holding firmly enough to the ontological underpinnings of the Christian faith. We will examine this charge in the final section of Chapter II. For now, we can anticipate the argument there by making two points. First, claiming not to believe that one can prove something on the basis of neutral, universally accessible criteria is not the same as not believing it to be true. Second, Yoder's call to follow Jesus in the way of peace has no rationale if Jesus is just a human teacher. In other words, the validity of his ethics logically requires a high Christology.

\textsuperscript{151} POJ, 10. Yoder goes so far as to accuse those who reject the humanity of Jesus as the norm for Christian social ethics as "seeing Jesus through ebionitic eyes, that is, limiting his relevance to that which one chooses to attribute to his human status as a radical rabbi. (98) He also says: "When the later, more "theological" New Testament writings formulated the claim to preexistence and cosmic preeminence for the divine Son or Word . . . the intent of this language was not to consecrate beside Jesus some other way of perceiving the eternal Word, through reason or history or nature, but rather to affirm the exclusivity of the revelation claim they were making for Jesus. The same must be said of the later development of the classic ideas of the Trinity and the Incarnation." (99) Yoder here is challenging those who affirm classical orthodoxy to take his claims seriously as the logical implications of their own position.

\textsuperscript{152} See also, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, 73.
that of Stanley Hauerwas, which he calls "Anabaptist." He then explicitly identifies Hauerwas as having a "low" Christology.\textsuperscript{153} To paint all Anabaptists with the brush of Christological unorthodoxy is neither historically accurate or ecumenically responsible. One really needs to distinguish between "Ecclesial Anabaptists" and "Evangelical Rationalists" because to fail to do so is to portray the entire Mennonite family of denominations as heretical, which is clearly unfair.\textsuperscript{154} But the question we must answer is whether Yoder, who is clearly an Anabaptist, has a low Christology.

First, we must agree with Biggar in his assessment of Hauerwas' Christology as not being clearly orthodox in the classical sense and, therefore, to be contrasted sharply with that of Barth. He is right to suggest that Hauerwas and Barth share some important common concerns such as making the biblical narrative central in ethics and correcting the view of ethics which sees it as basically a conceptual and logical affair. The difference between them, however, is that:

In contemporary Christian ethics the emphasis placed on the social formation of moral character is very marked indeed. As a corrective to an earlier, individualistic preoccupation with moral decision-making, that is certainly to be welcomed. But in much contemporary discussion this new emphasis is exaggerated to the point where the transcendent God and the individual's relationship to him disappears from view.\textsuperscript{155}

This certainly sums up the difference nicely between Barth and much of what is going on in those streams of contemporary Christian ethics which have begun to emphasize the categories of narrative and community. The issue comes down to Barth's realism. He actually believes that the living God is more real than anything else and that the narrative of God's action in Scripture is authoritative because it describes the real world in terms of

\textsuperscript{153} The Hastening That Waits, 143, n. 67.
\textsuperscript{154} See the discussion of Anabaptist historiography above in Section A.1.
\textsuperscript{155} The Hastening That Waits, 145.
which we must understand ourselves. Hauerwas, on the other hand, is interested in narrative because of its sociological function in forming the identity of the Christian community and providing a rationale for the moral beliefs of that community.\textsuperscript{156} But is the narrative true?

His rhetoric in his \textit{The Peaceable Kingdom} may not be representative of his considered position, but, as it stands, it is reminiscent of classical liberalism, and very different from that of Yoder as quoted above, insofar as he appears to contrast Christological orthodoxy and a concern for the ethical implications of the man Jesus:

Christian ethics has tended to make "Christology" rather than Jesus its starting point. His relevance is seen in more substantive claims about the incarnation. Christian ethics then often begins with some broadly drawn theological claims about the significance of God becoming man, but the life of the man whom God made his representative is ignored or used selectively . . . This emphasis on Jesus' ontological significance strikes many as absolutely essential . . . Christologies which emphasize the cosmic and ontological Christ tend to make Jesus' life almost incidental to what is assumed to be a more profound theological point.\textsuperscript{157}

Michael Cartwright notes that one of the problems in the recent interpretation of Yoder's thought has been that, too often, he has been read through the lens of Hauerwas.\textsuperscript{158}

Cartwright also notes that Hauerwas has never gone so far as to adopt the tag of "Biblical Realism" and suggests that the reason may be that "Hauerwas would have a problem with

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 118.
\textsuperscript{157} \textit{The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 72-3. One needs to be careful about attributing to Hauerwas a total lack of appreciation for the ontological basis of Christology. He certainly distances himself from a liberal view of Jesus as exemplar and he says "without the ontological change occasioned through Christ's resurrection, there would be no possibility of living as he did. . . . Our obedience to his life is only because of the Father's vindication of Jesus' obedience through the resurrection." ("Epilogue" in Paul Ramsey, \textit{Speak Up For Just War or Pacifism: A Critique of the Methodist Bishops' Letter "In Defence of Creation"} (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 162.)
\textsuperscript{158} "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity: John Howard Yoder's Vision of the Faithful Church," RP, 15, n. 25. For example, we can point to the comments of Richard B. Miller in his \textit{Interpretations of Conflict: Ethics, Pacifism and the Just-War}, who says: "For authors like Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder, the truths of one's religion or culture serve as a beacon to other travelers . . . Epistemologically, this approach is unabashedly relativistic: ethical beliefs are obligatory only within distinct webs of beliefs or
the term "realism" insofar as it seems to suggest that there is a 'correspondent reality'
which exists apart from the narrative and its visible embodiment in a community."\textsuperscript{159}

Cartwright puts his finger on the very same point as being the difference between
Hauerwas and Yoder, as Biggar identified as being the difference between Hauerwas and
Barth.\textsuperscript{160}

Yoder clearly distinguishes his position from that of those narrative theologians
who employ narrative as a master concept into which the narratives of Scripture fit.
While he expresses appreciation for the emphasis on narrative as a corrective, two points
need to be made. First, Yoder was employing narrative as a category in describing the
biblical way of rendering the identity of Jesus Christ before the current fad of narrative
theology got off the ground.\textsuperscript{161} Second, Yoder's theological realism requires him to
affirm the priority of the biblical story over all other narratives. He says:

Only from within the community of resurrection confession is the cruciformity of
the cosmos a key rather than a scandal. Therefore the particular narrative is prior
to the general idea of narrative. . . . One will welcome the creative imagination of
structuralists who protect narration from reduction to "truths" and "concepts;" yet
an equal vigilance is needed to defend the particularity of Abraham, Samuel,
Jeremiah and Jesus from reduction to mere specimens of a new kind of universal,
namely narrative forms lying deeper than the ordering events and sufficient to
explain them.\textsuperscript{162}

cultural languages." This assessment may not even be fair to Hauerwas and it certainly distorts Yoder's
\textsuperscript{159} "Practices, Politics, and Performance: Toward a Communal Hermeneutic For Christian Ethics,"

\textsuperscript{160} Hauerwas credits Yoder for converting him to pacifism and for giving him an ecclesiology. So many
people who read Hauerwas assume, first, that Hauerwas is an "Anabaptist" and, second, that Yoder's
theology is similar to that of Hauerwas. (The Peaceable Kingdom, xxivf.) But Hauerwas is a United
Methodist whose ecclesiology is very thin compared to that of Yoder and they disagree on fundamental
issues of style, substance and emphasis. The contrast between these two thinkers will be developed
throughout this dissertation at appropriate points.

\textsuperscript{161} See Chapter II in which Yoder's view of narrative is discussed based on his lectures from the 1970's
entitled: Preface to Christology.

\textsuperscript{162} "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood," PK, 36. See Yoder's claims for realism in "Jesus: A Model For
compatible with the approach described by Hans Frei in The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative (New Haven:
Yale University Press, 1974) as the classical Christian position.
Yoder's is a narrative theology in which theological realism is carefully and specifically affirmed. He criticizes Hauerwas for not giving enough emphasis to "the objective reality of salvation history:"

One reason Hauerwas does not do text-based Bible study is that he is overawed by the notion of community-dependency and underawed by the objective reality of salvation history. Also underawed by the study of real (unsaved) history. He would rather read novels.\textsuperscript{163}

Yoder's theological realism is clear, but the situation with regard to Hauerwas is less so.

Barth's Christology is unfolded in Paragraph 15 "The Mystery of Revelation."\textsuperscript{164} There can be no question of whether Barth has a high Christology or not. The heart of his exposition is the phrase "very God and very man." He says: "The miracle of the incarnation, of the unio hypostatica, is seen ... when we realize that the Word of God descended from the freedom, majesty and glory of His divinity, that without becoming unlike Himself He assumed His likeness to us ..."\textsuperscript{165} He soundly rebukes Brunner for indifference to the sign of the divinity of Jesus Christ: the virgin birth.\textsuperscript{166} It is likely that Barth would have found reason likewise to rebuke Hauerwas for his lack of theological realism, but would have found Yoder's "Biblical Realism" very compatible with his own approach.\textsuperscript{167}

3) Yoder's concentration on the particular narrative history of Jesus Christ as the starting point for all theological reflection, like Barth's, leads him to reject natural

\textsuperscript{164} CD I/2, 122.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 165.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 183-4.
\textsuperscript{167} See WPR, 437 for Yoder's affirmation of the bodily resurrection of Jesus as an event within history.
theology, apologetics and systematic theology. Yoder refers to his "post-modern acceptance of the particularity of the Christian story without subjecting it either to the claimed objectivity of general consensus or to that of some specific 'scientific method'" and states his agreement with Barth's well-known rejection of the program of Schleiermacher to base theology on "Feeling." For Yoder, the historical narrative centered on Jesus and the life of the community which witnesses to Jesus is prior to "all possible methodological distillations."

In rejecting apologetics, Yoder suggests that the alternative is "confession." He also explicitly rejects natural theology as a source of moral knowledge. Richard Hays rightly states that, for Barth, natural theology was a form of idolatry, and Yoder sharpens this point when he states: "The worst form of idolatry is not the carving of an image; it is the presumption that one has - or that a society has, or a culture has - the right to set the terms under which God can be recognized." He also rejects systematic theology in the sense of system of thought, based on general first principles, from which timeless, universal truth can be generated. The proper movement is from the particular to the general, not from the general to the particular and this rule is given to us in the fact

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168 For a discussion of his rejection of natural theology, see Yoder's WPR, 46-48 where he deals with Romans 2:14ff.
170 "How To Be Read By the Bible," 7.
171 "Walk and Word," 82.
172 "Firstfruits: The Paradigmatic Public Role of God's People," FTN, 25. Gerber Koontz notes that Yoder shares with Barth the conviction that the best way to dialogue about foundational issues and communicate the intelligibility of Christian faith is not to argue its foundational assumptions but to describe it as coherently as possible starting with those assumptions. "Confessional Theology in a Pluralistic Context," 281.
175 "Walk and Word, 89."
that God's revelation is historical. Speaking of the words of Lessing: "The accidental truths of history can never become the necessary truths of reason . . . that . . . is the ugly, broad ditch which I cannot get across," Yoder says that we do not have to get across that ditch because, in the Incarnation, "the truth has come to our side of the ditch."\(^{176}\)

Is Yoder as radically Christocentric as Barth? Several commentators see a difference between the two theologians at this point. Gerber-Koontz claims that: "it is necessary to carefully distinguish Barth's Christocentric theology from Yoder's. . . . Yoder does not claim that Jesus is the only source of human knowledge of God while Barth comes close to this position."\(^{177}\) Gerber-Koontz is not wrong to say that, for Yoder, Jesus is not the only source of truth, but her statement, taken by itself without clarification, could be misleading in two ways. First, for Yoder, while not all truth is found in Jesus or the Bible, the truth that is found in Jesus is "the truth that matters the most, which must therefore regulate our reception and recognition of other kinds and levels of truth rather than being set in parallel or subordinated thereto."\(^{178}\) Second, there is essentially no difference between Yoder and Barth on this point. Barth makes unsystematic use of philosophy and other human thought forms in his task of theological reflection, but as George Hunsinger points out, there is always a move from the particular to the general.\(^{179}\) As Mary Cunningham puts it: "Barth's logical insistence that Jesus as

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\(^{176}\) "But We Do See Jesus: The Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth," PK, 46, 62.

\(^{177}\) "Confessional Theology in a Pluralistic Context," 261. See also Kent Reames, "Histories of Reason and Revelation: With Alasdair MacIntyre and John Howard Yoder Into Historicist Theology and Ethics," (unpublished diss., University of Chicago, 1997), 271. Reames sees Yoder as moving Barthianism much closer to what he calls "reasonism" by finding ways to be confessionalist and at the same time deeply rational. The rationality of Barth's theology is consistently underestimated by North American theologians.

\(^{178}\) Yoder, "The Use of the Bible in Theology," 117. Yoder denies that "Biblical Realism" includes any disrespect for human rationality, but he acknowledges that "some Barthian rhetoric" may have played into the hands of this misinterpretation. (Ibid., 116.)

\(^{179}\) See his discussion of the motif of particularism in Barth's thought. How To Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 32-35.
the logical subject governs the use of predicates descriptive of Him reflects his commitment to the priority of the particular over the general.\textsuperscript{180}

Another related issue of purported difference between Barth and Yoder has to do with the issue of the historical character of revelation. Hays claims that, while Yoder stands close to Barth in rejecting the normative claims of nonbiblical sources of authority for ethics, his position is more nuanced insofar as Yoder "finds in history the hermeneutical point of contact with human reason that Barth steadfastly refused to acknowledge."\textsuperscript{181} Bruce McCormack shows that this common, but mistaken, reading of Barth is not valid, at least not after May, 1924. According to McCormack, it was at this point that Barth discovered the anhypostatic-enhypostatic Christological dogma of the ancient church and saw in it "an understanding of the incarnate being of the Mediator which preserved that infinite qualitative distinction between God and humankind which had been at the forefront of his concerns . . ."\textsuperscript{182} This enabled Barth "to give the incarnation its due." No longer did Barth need to reduce the 'site' of revelation to a single 'mathematical point,' the event of the cross.\textsuperscript{183} In fact, Barth was "able quite calmly to assert that 'Christian revelation and Christian faith are historical . . . The hiddenness of God is a hiddenness in history."\textsuperscript{184} With this discovery, Barth was now in a position to "affirm the presence in history of the second Person of the Trinity . . . without fear of


\textsuperscript{181} The Moral Vision of the New Testament, 250.


\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 328.

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 363.
historicizing revelation"\textsuperscript{185} and he was now able to "appeal to the incarnation as the ground and prototype of the analogia fidei."\textsuperscript{186}

The similarity of Yoder's position to that of Barth can be seen in a line of criticism of Yoder's hermeneutics developed by Michael Cartwright. As we saw in the first section of this chapter, Yoder does not merely say that pacifism is one possible way to read the significance of Jesus for ethics. If he did, he would be able to accept Niebuhr's vocational pacifism and would not have to defend pacifism as the norm for all Christians. Pacifism could be right for Mennonites and participation in war could be not necessarily wrong for Presbyterians. In that case, Yoder would not receive the kind of criticism Michael Cartwright offers concerning Yoder's hermeneutic. Cartwright criticizes Yoder for distinguishing between what a text meant and what it means because this distinction presupposes a stable meaning of the biblical text. Cartwright thinks this concept of a stable meaning in the text is in tension with Yoder's communal hermeneutic and his emphasis on a socio-political interpretation of the New Testament. He would like Yoder consistently to implement his historicism and a communal hermeneutic. Cartwright is unhappy with what he regards as Yoder's "privileging his own reading of Scripture by way of appeals to historical reconstruction of the first century context" and forgetting that "such interpretations are political, and therefore subject to contested readings."\textsuperscript{187} Cartwright is a sensitive and astute interpreter of Yoder and he is here putting his finger on a point with which those who would accuse Yoder of a totally relativizing historicism need to come to terms.

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., 366.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 367.
One of Yoder's greatest concerns is the way that many mainstream ethicists turn Scripture into a wax nose and use it to undergird ideologies of power. As the representative of a minority position, he is searching for ways to argue the case for peace persuasively in terms familiar to the majority. Yoder thinks that it is possible to appeal to Jesus as the norm which judges varying readings of Scripture in the support of various socio-political options. Why? This is only possible because Yoder views Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of God in history. So Yoder cannot follow the proponents of deconstruction all the way. He makes good use of their hermeneutic of suspicion in his subversion of Constantinianism, but he is not really one of them, and this is the point at which his true colors show. Since the Incarnation happened in history, it is necessary (and not merely a concession to modern biblical scholarship) to use all historical and critical means possible to establish the meaning of the biblical texts. But it is not necessary to go behind the texts to get at "what really happened" because it is the texts themselves, as the authors (or redactors) produced them that render (as Frei would say) the identity of Jesus Christ. Since the texts witness to the Incarnation, which is historical, what they meant cannot change.\(^{188}\) Of course, what they mean may change as the situation of the readers changes. But there is a sense of stability at the base of the interpretive process which is rooted in the \textit{historical character} of Divine revelation. It is this rootedness in history which makes it possible (or rather, from Yoder's perspective, necessary) to stand firmly for non-violence as the true meaning of discipleship.\(^{189}\)

\(^{188}\) Of course, Yoder would be quick to point out that our appreciation and understanding of what they meant can and does change, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. History is not the story of unalloyed progress from one degree of hermeneutical glory to another.

It is the contention of this essay that Yoder's historicism is thoroughgoing *except* at the crucial point of the Incarnation and that this essentially Barthian methodological move is what often causes interpreters great confusion. They either want him to renounce, or at least restrain at key points, his historicism in the interests of maintaining an "Anabaptist hermeneutic" or, alternatively, they accuse him of selling out to modernity in the form of complete moral relativism. Since Barth himself is not well-understood at this point, it is not easy, for many interpreters, to see how Yoder, following Barth, can calmly refuse to do neither and remain consistent.

Although Hays overstates the contrast between Barth and Yoder, he is not wrong to see some development between the thought of Barth and that of Yoder. Yoder's appreciation of the necessity of a continuing process of communal moral discernment leads him to flesh out the process by which Scripture is interpreted within the body of Christ. Hays recognizes what Yoder is about when he says:

Thus Yoder develops a hermeneutic which acknowledges the necessary places of tradition, reason and experience in the interpretive process. At the same time, he insists that the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus must remain the fundamental norm for all Christian ethics.  

Saying that Jesus should remain the fundamental norm is one thing. Actually finding a way to do it, and maintaining one's concentration on the focal point of Jesus Christ all along the line, is much more difficult. The contribution that this essay seeks to make to the discussion is the recognition that Yoder's method of accomplishing this goal is essentially Barthian.

4) Yoder's concentration on the particular narrative history of Jesus Christ leads him to an emphasis on pacifism as being of decisive importance for discipleship and

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ethics and this is a development of trends in Barth's thought. It is true that Barth did not take a totally pacifist stance, although he did come to advocate a practical pacifism in his later writings:

According to the sense of the New Testament we cannot be pacifists in principle, only in practice. But we have to consider very closely whether, if we are called to discipleship, we can avoid being practical pacifists, or fail to do so.192

The point being made here, however, is that Yoder's way of arguing for pacifism on the basis of the Incarnation is harmony with Barth's theological method. Yoder says, "If Jesus Christ was not who historic Christianity confesses he was, the revelation in the life of a real man of the character of God himself, then this one argument for pacifism collapses."193 Our focus here is on how Yoder is arguing; we will develop the substance his argument more fully in Chapter Two. For now, we need to note that Yoder is grounding his pacifism in the person of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, Yoder is arguing that to do so is a legitimate development of Barth's theology. As Philip Thorne puts it: "Yoder identifies a line or movement of thought in Barth that leads if consistently pursued, to a pacifist and even Anabaptist ethic."194 As Thorne points out, Yoder argues that even though Barth did not become a fully consistent

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191 This is a controversial development of Barth's thought and one which many other Barth interpreters would see as illegitimate. However, the point under discussion here is primarily not "should a good Barthian be a pacifist?" but rather, "does the theology of Barth provide methodological resources for undergirding pacifism theologically?" Perhaps the difference is overly subtle, but it could be argued that Barth is honored more when his work is taken as helpful for another generation to use in constructing a theological position which enables faithfulness in that generation's situation, than when self-styled "disciples" slavishly repeat his conclusions.
192 CD, IV/2, 550. This passage is in Barth's section: "The Call to Discipleship" in his doctrine of sanctification.
193 POJ, 237. Emphasis not in the original. See also his statement that his type of pacifism is the only type for which the person of Jesus is indispensable. Yoder says, "It is the only one of these positions which would lose its substance if Jesus were not Christ and would lose its foundation if Jesus Christ were not Lord." (NV, 134.)
pacifist, "Barth's radically Christological orientation, his emerging position on baptism, and his development of the doctrine of sanctification as obedient imitation of the life of Christ definitely tend in this direction." Thorne interprets Yoder as meaning to argue that The Politics of Jesus is "an extension of the biblical realist revolution instituted by Karl Barth." Richard Hays also sees Yoder's pacifism as growing out of his understanding of Barth's theology:

Like his teacher Barth, Yoder affirms that Jesus reveals the true nature and vocation of human beings. This affirmation calls for a sweeping reformulation of our approach to theological ethics, for a christocentric ethic must take its bearing from the historical particularity of Jesus, who disclosed definitively that 'God's will for God's man in this world is that he should renounce legitimate defence.'

Yoder interprets Barth as being well on the way to pacifism: "Our conclusion is therefore that between Barth and an integral Christian pacifism the only differences lie at points where Barth did not finish working out the implications of his originality." Yoder points to the doctrine of sanctification in Church Dogmatics IV/2 as key evidence for this conclusion:

The approach of "The Holy One and the Holy Ones" marked the maturing of a shift from a Christology where the Jesus of the chapters on Nicea and Chalcedon was little more than a cipher for the concept of revelation, to the human figure of the evangelical accounts. If discipleship is to be ethical rather than only pietistic, the One we follow must be known in his humanness.

Once the humanness of Jesus as significant for Christian ethics is acknowledged, the way is paved for the kind of argument Yoder makes in The Politics of Jesus concerning the
ethical relevance of Jesus. 

Nigel Biggar's interpretation of Barth's ethics, however, raises a potentially fatal objection to this interpretation of a general similarity between the method of Barth and Yoder. In the context of a discussion of the way in which Barth grounds ethics in the Bible, he uses the concept of "correspondence" as an example of Barth's method:

One of the most remarkable features of Barth's concept of correspondence with the action of God in Christ is its difference from either the Roman Catholic notion of the imitatio Christi or the Anabaptist notion of Christian discipleship.  

Biggar does not define what he means by "the Anabaptist notion of Christian discipleship" and does not mention Yoder in this regard. However, he gives a clue as to his meaning when he goes on to say that Barth rejected the idea that "correspondence to God Incarnate can be identified with the way of the cross...self-sacrifice is not the principle of the Christian life." Biggar identifies Barth's concern at this point as being to head off all attempts simply to read a theological or ethical system out of the Bible.

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200 As Hays notes, both Barth and Yoder eschew "the hermeneutical strategy of extracting moral principles from Scripture for the same reason: applying principles to situations leaves too much room for straying away from the truth revealed in Jesus." (The Moral Vision of the New Testament, 249.) Like Barth, Yoder is very concerned to let Jesus Christ Himself be the source of Christian ethics.

201 The Hastening That Waits, 108.

202 Ibid. Biggar's claim here is at least debatable. He is right to say that in the 1946 essay "Christian Ethics" where Barth develops the concept of correspondence, Barth does not refer to the call of Jesus to "take up your cross and come follow me." Biggar states that, although the concept of correspondence is not much mentioned in the special ethics sections of the CD, it nevertheless is very much at work there (a claim which, in itself, is undoubtedly true) as support for his claim that Barth's notion of discipleship does not focus on the call to cross-bearing. But Paragraph 66 on sanctification in CD 1V2 is brought by Barth to its climax with Section 6 "The Dignity of the Cross" (598-613) where Barth calls the cross the "indispensable element in any Christian doctrine of sanctification" (598) and says that "The cross is the most concrete form of the fellowship between Christ and the Christian" (599). Barth specifically states that the cross means persecution (609) and so takes for granted that it means suffering that he takes the trouble to clarify at length the difference between the sufferings of Christ and those of Christians (604f). Now, given that Biggar has stated that Barth's method is to derive his moral propositions from theological propositions, and given that Barth's doctrine of sanctification culminates in his section on the cross as the meaning of sanctification, can we accept Biggar's claim that Barth's notion of correspondence, which is supposed to govern his ethics cannot be identified with the centrality of the cross in Christian discipleship? Barth not only makes suffering an important motif of the Christian life; it can be argued also that he makes it the central motif of the Christian life, at least with regard to how the Christian (and the Christian community) relates to the world, just as Yoder does.
Biggar says: "Barth does not move from epitomical or characteristic acts of Jesus to moral prescriptions. Instead, he moves from the Bible directly to a general theological description of God's action in Christ . . . and it is from these that he draws moral conclusions." According to Biggar,

The methodological reason for the different moral conclusions at which Barth arrives is that, according to him, the normative 'story' to which human conduct should correspond does not comprise an extract from Jesus' life or a refrain in it, but a theological summary of it.

For Biggar, Barth's view of what is wrong with the Anabaptist notion of discipleship, then, is that it seizes on individual texts and reads them as immediately and literally binding for Christian disciples. Barth's method, on the other hand, involves coming to theological conclusions about the narrative of Jesus based on a reading of the narrative as a whole, from which moral propositions can be derived.

Biggar's interpretation of Barth's method at this point seems sound. It also has to be admitted that the picture of Anabaptists simple-mindedly reading isolated texts and taking them legalistically, while greatly overstated in the history of Protestant polemics against them, is, nevertheless, not without some historical foundation. The question is, however, whether Yoder's method of coming to the conclusion that the action of Christians should correspond to God's as God's character is revealed in the cross, should be interpreted as falling under Barth's strictures at this point. In *The Politics of Jesus* Yoder deliberately does not refer to the usual texts from the Sermon on the Mount which traditionally have been emphasized by Anabaptists as "prooftexts." Instead, he reads the Gospel of Luke as a whole and interprets the theological meaning of the narrative of Jesus and its implications for ethics, just as Barth does. He rejects the simplistic

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203 Ibid., 109.
imitating of the incidentals of Jesus' life such as the deriving of an injunction to be celibate from the fact that he never married, which is the just sort of thing Barth wants to exclude.205

Yoder's method of arriving at the cross as the focal point of Christian discipleship is formally identical to the method Biggar describes Barth as using in the case of homosexuality. Biggar says that it would be a mistake to think that "the logic by which Barth arrives at his judgment about homosexuality from his theological concept of humanity proceeds without serious regard for the witness of the Bible" just because Barth only discusses one biblical passage (Romans 1:25-27) in the context of his treatment of this issue. Biggar points out that Barth's conclusion on homosexuality is derived from his theological anthropology, which in turn is derived from his exegesis of texts such as Genesis 1:27 and I Corinthians 11:11. It is not just a matter of plucking a likely-looking text out of the Bible to support an ethical conclusion; rather, it is a procedure of letting a particular text be interpreted by a theological anthropology which is built up and controlled by the canonical context as a whole. Yoder's choice of the cross as the central image in Christian discipleship is a theological decision which is based on a careful reading of the Gospel of Luke as a whole and the imitation-participation-correspondence language of the Epistles. The fact that the Epistles call for imitation of Jesus at the point of the cross only and repeatedly is the key for Yoder's interpretation: "Only at one point, only on one subject - but then consistently, universally - is Jesus our example: in his cross."206 The fact that Barth and Yoder come to different conclusions on the specific

204 Ibid.
205 POJ, 95.
206 Ibid.
issue of whether Christian pacifism is absolute or nearly absolute should not deter us from observing the essential similarity of their theological method.

5) Yoder's identification of doctrine and ethics as two sides of the same coin is the implementation of Barth's method. In The Politics of Jesus, Yoder argues for certain social ethical implications of Christology on the basis of his reading of the text of the Gospel of Luke. However, he also says that:

the view of Jesus being proposed here is more radically Nicene and Chalcedonian than other views. I do not here advocate an unheard-of modern understanding of Jesus. I ask rather that the implications of what the church has always said about Jesus as Word of the Father, as true God and true Man, be taken more seriously, as relevant to our social problems, than ever before.207

In appealing to the classic doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, Yoder is seeking to derive ethical implications from them. This has led some interpreters to assume that Yoder must be reducing doctrine to ethics. But there is another way to read Yoder at this point and that is to see him as doing the same thing as Barth does in the Church Dogmatics.

For Barth, "dogmatics is ethics and ethics is also dogmatics;"208 they are not two things, but two aspects of the one thing. Barth rejects all attempts to do theological ethics on the basis of "general human ethics" or "philosophical ethics."209 Instead he seeks to derive ethics from God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ: "In the one image of Jesus Christ we have both the Gospel which reconciles us with God ... and the Law which ... really binds and obligates us."210 Theological ethics is grace, says Barth; "to become obedient, to act rightly, to realize the good, never means anything other than to become obedient to

207 Ibid., 102.
208 CD, I/2, 793.
209 CD, II/2, 543.
210 Ibid., 539.
the revelation of the grace of God."\textsuperscript{211} For Barth, ethics is Christological or it is not Christian. Yoder makes the same point in rejecting natural theology as the basis for Christian ethics:

If the meaning of Jesus is thus different from what he was understood by his Palestinian disciples and adversaries to mean, and if those ordinary meanings need to be filtered through a hermeneutical transposition and replaced by an ethic of social survival and responsibility, what then has become of the concept of revelation? Is there such a thing as a \textit{Christian} ethic at all? If there be no specifically Christian ethic but only natural human ethics . . . does this thoroughgoing abandon of particular substance apply to ethical truth only? Why not to all other truth as well?\textsuperscript{212}

For Yoder, ethics and doctrine belong together.

6) Yoder's concept of ethics as obedience, rather than as the application of principles, is like Barth's in many ways.\textsuperscript{213} For Barth, "the good in human action consists in the fact that it is determined by the divine command."\textsuperscript{214} John Webster makes the important point that the entire \textit{Church Dogmatics} is an ethical dogmatics; a moral ontology in which is given "an extensive account of the situation in which human agents act."\textsuperscript{215} He also makes the point that Barth is "profoundly perturbed by modernity's primary images of the human person; that of the self as a centre of judgment, creating

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{212} POJ, 10.
\textsuperscript{213} One could contrast the two by saying that for Barth, ethics consists of obedience to the command of God while, for Yoder, it consists of obedience to the teaching and example of Jesus. But that contrast obscures at least as much as it clarifies. To suggest that, for Barth, the command of God is heard more clearly when one's gaze has been moved from Jesus Christ would be to distort his whole approach, and to suggest that, for Yoder, the teaching and example of Jesus is any less than the command of God would be to misrepresent his approach.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 547.
\textsuperscript{215} \textit{Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1
value by its acts of allegiance or choice, organising the moral world around its consciousness of itself as the ethical *fundamentum*.

In this context it is significant to note Barth's definition of most types of ethics as sin:

... in so far as this general conception of ethics seems to speak of an answer to the question which is to be worked out by man himself, it confirms also that man tries to escape the grace of God by which the question of the good is put, but by which it is also answered in advance. Strange as it may seem, that general conception of ethics coincides exactly with the conception of sin.

Barth is convinced that "moral problems are resolvable by correct theological description of moral space" and, therefore, he gives low priority to both the issues of character and to the analysis of quandary situations. For Barth, the command of God is definite and concrete. Likewise, Yoder does not spend much time on quandary situations or discussions of character. He focuses on theological description of Christ, history and the church. Yoder rejects many forms of ethical deliberation when he states, "the good action is measured by its conformity to the command and to the nature of God and not by its success in achieving specific results." Michael Cartwright notes that "Yoder disagrees with the presumption that prescriptive use of Scripture is unthinkable" and goes so far as to say: "There is a strong sense in which everything that Yoder has written constitutes a challenge to this predisposition."

Some of the charges leveled against Yoder, such as having a low doctrine of sin, having a perfectionism streak in his theology and of a lack of appreciation of moral ambiguity and the tragic dimension of life could be explicable as misunderstandings of

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216 Ibid., 18.
217 CD, II/2, 518.
218 Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation, 2.
219 CWS, 49.
the fact that Yoder is working with a concept of ethics as obedience to God's grace, rather than obedience to a law distinguishable from grace. To find Yoder guilty of these charges is rather extreme. Is it not more likely that Barth and Yoder share a concept of ethics as obedience to the Gospel call, which is the experience of grace?

7) Yoder's distinction between church and world as crucial for social ethics builds on and extends Barth's distinction between the Christian community and the civil community. In his lecture "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics" Yoder turns to a discussion of Barth's "The Order of the Community" in Church Dogmatics IV/2 where the notion of "True Church Law" is discussed. Yoder makes the point in this lecture that "Barth is affirming for the first time in mainstream Protestant theology since Constantine the theological legitimacy of admitting about a set of social structures, that those who participate in them cannot be presumed to be addressable from the perspective of Christian confession."\(^{221}\) The distinction between church and world is central to his thought at this point.

One implication of the distinction between church and world is that Christian ethics is for Christians. When Christians address the world, there is an indirectness or a nuanced quality to that address that is not present in the command of God which is heard by the church. In his essay: "The Christian Community and the Civil Community" Barth uses the concept of analogy as a possible way to facilitate Christian speech to the state. Yoder is of the opinion that a more carefully worked out, rigorously applied use of analogy is the necessary basis for such speech.\(^{222}\) But what is important to note here is


\(^{222}\) Yoder discusses Barth's use of analogy in his unpublished paper "The Basis of Barth's Social Ethics," 7. We will analyze the use of analogy by Yoder in Chapter IV of this essay.
the fact that both Barth and Yoder take the distinction between church and world as fundamental to their method of doing social ethics.

Another implication of the church-world distinction is that for Yoder, good news is turned into bad news when it is forced upon people by coercive methods, whether they be crude physical methods or sophisticated and refined epistemological theories. How can the proclamation of the Gospel be experienced by its hearers as liberating, enabling, welcome news? It can be none of these things unless the method of proclamation respects their integrity as persons and offers them the opportunity to reject the message.

The distinction between church and world respects the right of some people to refuse to believe the Gospel. Yoder says:

... the most important error of the Christendom vision is not first of all its acceptance of an ethic of power, violence, and the crusade; not first of all its transference of eschatology into the present providence with God working through Constantine and all his successors in civil government, not its appropriation of pagan religiosity that will lead to sacerdotalism and sacramentalism, not its modeling church hierarchy after Roman administration, nor any other specific vice derived from what changed about the nature of the church with the epoch of Constantine. Those were all mistakes, but they were derived from the misdefinition of the place of the people of God in the world. The fundamental wrongness of the vision of Christendom is its illegitimate takeover of the world; its ascription of a Christian loyalty or duty to those who have made no confession, and thereby, its denying to the non-confessing creation the freedom of unbelief that the nonresistance of God in creation gave to a rebellious humanity.223

Yoder claims that Barth's church-world distinction and his recognition that Christian ethics is telling the story of Jesus, and telling it in such a way that it is grace, Gospel, good news, makes him non-Constantinian.

8) Yoder's view of the mission of the church as being to witness to Jesus Christ is exactly the same as Barth's view. Yoder speaks frequently of not taking responsibility for

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making history come out right. Our call is to obey in a world which we do not control.²²⁴ This strong sense of the sovereignty of God and the limited role of humankind is rooted, this essay will argue, in an eschatology which stresses the action of God in the world both now and in the future - action which calls humans to respond in faith by laying down their arms and standing by to watch the deliverance of the LORD. Just as there is nothing we can do to extend or add to our salvation, there is nothing we can do to extend or add to the coming of the Kingdom of God. The role of the church is that of witness. Yet, paradoxically, the witness offered by the church becomes the key to history and "the ultimate meaning of history is to be found in the work of the church."²²⁵

In *Church Dogmatics* IV/3:2, Paragraph 72 "The Holy Spirit and the Sending of the Christian Community." Barth has a section entitled "The Task of the Community" in which he stresses the point that the community is sent into the world and exists for the world.²²⁶ The task of the church is very definite: it is to bear witness to Jesus Christ by being itself. In the following section on "The Ministry of the Community," Barth makes it clear that the witness consists of both word and deed: "There is a work of the lips and also of the hands."²²⁷

Yoder's whole concept of social ethics is built on the premise that Jesus called the Christian community into being in order that it might be the continuing witness to him on earth and that, in order for that witness to be clear, it had to be a community. Why? It had to be a community because only in community can the love of God, which is

²²⁴ "Christ, the Hope of the World," RP, 204.
²²⁶ CD IV/3:2, 795.
²²⁷ Ibid., 863.
displayed in His sending of His Son as the Saviour of the world and which is rooted in His Triune nature, be made manifest.

2. Areas of Disagreement: There is really only one major area of methodological disagreement between Yoder and Barth and that is the problematic concept of the Grenzfalle. In what follows, we shall examine, first, Barth's actual use of the concept, second, his account of why his ethical theory requires such a concept, and then Yoder's critique of Barth's ethics at this point. Finally, we will offer an evaluation of the debate.

In the third volume of his Church Dogmatics Barth develops the concept of the "exceptional case" or Grenzfalle. Here Barth considers the issues of suicide, abortion, euthanasia, self-defense, capital punishment and war. In each case, except for euthanasia, he outlines the circumstances surrounding a case in which he believes the command of God could be heard to take life.

With regard to suicide, he imagines a scenario in which a person might be commanded to take his or her own life, for who can say that the gracious God might not "help a man in affliction by telling him to take this way out" as, for example, in the case of a man being tortured and afraid of betraying his friends and cause and thus directly or indirectly deny his faith. In the case of abortion, Barth comes close to enunciating a principle (!) for recognizing the exceptional case when he says that it could occur only if it is a matter of life for life, that is, a situation in which it is a choice between the life of the mother and the life of the child. Barth says that abortion is only possible when: "it is a case of one life being balanced against another . . . the sacrifice of one being

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228 CD III/4, 396. The sub-section, "The Protection of Life" (397-470) comes after the first subsection of Paragraph 55 Freedom For Life, which is entitled "Respect For Life." The concept of the Grenzfalle is employed most fully with regard to the issue of the taking of human life in Barth's ethics as a whole.

229 Ibid., 410, 412.
Given the elasticity with which the medical profession and ethicists have defined the "health" of the mother, however, it is hard to know what Barth means here. Does he mean that it is only possible in the case of the actual, physical life of the mother being in danger, such as in the case of a tubal pregnancy, or would he include non-life-threatening indications as well? If it is the former, then he could claim to derive the rationale for breaking the rule from the rule itself, that is, taking life only in order to preserve life. However, Barth does not seem to work with such a literal definition of the exceptional case. Life can be taken, he thinks, even when it is not done specifically to save other innocent life. He considers euthanasia only briefly and comes to the conclusion that it can not be justified as the command of God; here must be pronounced an unequivocal "No." In the consideration of the question of self-defense, however, he argues that while it is a natural instinct, the New Testament declares it to be wrong. Nevertheless, the instinct of self-defence can be "sanctified" and "we may receive from the Lord orders which lead us beyond this line." Barth then argues extensively against capital punishment as a social institution, except in two well-defined situations: high treason in the case of war and tyrannicide.

Finally, Barth turns to the question of killing in war. Here Barth begins by "demythologizing war" to a great extent. He says that modern war is total war usually waged for the acquisition and protection of material interests with scientific objectivity

\[\text{\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 421.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{231} Ibid., 423, 427.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{232} Ibid., 431.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{233} Ibid., 434. Interestingly, Barth offers no specific examples here, but mentions the upcoming case of capital punishment. It almost seems that, although he cannot think of a legitimate exceptional case here, he cannot consistently deny the possibility of the exceptional case in the case of the individual, when he is on the verge of approving it in the case of the state.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 448.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 458.} \]
and appalling effectiveness. War is characterized as "killing . . . with neither glory, dignity nor chivalry, with neither restraint nor consideration in any respect." Barth says that if there can be any question of a just war, it can be only with "even stricter reserve and caution than have been necessary in relation to such things as suicide, abortion, capital punishment, and so on." Barth's realism concerning war is stark:

Does not war demand that almost everything that God has forbidden be done on a broad front? To kill effectively, and in connexion therewith, must not those who wage war steal, rob, commit arson, lie, deceive, slander, and unfortunately to a large extent fornicate, not to speak of the almost inevitable repression of all the finer and weightier forms of obedience? And how can they pray when at the climax of this whole world of dubious action it is a brutal matter of killing? . . . it is certainly not true that most people become better in war. The fact is that for most people war is a trial for which they are no match, and from the consequences of which they can never recover.

In a discussion of the pacifism of the early church and the "elasticity with which the Church has countenanced war and war fever from the days of Constantine," Barth thinks that, of the two positions, that of the early church is superior. He goes so far as to assert that "the inflexible negative of pacifism has almost infinite arguments in its favor and is almost overpoweringly strong." Nevertheless, he pulls back from the brink of consistent pacifism at the last moment.

Only in the case where a nation's continued existence is at stake is the possibility of a command to wage war possible and then only if there is bound up with the independent life of a nation "responsibility for the whole physical, intellectual and spiritual life of the people comprising it, and therefore their relationship to God."
Barth asserts that he would see this as the case if there were any attack on the independence, neutrality and territorial integrity of the Swiss Confederation. Barth also gives approval to war in the case of a nation coming to the defence of a weaker state which finds itself in the above situation. Barth does not make explicit use of the traditional just war criteria, no doubt because that would be a concession to casuistry.

Why does Barth believe the concept of the "exceptional case" is necessary in Christian ethics? Several considerations enter into the picture. First, Barth is very concerned not to have a system of casuistry which individuals can manipulate as a way of avoiding obedience, thus making themselves sovereign instead of God. Second, casuistry makes the command of God into an "empty form" instead of a concrete, definite and personal address of the living God to the individual. Third, casuistry destroys the freedom of obedience by inserting something between the command of God and the human called to obey Him. Barth has been criticized for his portrayal of casuistry as "a closed, rationalistic ethical system which allows no room for the highly individual, vocational dimension of moral deliberation." There is no doubt that Barth himself engaged in a form of casuistry in the passage described above, so his rejection of casuistry is, therefore, not entirely convincing. But he would contend that he is not giving a complete casuistic system in advance, that his discussion of specifics is to give guidelines only and that the real function of special ethics is "instructional preparation for

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241 Ibid., 13.
242 Biggar, The Hastening That Waits, 163.
243 Perhaps it would be fair to say that he rejects a systematic casuistry, while endorsing an ad hoc type. See Nigel Biggar's excellent discussion of Barth's use of a non-absolutist form of normative ethics which could, without doing violence to his concerns, be expanded into a non-absolutist form of casuistry. ("Hearing God's Command and Thinking About What's Right: With and Beyond Barth," Reckoning With Barth: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Karl Barth's Birth (London: Mowbray, 1988), 113-8.
the ethical event." The line here between casuistry and non-casuistry is very thin, but still perceptible.

Yoder criticizes Barth's concept of the *Grenzfall* in several different ways and from various angles. We will first examine his direct criticism as given in Chapter IX of his book on Barth. Then we will examine a criticism which is implicit in many of Yoder's writings which applies to Barth.

First, Yoder points out that classical just war theory was rooted deeply in natural theology and this can be seen in two ways: first, the self is a valid locus of ethical value and the source of duties to my self, and my nation to itself, which are not subordinate to my duties to God and, second, the knowledge needed to make specific ethical choices is derived from "nature" rather than from revelation. Yoder notes that, at both points, Barth's *Grenzfall* argument is weak. He notes that, although the appeal is to God's sovereignty, it is the individual who decides when to abort the fetus, go to war or defend oneself. "The only exceptions God in His sovereignty seems likely to make happen to coincide with my or our righteous self-interest." Yoder further notes that, while the imagery of the divine Word spoken vertically into the situation is retained, the substance of the choices made is derived from "common sense." Yoder calls this a "concession" to natural theology. If the concept of the *Grenzfall* existed in Barth's thought simply as a reminder of the limit of human knowledge and the freedom of the commanding God, Yoder could agree with it fully. However, it limits God just as much to affirm that

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244 CD III/4, 18. In this regard it is instructive that Yoder reports (KBW, 64) that in conversation Barth confirmed that his statement (CD III/4, 462) regarding an attack on Switzerland being an example of a *Grenzfall* is misleading in that such an affirmation cannot be known theologically in advance.
245 KBW, 70.
246 Ibid., 71.
247 Ibid., 72. That it does not can be seen in the fact that Barth does find it possible to say an unequivocal "No" to euthanasia. Apparently, no *Grenzfall* is needed here to protect God's sovereignty.
God will ever command, or has ever commanded, killing, as it does to say that one knows of no exceptions to the rule: "The finitude of human knowledge is in itself in no way a ground for assuming that God is going to command participation in war." The concept of the Grenzfall, in and of itself, gives us no new knowledge of the war question. What then is Barth's basis for advocating killing in war on the basis of national defence in some cases? From what theological proposition or doctrine or interpretation of the story of Jesus is this position derived? Yoder says the basis is "common sense" or "natural theology." He concludes:

The Grenzfall is not a formal concept with validity in the discipline of ethics. It is simply the label which Barth has seen fit to attach to the fact that, in some situations, he considers himself obliged to make a choice which runs against what all the formal concepts of his own ethics would seem to require.249

A second line of criticism of Barth's use of the Grenzfall runs through Yoder's writings in general and is also found in Barth's own theology, as discussed above. It is the rejection of the identification of church and state in the Christendom idea. The church - world distinction as basic to Christian ethics is common ground for Yoder and Barth, although it must be said that Barth only late in life came to make much theological use of the concept, whereas it was a major theme of Yoder's theology from his earliest writings all the way through.

Throughout his discussion of the issue of war, Barth does not keep the church - world distinction rigorously in view. If he had, the results would have been very different. The most glaring example of the negative results of the failure to keep this distinction in view is where Barth defines what would justify going to war to defend the

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248 Ibid., 73.
249 Ibid.
national sovereignty of a given nation:

Why do we have to allow the possibility that in the light of the divine commandment this is a justifiable reason for war, so that a war waged for this reason must be described as a just war in spite of all the horrors which it will certainly entail? The obvious answer is that there may well be bound up with the independent life of a nation responsibility for the whole physical, intellectual and spiritual life of the people comprising it, and therefore their relationship to God.\(^{250}\)

How could a nation-state be described this way without it having, in effect, become a church? Or has the nation, in this instance, assumed a divine character? It would seem that, at the least, the state has in this case assumed the eschatological role which properly belongs to the church. Just a few pages before, in a discussion of the "Fall of the Church," Barth argued that to identify the fall with the Christian church's adoption of a positive attitude toward war was superficial and that:

If there is a fall of Christianity, then this is to be sought at a deeper level, and theologically we shall find it in the degeneration of ecclesiastical eschatology and the resultant overestimation and misinterpretation of the events and laws of the present world.\(^{251}\)

It almost seems as though Barth has provided in advance the refutation of his own argument. If Barth had lived to work through the volume on redemption, if he had had a chance to rethink his eschatology in the light of the church-world distinction, if he had decided to abandon his advocacy of the possible rightness of war for Christians for purposes of national defence as left over remnants of natural theology and Christendom thinking, and if he had reformulated his ethics of killing in the light of his writings on the "call to discipleship" and the "dignity of the cross," he would have been able to find

\(^{250}\) CD III/4, 462.
\(^{251}\) CD III/4, 455. In Chapter III, we shall investigate the important role Yoder's eschatology plays in his rejection of war.
within his own theology all the resources necessary for the development of a consistent pacifism and the result would have been greater internal coherence in his theology. Yoder's critique of Barth's use of the concept of the *Grenzfall* is entirely an internal critique. The issue is how consistent Barth is with his own theology. On this basis, then, we conclude that Yoder's critique is justified and that Barth's ethics would be more consistent without this concept.

**C. Anabaptism, Barth and Yoder's Theological Method: A Summary**

The purpose of this chapter has been to place Yoder's thought in its historical context so that his theological method could be discerned more clearly, as a preliminary step to the systematic exposition of his occasional and conversational writings. What has emerged is that Yoder has combined, in a creative manner, aspects of his Anabaptist theological heritage with the theological method of Karl Barth to construct an approach to social ethics which is clearly postliberal.

In developing his "pacifism of the messianic community." what Yoder does is identical to, similar to or a legitimate development of what Barth does in the *Church Dogmatics* at the following key points: 1) the reading of the Bible as a narrative centering on Jesus Christ and the consequent rejection of the scholastic doctrine of inspiration, 2) a Biblical Realism which leads to a "high" Christology and the consequent rejection of liberal views of Jesus as less than fully divine, 3) the concentration on the particular narrative history of Jesus Christ as the starting point for all theological reflection and the consequent rejection of natural theology, systematic theology and apologetics, 4) the concentration on the particular narrative history of Jesus Christ as leading to an emphasis
on the pacifism of Jesus as being of decisive importance for discipleship and ethics,
5) the identification of dogmatics and ethics as two sides of the same coin, 6) the concept
of ethics as obedience, 7) the distinction of church and world as the starting point for
social ethical reflection and 8) the definition of the mission of the church as witness.
Clearly, Thorne's insight that the influence of Barth "lies deep within the structure of
Yoder's thought" is accurate.252 It would be overstating the case, however, to say that
Yoder simply took over Barth's methodology and applied it to social ethics because
Yoder's Anabaptist heritage and, in particular, his involvement in the Mennonite identity
debate, has also shaped his theological method.

Which parts of his method, then, did Yoder get from Barth and which did he get
from his Anabaptist theological heritage? The themes of a biblically-based, "high"
Christology, pacifism, the concept of ethics as obedience, the church-world distinction
and the definition of the mission of the church as being witness are found in his
Anabaptist heritage. The narrative approach to Scripture, the rejection of natural
theology and the identification of ethics and dogmatics as two sides of the same coin
appear to have come from Barth. Yoder's high Christology and his concept of ethics as
obedience were reinforced and clarified by Barth. The church-world distinction and the
concept of the mission of the church as witness are found in Barth's thought, but Yoder
develops and clarifies them. The emphasis on pacifism as rooted in the narrative history
of Jesus Christ represents a definite development and extension, though not a
contradiction, of the overall trajectory of Barth's thought. On one methodological point,
the concept of the Grenzfall, Yoder is in clear disagreement with Barth, although Yoder

252 Philip Thorne, Evangelicalism and Karl Barth, 173.
mounts a strong case for seeing the concept of the *Grenzfall* as an alien concept which is not really consistent with rest of Barth's thought. Yoder interprets Barth's methodology as leading to pacifism even though Barth himself did not work out the full implications of "his commitment to the free church vision."253

Whether or not one accepts Yoder's critique of Barth's use the concept of the *Grenzfall*, however, it is nonetheless necessary to view Yoder as employing a method very much like that of Barth in the realm of social ethics and, thus, to view "the pacifism of the messianic community" as a postliberal social ethic, which depends in great measure upon Barth's theology, while going beyond it and building on it. Whether or not this interpretation of Yoder's work is valid, however, can only be assessed finally on the basis of an examination of Yoder's actual theology as a whole because what a theologian says should be done, and what is actually done, are often two different things. The rest of this essay will expound the content of the theological basis of Yoder's social ethics systematically and, thus, provide a basis for coming to a conclusion about how consistently he worked out the theological methodology described in this chapter.

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CHAPTER II
CHRISTOLOGY AS THE SOURCE OF YODER'S SOCIAL ETHICS

The title of this chapter deliberately refers to "Christology" rather than simply to "Jesus" because the main point to be developed here is that Yoder's approach to social ethics is rooted in the classical, orthodox Christology which the ecumenical creeds affirm as the meaning of the Scriptures. In order to begin to turn this assertion into an argument we need to examine the importance of Yoder's Christology for his social ethics.

The importance of Christology for Yoder's social ethics can be seen in the central claim set forth in The Politics of Jesus in particular, and in his writings in general, that the New Testament's rendering of Jesus Christ implies a certain shape for the moral life of the disciple. This claim can be broken down into three inter-related sub-claims: first, that the Jesus of the New Testament is both relevant to and normative for Christian ethics, second, that a particular kind of pacifism is central to a Christian social ethic based upon Jesus, and third, that the account of the significance of Jesus required by this approach to social ethics is more radically Nicene and Chalcedonian than the accounts found in mainstream Christianity since Constantine. In Sections A, B and C, we will unpack these three sub-claims in some detail before turning to the charge of reductionism, which has been made against Yoder's theology, in the final section of this chapter.
In Section A we will discuss Yoder's presentation of the identity and authority of the Jesus of the Gospel narratives, a Jesus who embodies a new social reality. In Section B we will look at his understanding of the concept of discipleship as the implication of the Christology of the Gospel narratives, which is found in the rest of the New Testament. Then, in Section C, we will examine his reading of the development of Christology in the early church culminating in the creeds of Nicea and Chalcedon. Finally, we will be in a position to address in Section D the charge of reductionism of doctrine to ethics and spirituality to politics brought against Yoder by some of his critics.

A. Yoder's Narrative, Postliberal Christology

First, we need to examine Yoder's claim that the Jesus of the New Testament is both relevant to, and normative for, contemporary Christian social ethics. In order to do that we turn to his exposition of the social ethic of Jesus in the first half of The Politics of Jesus, where Yoder gives his reading of the Gospel of Luke. The fact that Yoder's account of Christian ethics begins with a detailed reading of the Gospel narratives in the light of their historical context is a strength of Yoder's approach. Nigel Biggar, in the conclusion to his study of the ethics of Karl Barth refers to "the vague terms in which he (i.e. Barth) articulates Jesus' moral significance" and argues that one respect in which contemporary ethics needs to go beyond Barth in determining the moral significance of Jesus Christ is "not only by way of an analysis of Christology, but also through close

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1 The Hastening That Waits, 166.
scrutiny of the particular political, social, religious and moral circumstances to which Jesus was responding." That is precisely what Yoder does in this book.

1. Yoder's Reading of Luke's Gospel: Yoder does not comment on every pericope in Luke. Instead, he focuses on certain selected sections which illustrate the editorial stance of the author of the Gospel and which point to the overall message which is being conveyed. He chooses Luke because it is generally agreed that one of Luke's editorial concerns is to show that Christianity is no threat to the Roman empire. Thus, the bias, if any exists, would be in favour of downplaying the social radicality of Jesus.

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2 Ibid., 167. Biggar's criticism of Barth on this point has some validity as far as ethics proper is concerned and it is certainly true that Yoder does treat Jesus in his historical context more fully so far as social ethics is concerned. However, Biggar perhaps does not sufficiently take into account Barth's treatment of Jesus as "The Royal Man" in CD IV/2, 154-264 or his discussion of "The Holy One and the Holy Ones," 511-33. Barth's Christology is far from docetic; he pays serious and sustained attention to the humanity of Jesus as portrayed in the synoptic Gospels and he lets that humanity become significant for his doctrine of sanctification. And it needs to be borne in mind that, for Barth, all of dogmatics is relevant to ethics and not just the material in the sections specifically labeled as ethics. Certainly Yoder makes good use of Barth's material for his purposes. If he goes beyond Barth, it is more like filling in the blank spaces than drawing new shapes. See Yoder's "The Basis of Barth's Social Ethics," 6-7.

3 POJ, 11. Richard Hays notes that Yoder is referring to Hans Conzelman's pioneering redaction-critical study of Luke. (The Moral Vision of the New Testament, 241, n. 107.) In the second edition, Yoder notes that new readings of Luke's intentions have arisen which see Luke as especially attentive to the underdogs - women, tax collectors, soldiers, the poor, lepers etc. - which would make his Gospel more likely to display Jesus' social concern. If the newer line of Gospel criticism is correct, then Yoder chose the Gospel which made his task the easiest, not the hardest. He contends, however, that his reading of the significance of Jesus is the common witness of all the Gospels and thus not dependant upon any one of them. He says: "I have no stake in preferring one school of Gospel criticism to another." (POJ, 54.) Hays comments that Yoder may be going too far in saying that he has no stake in preferring some critical approaches to the Gospels to others. He points to the detached Cynic Jesus imagined by the historical critics of the Jesus Seminar as an example of Gospel criticism which would stand in fundamental tension with his view of Jesus. (The Moral Vision of the New Testament, 247, n. 141.) However, the Cynic Jesus is an historical reconstruction of the phenomenon supposed to be the "reality" behind the text. Such an historical reconstruction is a shifting, ephemeral and uncertain human construct, in contrast to the relatively more stable Jesus of the canonical texts. Like Barth, Yoder's focus is on the canonical text of Scripture and he has no stake in either the Fundamentalist or the Liberal focus on the "thing" behind the text, both of whose foci are essentially modern. Yoder's point that the interpretation of the canonical text is not decisively affected by changing fads in historical research would only be invalid if it could be proven somehow that Jesus never lived or if his bones were conclusively identified or some such thing. The more mundane, day to day changes in what used to be referred to as "the assured results of higher criticism" are hardly earth-shattering. Such research can be helpful in establishing the original meaning of the text, but it can never become a substitute for the text. Yoder contends that his Biblical Realism is only possible as a post-critical phenomenon. ("How To Be Read By the Bible," 116.) Hays himself notes that, like Barth, Yoder aims to take the entire New Testament canon into account and "succeeds to an impressive degree." (The Moral Vision of the New Testament, 246.)
In Yoder's reading of Luke, we see the emergence of the themes of eschatology and ecclesiology, which will be treated more extensively in Chapters Three and Four of this essay. It is important to understand how firmly Yoder's eschatology and ecclesiology are rooted in his Christology and that his rejection of the violence of the imperial, Constantinian, church is done, most fundamentally, for Christological reasons. Yoder contends that Luke presents Jesus as the messiah of Israel, as the founder of a new community of discipleship separate from the world around it, and as rejecting violence both for himself and for his new community. Christology implies a specific type of discipleship, which implies a certain type of ecclesiology and which only makes sense within the context of a certain understanding of history, that is, within a certain eschatology.

We begin by noting that Yoder understands Luke as meaning to present Jesus as the messiah of Israel. The theme of messiahship is prominent in the Gospel texts and much of the debate is over what kind of messiah should be expected and what kind of messiah Jesus is. Yoder interprets the story in Luke 9 of the feeding of the multitude as a conflict between Jesus and the crowds over what kind of messiah he is. Yoder says: "The cross and the crown are alternatives." The estrangement of Jesus from both the crowds and the Jewish leaders begins at this point. Jesus has earned the contempt of the crowds

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4 Yoder's exegetical approach is here a canonical one in the sense that he, like B. S. Childs and Karl Barth, is interested in the meaning of the text in its final form, not in a reconstruction of supposed historical events behind the text, to which the text may or not be a more or less faithful guide. While Yoder takes great pains to distance himself from scholastic and fundamentalist theories of verbal inspiration and inerrancy, the fact is that, as in the case of Barth, a doctrine of inspiration is at work here. Yoder seems to proceed on the assumptions that biblical narrative is true and that the narrative of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension is the center of the biblical narrative. Thus, the task of interpretation is to understand the text, relate that understanding to Jesus Christ and then to apply it to our contemporary situation. See Hays, The Moral Vision of the New Testament, 248-52 for an excellent discussion of Yoder's hermeneutics.

5 POJ, 35.
for refusing insurrection and the animosity of some of the Jewish leaders for refusing quietism. But note that the issue at stake is what kind of messiahship, not messiahship or not. It is at this point that Jesus renews his messianic claims and begins his "march to Jerusalem."\(^6\)

Yoder also interprets the account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness just prior to the beginning of his public ministry as centering on the issue of what kind of messiah Jesus believed himself called to be. Yoder says that here we have to do with the "conferring of a mission in history . . . this mission is then further defined by the testing into which Jesus moves immediately."\(^7\) Yoder notes that "all the options laid before Jesus are ways of being king."\(^8\)

Yoder thus interprets the temptations as essentially social-political in nature. The first temptation is an economic one: feed the crowds and you will be king. Ironically, the image used of Jesus' second coming in Revelation 19 is the wedding supper of the Lamb. The problem with this temptation is not that the messiah should be ethereal and otherworldly, but it is with the timing. Satan is tempting Jesus to get to the crown directly and not by means of the cross. The second, which is more obviously socio-political in nature, is interpreted as an offer of secular power. The offer is rejected, not simply because the offer comes from Satan, but because secular power is not suitable for the carrying out of Jesus' mission. Yoder asks "Are we to imagine some sort of Satan cult?" He thinks not. Rather, Yoder thinks that the concrete meaning of the temptation

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\(^6\) Ibid., 36.
\(^7\) Ibid., 24.
\(^8\) Ibid., 25.
being put forward here is actually the idolatry of nationalism. Jesus is wrestling not with
the worship of Satan directly, but with the worship of the nation. The point of the story is
that nationalism is described as being on the same moral level as Satan-worship. The
third temptation, throwing himself down from the pinnacle of the temple and being
miraculously saved, is interpreted as a temptation to make a claim for kingship. The
punishment for blasphemy was to be hurled down from the pinnacle of the temple, so if
Jesus were to be miraculously saved from this punishment if would validate his messianic
claims. Here we see Jesus "contemplating the role of religious reformer, heavenly
messenger, appearing unheralded from above to set things right." But this too is rejected
by Jesus.

Exegesis of this passage has often centered on the personal temptation
experienced by a hungry Jesus to make bread for himself to eat, to worship Satan and to
draw attention to himself in a proud and flamboyant manner. The reason the socio-
economic-political nature of the temptations is often ignored is that this passage
challenges, in a fundamental manner, the legitimacy of the whole Constantinian
ecclesiastical establishment. Wielding economic power over the masses, making use of
nationalism and violence and assuming a divine or semi-divine character are the marks of
Constantinianism. Yoder is not the first to interpret these temptations in this manner, but
it has usually been novelists and outsiders to the Constantinian establishment (i.e.
sectarians) who have seen the issues most clearly.  

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9 Ibid., 27.
10 See, for example, Fyodor Dostoevsky's great novel: The Brothers Karazamov (Trans. by A. R.
MacAndrew (New York: Bantam Books, 1970). This novel, first published in 1880, contains a passage
(297-318) in which a poem called "The Grand Inquisitor" describes the acceptance by the church of the
offer of Satan which is refused by Jesus in the temptation story. The offer is to make use of "miracle,
mystery and authority" rather than simple heralding the truth and giving people the freedom to accept or
reject it. The poem is a biting critique, not only of the Constantinian church, but also of the later
Jesus' response to growing tensions between his concept of messianity and that of
the crowds, on the one hand, and the Jewish leaders, on the other, was to set up a new
community, a renewed people of God. (Luke 12) Yoder points out that this, in itself, was
revolutionary: "in a society characterized by very stable, religiously undergirded family
ties, Jesus is here calling into being a community of voluntary commitment." Jesus
specifies the way in which this new community is to be different by saying "The kings of
the earth lord it over their subjects; But it shall not be so among you . . . For I am among
you as one who serves." (Luke 22:25-27) This new social order is both of this world, in
the sense that it is neither a monastery in the wilderness or a strictly individualistic and
private affair, but it is also not of this world, in the sense that it is a community in which
servanthood replaces domination and violence is rejected. As Yoder puts it: "The
alternative to how the kings of the earth rule is not 'spirituality' but servanthood." Yoder points out that every pericope in Luke 19:47-22:2 reflects in some way the
"confrontation of two social systems and Jesus' rejection of the status quo."

The voluntary nature of the community makes coercion impossible and freedom
integral to the nature of the community. For Yoder, the distinction between the church
and the world allows for the freedom of non-confession, which in turn allows for the
freedom of confession. The kind of leadership to be exercised in this community has to
be different from that exercised in a community based on coercion, such as the state or

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11 POJ, 37. Emphasis in the original.
12 Ibid., 39.
13 Ibid., 44.
the Constantinian church. Servant leadership and voluntary confession are the marks of the community founded by Jesus and are the distinguishing marks of the New Testament doctrine of the church. Only within this kind of community is fellowship based upon love actually possible.

The issue of eschatology is also implicit in Yoder's reading of Luke, along with ecclesiology, and the same issues of the existence of God and the freedom of humanity impinge upon it. Only if God exists and has the power to raise the dead, is it possible to believe that accepting suffering to the point of death, rather than resisting violently, can be meaningful action. The point of the resurrection is that Jesus' life and teachings have been vindicated by God and the point of faith in Jesus is the belief that love is greater than violence and domination because God is love. The fact that Jesus refused to take matters into his own hands is the basis of Yoder's rejection of coercion, violence and taking matters into our hands as disciples. Jesus demonstrated that doing so is not necessary for the one who trusts in the sovereignty of God over history.

Yoder argues that the temptation for Jesus to take matters into his own hand continued right up to the very end. He thinks that the temptation Jesus wrestled with in the Garden was, once again, the temptation to assume leadership of an armed nationalistic and messianic violent uprising. He notes that Matthew interprets the incident of Peter and the sword by having Jesus say "Do you not think that I can not appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53) Yoder comments:

I have little qualification for surmising what it would have looked like for twelve legions of angels - a Roman legion is said to have been 6,000 soldiers - to come into that garden. But what I can imagine is not very much to the point. Matthew's

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 46.
report is clear, and Matthew could imagine that this final encounter with Judas and the Jewish and perhaps Roman police would have been just the point at which God would unleash the apocalyptic holy war, where the miraculous power of the angelic hosts, Jesus' disciples as shock troops, and the crowds in Jerusalem with their long-brewing resentment would rise up in one mighty surge of sacred violence and finally drive the heathen from the land and restore to God's people (as Zechariah had predicted) the possibility to serve YHWH in freedom and without fear.\(^{15}\)

Yoder notes that the assistance of warrior angels was a regular element of the Zealot hope. He asserts that just as Jesus was tempted to messianic violence at the very beginning of his ministry (in the desert) and at the turning point (the feeding of the multitude), so he is tempted here for the third time to use violence and coercion to set up the Kingdom. The temptation is to disbelieve that God is actually in control of history and, therefore, to assume that one has to take matters into one's own hands, using violence if necessary, rather than walking the path of suffering servanthood in obedience to the will of the Father.

In Chapter Four of Politics, Yoder explores the Old Testament theme of the holy war in which God fights for his people. The cross is interpreted by Yoder as Jesus' renunciation of violence as the means by which the social order is to be set right. Jesus rejected the Essenes' option of withdrawal, the Herodians' and Sadducees' option of compromise in the name of realism, the Pharisees' option of stressing personal holiness and compromising where necessary in politics and the Zealots' Maccabean option of violent uprising. Yoder's contention is that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament by rejecting all these options and choosing the way of the cross.\(^{16}\)

Yoder contends that, after the Exile, "it had become a part of the standard

\[^{15}\text{Ibid., 47.}\]
\[^{16}\text{These options are more fully developed by Yoder in his essay "The Original Revolution" in OR, 19f.}\]
devotional ritual of Israel to look over the nation's history as one of miraculous preservation" which sometimes included the Israelites' military activity and sometimes not. In this light, Yoder contends that it would have been "at least possible if not normal for those 'waiting for the consolation of Israel' to see in these miraculous deliverances of the Old Testament story a paradigm of the way God would save his people now." This means that Jesus could have addressed concrete socio-political issues using the language of Kingdom and liberation without endorsing violence (though of course such misunderstanding would always be possible) and, in doing so, he could both have understood himself and been understood by others as "updating the faith of Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah." 

Jesus was put to death as a threat to the established social order by the authorities and this threat was real, according to Yoder. The rejection of Jesus was the rejection of the new social option he first embodied and then built out of those who accepted his message. In the acceptance of his message by some, the rejection of it by others, and in the collision between his new messianic community and the power of the state, we see the coming of the Kingdom into the world. The eschatological tension between a Kingdom which is both here and yet not entirely here yet is the basis of the dramatic tension which runs through the Gospel narratives.

One flaw in this book is that Yoder does not here, though he does in other writings, make as central as he could have the importance of the resurrection to the ability of the story to go on after the crucifixion. He appears to take for granted the fact that it is
precisely the resurrection which allows the infant church to survive, develop and reach out in a hostile environment and he also seems to take for granted that his readers already believe in the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus. Instead of spending much time on the resurrection as such in his discussion of Luke's Gospel, Yoder assumes the resurrection in his discussion of the Incarnation in Chapter 6 "Trial Balance," where he claims that the function of the New Testament claims for the preexistence and cosmic preeminence of the Word is to "affirm the exclusivity of the revelation claim they were making for Jesus." Thus, his affirmation of the reality of Jesus' resurrection is more implicit than explicit.

Nevertheless, Yoder's major achievement in Politics is to have seen that the Jesus of the Gospel narratives is an eschatological Jesus, who calls into being an eschatological community which is in tension with the established social order of this world, and to have seen, in that depiction of Jesus' person and work, the basis for a social ethic which is distinctively Christian. This reading of the Gospel narrative is one which challenges, and seeks to undermine, other long-established apolitical readings. It is therefore reasonable, before simply accepting it, to pause to reflect upon the hermeneutical principles being used to build up this new reading of Luke.

The profundity of what Yoder has done already in this book should not be underestimated. He mentions in the Preface that, on the deepest level, his work "represents an exercise in fundamental philosophical hermeneutics." What does Yoder

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21 In a very real sense, for Yoder, the resurrection constitutes the new community. Yoder says: "Only from within the community of resurrection is the cruciformity of the cosmos a key rather than a scandal." ("The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood," PK, 36.) He also claims that it is the resurrection which makes the cross meaningful. (WPR, 437.)

22 POJ, 99. The thought seems to be: Who would ever imagine a Jesus, of whom preexistence and cosmic preeminence could be predicated, who was not raised from the dead?

23 Ibid., x.
mean by this characterization of his work? He tells us that he is trying to apply the insights of "Biblical Realism," which he says makes it "thinkable that there might be about the biblical vision of reality certain dimensions which refuse to be pushed into the mold of any one contemporary worldview." But this statement requires interpretation and elaboration. Is it possible to describe the hermeneutical moves made in this book more precisely? We can reflect on Yoder's hermeneutics by comparing what he does in this book to what another postliberal author does in another, very different, book on the Gospels.

2. A Comparison of the Hermeneutics of Yoder and Frei: Just three years after the publication of The Politics of Jesus, a very formal, densely-written book by Hans Frei appeared, entitled The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology. A comparison of the books by Frei and Yoder reveals some interesting insights. On the surface the two works exhibit some very different attributes. Politics is written in a much more free-flowing and rhetorical style, while Identity is full of close reasoning and technical thought. Also, while Identity is a book on method which never really fleshes out any major constructive theological proposals, Politics is the application of a presupposed method to a problem and a statement of ethical conclusions. Furthermore, Politics engages the biblical text to a much greater degree than does Identity, which is unsurprising given the more methodological focus of Identity. Precisely because these two books are so different, a consideration of Identity can help illumine Yoder's method. Since Politics is so substance-oriented and Frei's book is so methodology-oriented, comparing the two can help bring to light the methodological

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24 Ibid.
features of Yoder's book. This is especially true because the two books, for all their differences, have some important similarities.

First, both Frei and Yoder reject what could be termed "systematic or philosophical hermeneutics" (of either an idealist or existentialist type) in favor of what Frei terms a lower level understanding of hermeneutics as "the rules and principles governing exegesis." Yoder, later looking back on *Politics* and reflecting on his use of Scripture in that book, stated that his concern was to try to let the Bible say what is means without "subjecting it to the superior authority of our own contemporary hermeneutic framework." Both Frei and Yoder make use of historical criticism but they both see it as having limited value for theological exegesis. George Hunsinger's description of the relevance of historical criticism for Frei applies also to Yoder. Hunsinger says that for Frei, faith needs only two very minimal assurances: that the resurrection has not been disconfirmed historically and that a man named Jesus of Nazareth did, in fact, live, did proclaim the Kingdom of God, and was executed. While historical criticism could, theoretically, disprove the resurrection, it never could prove it because the resurrection is an absolutely unique event. Once the basic historicity of the Gospel narratives (in the sense described above) is established, and as long as it is not disconfirmed, theology is free to go on with its work using the narratives of the Gospels as identity descriptions and not as either historical sources or as myths. Yoder uses historical criticism in order to

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26 *Identity*, xvi. Frei uses adjectives like "old-fashioned," "low-keyed," and "narrow" to describe his view of hermeneutics.
27 "How To Be Read By the Bible," 39.
28 See POJ, 12, n. 17 where Yoder states his openness to historical criticism while asserting its inadequacy as a substitute for engaging the canonical text for constructive Christian ethics.
30 *Identity*, 151.
help establish the meaning of the text to a greater degree than Frei, but has no interest in historical reconstructions of a reality behind the text.\footnote{See above, 96, n. 3. In this respect, both writers resemble Barth. See Mary K. Cunningham, \textit{What is Theological Exegesis: Interpretation and Use of Scripture in Barth's Doctrine of Election} (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1995).}

Second, both Frei and Yoder employ an Anselmic/Barthian "faith seeking understanding" method.\footnote{For Barth's Anselmic method see his book \textit{Anselm: Fides Quarens Intellectum: Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of His Theological Scheme}, trans. I. W. Robertson, (London: SCM Press, 1960, Reprinted by The Pipwick Press, 1975) and also Webster, \textit{Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation}, 218. In passing it should be noted that the "characteristic absence of crisis" which Barth noted in Anselm's theology, and which Webster says also characterizes Barth's own theology, is also a feature of Yoder's writings. Mark Thiessen Nation says "At least as revealed to others, Yoder certainly did not agonize much over issues. That is who he was." ("He Came Preaching Peace," 72.)} Frei writes: "I remain convinced that a sound basis for good dogmatic theology demands that a sharp distinction be observed between dogmatic theology and apologetics."\footnote{\textit{Identity}, ix.} He begins, in Chapter One, with the question: "How shall we speak of Christ's presence?" and then says that he is not going to write a "rational defense of the possible or actual truth of the Christian faith."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 1.} Instead, he tells us, what he is going to write "constitutes a refection within belief."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 4.} Yoder, in contrast, is as methodologically reticent in public as Frei is methodologically preoccupied. Most of Yoder's methodological reflections occur in unpublished papers or as clarifications of previous misunderstood writings. The result of this approach is that the reader of \textit{Politics} has no way of knowing whether Yoder's approach in \textit{Politics}, in which he assumes Jesus as authoritative and takes as his task to show that loyalty to Jesus involves something radically different from what most people have thought it meant, is a principled or
incidental one. His other writings do make clear the answer, however. The title of one of
his later essays: "Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism" expresses his
view well. Yoder is not willing to engage in apologetics if that requires imposing a pre-
understanding on the text, which limits what the text can say.

Third, both Frei and Yoder are concerned to assert the immediate presence of
Jesus Christ to believers so that the Christian life can be one of obedient discipleship,
rather than autonomous or semi-autonomous decision-making. In a later reflection on
the method of Politics, Yoder stated that the particular challenge addressed in this book
was "how, once we know what the text says, it has authority for us." Yoder points out
that both "orthodox" and "liberal" theologians of Christendom typically have said that the
Scriptures undergird some "general anthropology of sin and grace" and "a general
document of the rightness of there being a civil order in the world" and then do ethics on
the basis of something other than Scripture. In this book, Yoder attempts to re-establish
the "immediate relevance of Jesus as liberator and Lord." His basic conviction seems to
be that once we see clearly who Jesus is, we automatically know what it means to follow
him and, therefore, what ethical action is fitting.

Frei is doing something similar in Identity when he argues that "The governing
conviction in this essay is that in Jesus Christ identity and presence are so completely one
that they are given to us together: We cannot know who he is without having him

37 In this respect, both thinkers echo the concerns of Karl Barth. See Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 18 and Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits*, 14-15, 120.
38 "How To Be Read By the Bible," 17.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
present" and "factual affirmation of him and commitment to him cannot be conceived apart either."42 Charles L. Campbell draws attention to the "pattern of exchange" in Identity, in which Jesus forsakes the power to save himself in order to save others and comments that Frei fails to note that the way in which Jesus' refusal to take the military option, his decision for powerlessness in the face of the hostile forces of history, is in fact his most profound challenge to those forces and the embodiment of God's reign.43 He criticizes Frei for not exploring the continuity between Jesus' ministry and his crucifixion/resurrection and what possible ethical implications could be drawn from the connection. He argues that the connection consists of "Jesus' intentional enactment of the way of nonviolent resistance."44 Although Frei does not take this step, Campbell contends, his work does at least suggest it. What Frei does formally, Yoder does materially by interpreting the cross in terms of the ministry of Jesus.

Campbell states that, for Frei, Jesus' identity was centered in a "moral decision" and so now "the clue to our relationship to Jesus lies not in a 'profound self grasp,' but in moral obedience patterned after that of Jesus." Campbell contends that at the center of that "moral obedience" is the church's nonviolent resistance to the powers of the world. Campbell's words here could easily have been written about Yoder's position. For both Frei and Yoder, it is "the identity of Jesus rendered in the Gospels, which provides the pattern for the life of discipleship."46

41 Ibid., 4.
42 Ibid., 156.
43 Preaching Jesus: New Directions For Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 214.
44 Ibid., 215.
45 Ibid., 216.
46 Ibid., 212.
Fourth, both use an intention/action model to describe Jesus' identity. Frei gives the definition of this model: "... intention ... is nothing in itself without enactment. Enactment does not merely illustrate, but constitutes, intention." Who then is Jesus, for Frei? "He was what he did, the man completely obedient to God in enacting the good of men on their behalf." Frei notes that, in both the Gospel narratives and the apostolic writings which comment on these narratives, the obedience, rather than the faith, of Jesus is stressed. Jesus' identity is centered on moral action in moving toward a certain goal, rather than on his basic, unchanging self-understanding. In the course of the Gospel narrative, the "individual, specific and unsubstitutable identity of Jesus" is more and more clearly set forth until a climax is reached in the resurrection. Frei says, "Indeed, in the Gospel story the human person of Jesus of Nazareth becomes most fully himself in the resurrection." We have seen above how Yoder describes the identity of Jesus by recounting incidents from his life and how he interpreted the narrative as movement toward a goal, rather than merely as a series of illustrative stories. Yoder sums up the first half of his book with the words: "his deeds show a coherent, conscious social-political character and direction, and ... his words are inseparable therefrom."

These observations lead us to a contrast which needs to be drawn between Yoder and Frei, which highlights a major shortcoming in Politics. Despite Yoder's more in-

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47 Both writers appear to be indebted to the narrative Christology of Barth in the fourth volume of Church Dogmatics so far as method is concerned. No claims are being made here for the material consistency of the three theologians, although that would be a worthwhile project to explore in and of itself.
48 Identity, 110.
49 Ibid., 111.
50 Ibid., 106.
51 Ibid., 108.
52 Ibid., 49.
53 POJ, 112. Frei, typically, gives this move a name, insofar as he develops an understanding of Jesus' words as "performative utterances." (Identity, 97).
depth and constructive engagement with the text of Scripture in general, at one point there is a glaring lacuna in his presentation and that is in his failure in this book to give sustained attention to the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus for the identity of Jesus. Yoder's focus is on the cross to such an extent that readers have been misled into thinking that the resurrection is of little importance to Yoder's social ethics. Nothing actually could be further from the truth, but Yoder himself is at least partially responsible for the misunderstanding and this fact is never more obvious than when Frei's book is set alongside Yoder's.\(^{54}\)

However, this criticism should not blind us to the fact that both Yoder and Frei are heavily indebted to the theological method of Karl Barth in these two books. Like him, both reject philosophical hermeneutics in favour of a low-level use of historical criticism as a way of illumining the meaning of the canonical text, which always remains central in theological reflection. Like Barth, both employ a rational, Anselmic, faith seeking understanding method which sets apologetics aside in order to explore the inner logic of belief. Also, like Barth, both attempt to let Jesus Christ himself become immediately present to the believer so that his lordship can be concrete and definite. Finally, like Barth, both employ an intention/action model to describe Jesus' identity, the description of which is their central preoccupation. Clearly, the influence of Barth's method on both of these postliberal theologians is important.

Yoder's goal in the first half of Politics was to demonstrate how the Gospel narratives can be read in such a way as to make Jesus relevant to social ethics. On the

\(^{54}\) This is especially true when one considers that, for Frei, it is in the crucifixion-resurrection sequence that the identity of "the unsubstitutable Jesus of Nazareth who, as that one man, is the Christ and the presence of God" is most fully revealed. Yoder does not deny the importance of the resurrection, but he leaves himself
basis of this discussion of his book, it can now be concluded that he achieved that goal. He has depicted a Jesus who is firmly rooted in the biblical texts and who creates a new social order deliberately calculated to challenge the old one. Yoder has linked the themes of faith in God, the freedom of humanity and love as the basis of true worship of God together in such a way as to make the cross meaningful as a way of life in a sinful world. Jesus offers a new way of living, but the implication of accepting his offer is a cross. All of this implies a certain eschatology and a certain ecclesiology and Yoder's understanding of these two doctrines will be expounded in Chapters Three and Four of this essay. But before we move on to those chapters, we need to focus on the theme of discipleship as the implication of Yoder's view of Jesus' radical social ethic. If the nature of the Christian community is voluntary and if the only way that the kind of life he calls people to embrace makes sense is on the basis of faith in God, then it stands to reason that personal discipleship precedes and enables entrance into the Christian community. This is the theme which Yoder takes up in the second half of his book.

B. Discipleship as the Implication of Yoder's Christology

In the Chapter Seven of Politics, Yoder turns from Luke's Gospel to the New Testament epistles to investigate the question of whether or not there is preserved in the various strands of apostolic writings any consciousness of a radical social ethic stemming from Jesus. If the thesis argued in the first half of Politics is assumed to have been substantiated and Jesus was, in fact, relevant to and normative for social ethics, then either an awareness of the need of the Christian believer to take seriously that aspect of

open to being misconstrued because he treats the cross so explicitly and the resurrection so implicitly. Hence Yoder is often interpreted as having a low Christology.
the Christian life should be present in the apostolic tradition, or else there is a major gap between the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament.

1. The New Testament Concept of Discipleship: Yoder directs our attention to a concept which is found throughout the New Testament, namely, that of the correspondence of the believer's behaviour and attitude to that of the Lord. \(^{55}\)

Correspondence or participation, in which the believer's behaviour or attitude is said to "correspond to," "reflect" or "partake of" the same quality or nature as the Lord's, appears sometimes without any specific terminology. But usually it is expressed in two related verbal traditions: discipleship and imitation. The first tradition centers on the noun "disciple" and the verb "to follow after" or "to learn." The image is of the Israelites "following after" the pillar of cloud. The other tradition focuses on "imitation" language. Its imagery is more structural or mystical in that it can refer both to conformity of behaviour and similarity of inner intent or character of which that behaviour is expressive. The core idea here is that of the appropriateness of the human being reflecting the nature of God as in "Be holy, for I am holy." (Leviticus 19:2) Yoder concludes that the two concepts are similar enough to treat together.

Yoder quotes the New Testament extensively as he marshals evidence for his contention that the theme of correspondence is pervasive in the apostolic writings. He notes that the language varies but there is a consistency of thought in the call for the believer to share in the life of God by being rooted in Christ, dying and rising with Christ, loving and serving as Christ did and being subordinate as He was. He also notes that there is a particular and heavy emphasis placed on the disciple suffering with Christ at the hands of the world instead of exercising dominion and on doing it without complaint.
even though innocent. Yoder sums up the witness of the New Testament epistles regarding the meaning of discipleship by saying that the apostles appear to have preserved a "core memory" of their Lord's earthly ministry and they centered their ethic on the cross as "a substantial, binding and sometimes costly social stance."\(^{56}\)

Yoder points out that this body of material has, of course, not gone unnoticed by mainstream Christian ethics, but it has been interpreted differently. Rather than making the "exemplary quality of Jesus' social humanity" a model for our social ethics, the tradition has managed to "appropriate much of the New Testament idiom without catching its central historical thrust."\(^ {57}\) Yoder points to the way in which the phrase "bearing one's cross" is often taken, in Protestant pastoral care, to mean enduring sickness, accidents, loneliness or defeat.\(^ {58}\) But, says Yoder, the cross was not an inexplicable or chance event which happened to strike Jesus. It was accepted by him as his destiny when he could have turned away from it. His disciples are warned to count the cost before consciously taking up their own cross. (Luke 14:25-33) Another interpretation of the cross has been to make of it an inward experience of the self, as in Thomas Müntzer, Zinzendorf, revivalism and Christian existentialism. Still another interpretation makes use of cross language to express subjective brokenness and the renunciation of pride and self-will, as in Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Keswick renewal movements. Yet another interpretation is the concentration on and imitation of the outward form of Jesus' life (forsaking home and property, celibacy, manual labor,

\(^{55}\) POJ, 113.

\(^{56}\) POJ, 127.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 128, n. 33. Yoder mentions the Evangelical Carl F.H. Henry as a notable case in point.

\(^{58}\) For what follows, see POJ, 129-30.
barefoot itinerancy) which is found in the "mendicant" tradition such as the Franciscans.

But, says Yoder, in the New Testament there is no general concept of imitation.59

Yoder sets all these interpretations of the cross aside. While they may have value as emphases more or less warranted in the Christian life, they do not do justice to what the New Testament teaches in the passages cited above.

There is thus but one realm in which the concept of imitation holds - but there it holds in every strand of the New Testament literature and all the more strikingly by virtue of the absence of parallels in other realms. This is at the point of the concrete social meaning of the cross in its relation to enmity and power. Servanthood replaces dominion, forgiveness absorbs hostility. Thus - and only thus - are we bound by the New Testament to "be like Jesus."60

Yoder contends that New Testament discipleship means being like Jesus, following Jesus and taking up one's cross. What does this concept of discipleship mean for Christian ethics?

2. The New Testament Concept of Discipleship and Christian Ethics: In various ways, throughout his writings, Yoder reflects theologically on the meaning for social ethics of discipleship as the implication of New Testament Christology. He says:

With regard to the logic of ethical thinking it [discipleship] means that Christian behaviour is Christological, drawing its guidance not from a set of general philosophical principles nor from a collection of codified precise obligations, but from the person and the teachings of Jesus.61

Yoder denies that this is an "interim ethic," the credibility of which depends on one's expectation of an imminent end to the world, as Albert Schweitzer contended. It is not derived from any such calculations, he says, "but simply from Christology."62

59 Ibid., 130.
60 Ibid., 131.
For Yoder, New Testament Christology contains the key to the ultimate meaning of the cosmos:

By confessing that Messiah has been placed by God above and not within the cosmology and culture of the world they invade, the messianic Jewish witnesses also affirmed that under his lordship that cosmos would find its true coherence and meaning. . . . Even before the broken world can be made whole by the Second Coming, the witnesses to the first coming - through the very fact that they proclaim Christ above the powers, the Son above the angels - are enabled to go on proleptically in the redemption of creation. Only this evangelical christology can found a truly transformationalist approach to culture.63

The Christian community knows that the cross reveals the ultimate meaning of reality and the true nature of God.64 Therefore, it is enabled to suffer patiently while bearing witness to this fact, consoled by the cheerful expectation that the truth revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ can be denied, but never overcome.

Yoder believes that this understanding of Christian ethics as following Jesus was a source of the nonresistant convictions of the early Anabaptists. Unlike most mainstream Reformation historiography, which tends to paint all the Anabaptists with the same brush of legalism, Yoder argues that Article VI of the Schleitheim Confession links ethics and Christology in such a way as to ground the rejection of the sword, not in prooftexts, but in conformity to Christ.65 This, and this alone, is the point at which the sixteenth century Anabaptist vision is relevant to us today.66

This concept of discipleship enables martyrdom, which is an essential aspect of the witness to the Kingdom of God in this present world. Although Yoder fails to give sufficient attention to the resurrection of Christ in The Politics of Jesus, he does make up

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64 As Joel Zimbleman rightly sees, Yoder's starting point in ethics is a reflection on the divine nature. "Theological Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Juan Luis Segundo and John Howard Yoder," 193.
65 WPR, 185.
66 See the discussion of this point above in Chapter I, Section A.
the deficit in other contexts by stressing that the cross which is central in Christian ethics only makes sense in the post-Easter context. For example, he says:

As the cross becomes meaningful in the New Testament only in relation to the resurrection and to Pentecost, so in sectarian ethics is forgiving grace rightly understood only in the context of enabling grace. Interpreting justification by faith as a ratification for conscious compromise with the presence of sin is what Paul calls "sinning that grace may abound;" what Bonhoffer called "cheap grace."\(^{67}\)

The cross/resurrection of Jesus not only provides an example for the believer, but it also elicits a response from the believer. It not only reveals the truth about the cosmos, but it also draws the disciple into behaviour which corresponds to the divine action in Jesus Christ, specifically at the point of taking up one's cross.

In this way, the meaning of the cross for Yoder is not only outside of history, as it is for Reinhold Niebuhr. As Ronald Stone comments in describing the thought of his mentor: "the crucifixion was the ultimate symbol of love's fate; the resurrection was a symbol of an ahistorical fulfillment of love."\(^{68}\) But for Yoder, the behaviour of the disciple can correspond \textit{in history} to the action of God in Christ, precisely because God acted in Christ \textit{in history}. Gayle Gerber-Koontz summarizes Yoder's concern at this point nicely:

At the root of Yoder's ethical work is the assumption that in Christ humans see the kind of humanity that is pleasing to God. Such humanity both reveals and is derived from the nature of God and is defined fundamentally by agape, unconditional love of others. Therefore, the pattern or example of the historical Jesus has direct import for Christian ethics.\(^{69}\)

\(^{67}\) "The Anabaptist Dissent: The Logic of the Place of the Disciple in Society," \textit{Concern} 1 (June 1954), 60.
\(^{68}\) Professor Reinhold Niebuhr, 107. Richard Hays asks if Niebuhr really thinks of Jesus as a historical human being, notes the influence of Paul Tillich on Niebuhr's theology and offers this comment on Niebuhr's Christology: "It is difficult to see how Niebuhr's account of the ethic of Jesus avoids the pitfalls of docetism." (\textit{The Moral Vision of the New Testament}, 218.) This is a "Yoderian" criticism of Niebuhr.
\(^{69}\) "Confessional Theology in a Pluralistic Context: A Study of the Theological Ethics of H. Richard Niebuhr and John H. Yoder," 81.
The concept of correspondence, which Yoder sees as core idea deployed in the New Testament teaching on discipleship and imitation, is one which is important to Barth's theological ethics as well. Critics of Barth who accuse him of having a monism in which no room is allowed for meaningful human action, fail to appreciate the radical challenge to modernity inherent in Barth's re-conception of fully human action as action which is enabled and elicited by God's action, and more specifically, God's action in Jesus Christ. In a discussion of Barth's view of prayer, John Webster speaks of "a complex Christological statement, which both strongly affirms the vicarious character of Jesus' human action and yet does not suppress the reality of genuine human analogies to that which is accomplished outside the realm of our agency." The language of correspondence, Webster points out,

furnishes a way of affirming both the unique, incommunicable nature of God's action...and the reality of the human 'venture of action.' To embark on that venture is not to aspire to become co-regents with God, but rather to enter into and act out an order which, in its specificity and limitation, receives and testifies to the generative action of God in Christ...That, in sum, is what it means to be creature and covenant partner of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yoder's concept of obedient discipleship as the implication of his narrative Christology is substantially the same as that of Barth. Both differ from most modern accounts of human action which emphasize the autonomous, value-creating, choosing self as the prerequisite for genuinely moral action. The result is that both Barth and Yoder develop an approach to Christian ethics which is in tension with most modern approaches to ethics, whether they are idealist or existentialist, Marxist or liberal.

L. Gregory Jones notes that Protestant theology has been nervous about language

70 Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation, 78.
71 Ibid., 80.
like imitation of Christ, friendship with God and virtue because it appears to "detach the moral life from the objective accomplishment of human righteousness in Christ." The result of this reticence to talk about such issues is that "the subject as an ethical agent with duration through history is eliminated or at least paralyzed by the sole agency of Christ." Jones calls for

a way of speaking of the prior action of God, namely the saving life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which also calls forth an account of the shape human activity is to take in response. Such an emphasis is found by recovering the relationship between being conformed to Christ and being called to imitate - or, as I think is preferable language, to pattern one's life in - Christ.

What Barth provides in his ethics is such a way of speaking and Yoder has built upon this concept of ethics by exploring the social ethical implications of it.

On the basis of this understanding of Yoder's ethics, it is clear that those who criticize Yoder for being arbitrary in his choice of the cross as the point at which we are to follow Jesus and those which accuse him of selective prooftexting have simply not analyzed his thought with sufficient care. Likewise, the criticism that Yoder should not make pacifism an absolute prescription when so many other Christian moral principles are not treated this way, does not take account of the grounding of discipleship in New Testament Christology.

73 Ibid., 110.
74 Ibid.
75 For example, Robert M. Parham, "An Ethical Analysis of the Christian Social Strategies in the Writings of John C. Bennett, Jacques Ellul and John Howard Yoder," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Baylor University, 1984, 197.
77 It is puzzling that Zimbleman makes this criticism ("Theological Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Juan Luis Segundo and John Howard Yoder," 310) when he apparently understands clearly that Yoder is not being arbitrary in picking and choosing his moral principles.
C. Yoder and Classical, Orthodox Christology

This chapter, so far, has argued for a view of Yoder's social ethics as being rooted in a narrative, postliberal Christology which preserves theological realism and has, as its implication, a concept of ethics as discipleship. But the question which has yet to be addressed, and which inevitably arises with regard to Yoder's Christology, is the question of how compatible his understanding of Christology is with that of classical orthodoxy as expressed in the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds. It is unfortunate that Yoder's class lectures Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method were only informally published and are, therefore, not more widely known. It is in this work that Yoder directly addresses the development of Christological orthodoxy in the first five centuries of the Christian era. We need to examine his reading of this development in order to provide the basis for an accurate response to this question in the final section of this chapter, where the charge of reductionism will be examined.

1. Yoder's Affirmation of the Creeds: In Chapter One of this essay, an account of Yoder's historicism was sketched which saw it as being complete except at the key point of the Incarnation. Even there, Yoder is very concerned to say that the event was historical. But what we mean by Incarnation is that we believe that that one, particular, historical event, in all of its historical particularity, is actually revelatory of the Creator God. For this reason, Yoder is not a theological or ethical relativist.

Not everyone is convinced of this assessment, however. James Reimer interprets Yoder as conforming to modern historicism:

In an anti-metaphysical and anti-ontological age like ours, which has, it appears almost totally lost a concept of radical transcendence - a belief in the first article
of the creed - to emphasize the historical-political essence of the kerygma is in fact not a radical critique of the fundamental assumptions of the modern world (as Yoder intends it to be) but a tacit acknowledgement of modern historicist assumptions.\textsuperscript{78}

This evaluation of Yoder would be accurate if Incarnational doctrine were not central to Yoder's theology. Then Yoder would logically have no way to prevent his historicism from leading to an absolute relativism because he does reject the possibility of finding a universal method which can establish truth for everyone. However, given the nature of the Gospel, Yoder says

we must not abandon the claim that the validity of what we believe is founded on grounds more solid than whim, flipping a coin, accident, or provincial bias. Instead of seeking to escape particular identity, what we need, then, is a better way to restate the meaning of a truth claim from within particular identity.\textsuperscript{79}

Yoder affirms the ontological truth of the Gospel and the necessity of proclaiming it as true for all who hear it because the Gospel is the message of the Incarnation.

In Preface, Yoder discusses the development of the Apostles' Creed from the simple New Testament statement "Jesus is Lord" into a baptism formula which outlines the essentials of the Christian faith.\textsuperscript{80} The second article is the longest and the only one of the three which retains any sign of the original narrative character of the Gospels.\textsuperscript{81} Yoder says that the centrality of Christology is still clear here, although, unlike the New Testament kerygma, there is no call to repentance and the "fullness of time" theme is missing.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{78} "The Nature and Possibility of a Mennonite Theology," CGR, 8:2 (Spring 1990), 41.
\textsuperscript{80} PT, 103.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 103-4. Yoder notes that the second article is made up of participles describing Christ, while the first and third articles have no verbs except the "I believe" which introduces each article.
\textsuperscript{82} PT, 104.
Yoder follows the thread of doctrinal development through the first four centuries to Nicea. He treats credal development historically and considers intellectual, political and linguistic factors which fed into the process. He describes the various heretical positions such as ebionitism, docetism, modalism and Arianism. The basic problem with which the church was wrestling during this process, was how to preserve the New Testament concept that "Jesus, the Word in Jesus, is genuinely of the character of deity and genuinely human, and that his work is the work of God and yet the work of a man" as it moves from the still-Hebraic context of Hellenistic Judaism, out of which the New Testament documents emerged, to the Greek philosophical context of the wider Greco-Roman world. The church wanted to affirm both the deity of Jesus and monotheism.

Yoder says that the Nicene solution (which grew out of Tertullian's terminological distinction between person and substance), in which the person (Latin persona, Greek hypostasis) refers to the threeness of God and the substance (Latin substantia, Greek ousia) refers to the oneness of God, was the solution to a verbal formality, but it was a verbal formality which met a real need because it "safeguards the New Testament content . . . in a different thought world." The homoousios of Jesus and the Father preserves the core of New Testament teaching, insofar as it allows the church to affirm the deity of Jesus without abandoning monotheism. All this sounds very affirming of the creeds.

James Reimer, however, calls into question Yoder's commitment to credal orthodoxy. He rightly points out that Yoder is engaged in a polemic against individualistic, existentialist and spiritualistic interpretations of Christianity and he

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83 PT, 138.
84 Ibid.
85 PT, 135.
further contends that Yoder, therefore, emphasizes the historical-eschatological character of the faith at the expense of the metaphysical and the ontological. The problem with Reimer's assessment of Yoder's position is that he fails to make a crucial distinction between Yoder's epistemology and his ontology. He assumes that because Yoder rejects a foundationalist epistemology, he must not really mean (or is being inconsistent in asserting) that the Gospel is ontologically true. He observes that Yoder treats the Logos doctrine of Christ and the Trinitarian and Christological creedal formulations with "remarkable sympathy." But why should it be remarkable that Yoder would do this? Reimer is convinced that Yoder's emphasis on the historical-eschatological character of Christian faith has to be at the expense of the metaphysical-ontological character of the faith. But this is only certain if we assume a necessary connection between the existence of ontological truth and the existence of a rational method by which anyone can access that truth; thus, if you do not have a universal method for getting to truth, you cannot claim to know truth. Yoder would say: "Why not, if your claim is that, instead of you getting to the truth, the Truth has instead come to you?"

Reimer has argued in a series of articles that Yoder's position is incompatible with the Trinitarian and Christological affirmations of the ecumenical creeds, which, ironically, is just what many Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians assume must be the case with any Anabaptist writer. Reimer says: "The ancient ecumenical creeds, particularly in their Trinitarian affirmations, represented a coming together of Athens and

86 "The Nature and Possibility of a Mennonite Theology," 43.
87 Ibid.
88 "'But We Do See Jesus': The Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth," PK, 62.
89 See especially "The Nature and Possibility of a Mennonite Theology," "Trinitarian Orthodoxy, Constantinianism and Theology From a Radical Protestant Perspective" in Faith to Creed: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century, ed. S. Mark Heim (Grand
Jerusalem that I believe to be important for Christian theology and ethics."\textsuperscript{90} He finds this perspective lacking in Yoder and other non-foundationalists. He goes on to say that, although the theological orthodoxy of the first five centuries "stands in fundamental continuity with the Scriptures, it went beyond the Scriptures in formulating a uniquely Christian doctrine of God."\textsuperscript{91} He also criticizes Yoder for underestimating the discontinuity between Judaism and Christianity and asks: "Is one not finally faced with some radically new developments in the Christian understanding of God that include the move toward Nicea and Chalcedon, incorporating both Judaism and Hellenism in a new third way?"\textsuperscript{92} Reimer laments the "tragic nature of the historic split between Judaism and Christianity, and the consequent anti-Semitism"\textsuperscript{93} but he asserts that "to claim that in the first 500 years following the death of Christ a new 'religion' with a distinctive 'doctrine of God' evolved surely does not necessarily entail suppercessionism and anti-Semitism."\textsuperscript{94}

It is difficult to know just how to interpret what Reimer means at this point. How seriously should we take his statements about the Christian doctrine of God being distinct from the Jewish-Christian one? Does Reimer actually mean to say that Christianity, as expressed in the ecumenical creeds is a synthesis of Judaism and Hellenism, as opposed to being a re-statement of biblical teaching in Hellenistic thought forms? Reimer's claim that the "the central theological affirmations found in classical orthodoxy are needed to undergird the very moral and ethical claims that Yoder witnesses to so singularly"\textsuperscript{95} is

\textsuperscript{90} Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991): 127-61 and the forthcoming article in the Yoder Festschrift "Theological Orthodoxy and Jewish Christianity: A Personal Tribute to John Howard Yoder."
\textsuperscript{91} "Theological Orthodoxy and Jewish Christianity: A Personal Tribute to John Howard Yoder," 7-8.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 22.
surely correct. We agree that a high Christology is essential to Yoder's whole system. Why then does Reimer persist in questioning Yoder's commitment to orthodoxy? One reason has already been mentioned - the assumption that epistemological non-foundationalism necessarily entails ontological relativism - but there may be a deeper reason.

We can get at this issue by asking what Reimer and Yoder respectively mean by God. Yoder clearly affirms that the God of the New Testament, the Father of Jesus Christ, is the same God as the Old Testament Creator and the God of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. For Yoder, the Old and New Testaments and the Creeds all speak of the same God. What the creeds do, as far as Yoder is concerned, is to reject all statements about God which are not compatible with the biblical narrative centered on Jesus Christ as the Incarnation of God.

Is this the case for Reimer? Probably it is, although some of the unguarded statements quoted above might lead one to conclude that Reimer sees the distinctively Christian doctrine of God as deriving some of its substance from Greek philosophy and some of its substance from the Bible. Or one could interpret him as saying that the Creeds identify Aristotle's "Unmoved Mover" with the biblical God. Since the Middle Ages, Christian theology has often made this move. A Greek concept of God is fused with the biblical concept of God and the result is that the biblical proclamation gains "credibility" by being identified with the highest and best insights of the wider pagan world. The incorporation of natural theology into Christian theology is totally rejected by Barth and also by Yoder. This rejection can be seen in Yoder's account of the rejection of Arianism by the church at Nicea.
The conflict between the views of Arius and Athanasius lasted over a century.

Yoder is fully aware of the political factors which entered into the decision at the Council of Nicea in 325 and of the long struggle over the next fifty years in which imperial politics, popular opinion and theological debate were all part of the mix leading to the Council of Constantinople in 381. He notes further that the "Nicene Creed" was not really recognized until 431. Yoder says that most of the emperors and court officials during this period favored Arianism, while Athanasius had more popular support.

Arianism was a more fitting imperial ideology, claims Yoder, because if you lower your concept of who Christ was, then you raise your vision of the emperor, because the logos was in both Jesus and the emperor. We saw, way back in Proverbs that it is by the wisdom of God that the kings reign. Well if Jesus is a little smaller, the king will be a little higher, and that is just what Constantine and his advisors wanted.96

Yoder says that was also the case that the masses, who were moving into the church after it became the official religion of the empire, found Arianism more appealing because "it is respectable, it is popular, it is intelligent, it is an edifying and high religion." They did not want to "be bothered too much about Jesus in particular, or about the Jewish-Hebrew strain of Christian thought."97 In addition, the Athanasian position was becoming identified with popularization, the ignorance of the common people and the asceticism of the monastic movement which was seen as anti-culture and anti-intellectual. Yoder concludes: "Arius had a lot on his side. But Athanasius finally won out."98 There were reasons for this outcome such as the support of Athanasius by the churches in the West, the staying power and moral character of Athanasius and also that

96 PT. 136.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
over time Athanasius' friends (the Cappadocians) worked out the logic and language of his position so that it became more compelling.

Is the doctrine of the Trinity valid for all cultures and all times? Yoder's answer to this question is two-sided. On the one hand, this doctrine is not itself biblical revelation. Yoder points to the Medieval scholastic distinction between truths which can be known by natural reasons and truths which can only be known by revelation. Which is the doctrine of the Trinity? It certainly is not known by natural reason. But it was not given by revelation either. It is not found in the New Testament. Rather it is "something the Cappadocians figured out in the fourth century." But, on the other hand, it is "the solution of an intellectual difficulty which arises if we accept the statements of the Bible." Yoder says:

The doctrine of the Trinity is a test of whether your commitment to Jesus and to God are biblical enough that you will have the problem which the doctrine of the Trinity solves. It may be that there will be other solutions, other words, other phrasings, or ways to avoid tripping over the problem the way the Greek fathers did. But we will have to do it with the same commitment to the man Jesus, and the same commitment to the unique God which those Fathers had, or else we have left the Christian family.99

The Trinity guards and expresses biblical truth which is essential to the Christian faith.

Yoder's thought here is similar to George Lindbeck's rule theory of doctrine. For Lindbeck, the doctrine of the Trinity expresses three regulative principles: first, "there is only one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus," second, "the stories of Jesus refer to a genuine human being who was born, lived and died in a particular time and place" and third, every possible importance is to be ascribed to Jesus that is not

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99 PT, 140.
inconsistent with the first two rules."\textsuperscript{100} Yoder states: "Any doctrine, but especially a doctrine of this kind, is basically a set of assumptions about how we are going to use words and rules about what certain words ought to be used to mean and ought not."\textsuperscript{101}

For both Lindbeck and Yoder, this is a theory about how doctrines, as second-order language, regulate the first-order language of Christian worship and proclamation.\textsuperscript{102} The rule-theory of doctrine as such does not necessarily entail theological realism, but it is compatible with a realist understanding of first-order Christian language. While there has been considerable debate about the interpretation of the postliberalism of Lindbeck and Frei as to whether they are affirming realism or not,\textsuperscript{103} there can be little doubt of Yoder's "Biblical Realism."

Yoder takes the position that the Athanasian view is the biblical one, while the Arian view is the one which fits best with Constantinianism, even though the Athanasian position prevailed to become the credal orthodoxy of the imperial church. Reimer, however, says that it not clear whether Yoder views Nicene orthodoxy and Constantinianism to be part of the same movement. His evidence for this suspicion is that Yoder interprets the Council of Nicea in a socio-political framework and this makes him suspicious of its formulations.\textsuperscript{104} But Yoder's refusal to assume in advance the infallibility of the creeds is a function of his view of the authority of the canon of

\textsuperscript{100} The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), 94.
\textsuperscript{101} PT, 136.
\textsuperscript{102} Cartwright also notes that Yoder treats the doctrine of the Trinity as a second order doctrine. "Practices, Politics, and Performances," 425.
\textsuperscript{103} See, for example, the doubts expressed by Alister McGrath ("An Evangelical Evaluation of Postliberalism" The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation, eds. T. R. Phillips and D. L. Okholm (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 35ff. The position of this writer, however, is that Jeffrey Hensley's argument that Lindbeck is an anti-foundationalist thinker who is in principle open to metaphysical realism is convincing. ("Are Postliberals Necessarily Antirealists? Reexaming the Metaphysics of Lindbeck's Postliberal Theology" The Nature of Confession, 69-80.)
\textsuperscript{104} "Trinitarian Orthodoxy, Constantinianism and Theology Form A Radical Protestant Perspective," 136-7.
Scripture and its Christological center. It does not, in the end, lead Yoder to deny the validity of the Nicene Creed.

Reimer notes Yoder's claim that the fall of the church occurred, not in the fourth century, but in the second century when the Apologists began to downplay Jewish particularity. But Yoder does not simplistically assume that Constantinianism happened over night and he does not see the "fall" as an all or nothing proposition. The portrayal of the fall of the church in his writings is that of a gradual process. He affirms that biblical orthodoxy was still too strong simply to be set aside at this early point in church history. So the imperial power and the church entered into an alliance, rather than the church being completely taken over all at once. In this context, biblical orthodoxy (in the form of the Athanasian homoousion) remained within the bosom of the Constantinian church - its radical, social ethical implications latent, but not purged. This means that when Yoder speaks of the "fall of the church," as all branches of the Reformation did in the sixteenth century, he does not mean the total destruction of the church. Yoder thus is a reformer, not a restitutionist, in this sense.

What Yoder is referring to, in pushing the beginning of the fall of the church back to the second century, is the incipient Arianism which can be seen in the Apologists. On this point he is supported by Aloys Grillmeier, who says: "The coming Arian struggles are no more than the consequences of the error which was introduced at the time of the Apologists. The error lay in the fact that the Stoic Logos was essentially monistic ...." Reimer also recognizes that "It was the Arians who (influenced by middle

105 "Theological Orthodoxy and Jewish Christianity: A Personal Tribute to John Howard Yoder," 21.
Platonist cosmology) Hellenized the Gospel and tended to see Christ as a "demigod" philosophically understood." Reimer goes on to say that the Trinitarian faith of Nicea was much truer to the biblical Christ than the theological positions of most theologians from the second century on. Yoder and Reimer are in agreement on this point.

Yoder continues his survey of the development of Christology up to Chalcedon by pointing out that the church, having affirmed the unity of Jesus and the Father, now had the problem of how to relate the Son of God to the man Jesus. Again he surveys the various schools and heretical positions. If, in the fourth century, the influence of imperial politics on theological debate was strong, though not necessarily decisive, by the fifth century the balance is shifting toward more influence for politics than theology. Yoder notes the irony that Nestorius as a person was condemned as a heretic, while the substance of the Nestorian position was largely affirmed as orthodoxy. After Chalcedon, many churches left the orthodox fellowship. Around the Eastern end of the empire various churches, which adhered to the monophysite position, broke off as national units. The Nestorian churches of Syria and beyond were pushed out. Imperial unity gradually gained the ascendancy over ecclesiastical unity. Despite the fact that the monophysite churches led by Alexandria left, the day to day life of the orthodox church remained monophysite and the deity of Jesus tended to swallow up the humanity.

In evaluating the formula of Chalcedon, Yoder states that the controversy was a test of the seriousness of Nicea. If you take seriously the statements that Jesus is divine and one with the Father, you have to answer the question of how the divinity and

107 "Trinitarian Orthodoxy, Constantinianism and Theology From A Radical Protestant Perspective," 153.
108 PT, 148.
109 PT, 153.
humanity of Jesus go together. Yoder states that all the Eastern churches (both inside and outside the empire) tended to emphasize the deity at the expense of the humanity of Jesus and continue to do so today. The birth of Jesus matters most: "We could say that this is a doctrine of salvation by birth." The Roman tradition exalts Jesus as Lord and coming Judge: "Revelation is not in him, not in the book either. It is in the Church which he has mandated to work in the world." For Protestantism (and, Yoder suggests, for the New Testament), the humanity of Jesus matters more because the humanity of Jesus is the necessary prerequisite for what God wants to do with man: "The center, then, for Protestant thought, is neither on Incarnation nor on the authority given to the church to administer grace, but on what Jesus did as a man, giving himself."

Yoder consistently emphasizes the humanity of Jesus, not because he does not accept the deity of Jesus, but because he judges that the greatest danger in the church has been that of denying the humanity, rather than the deity of Jesus. Those who came to theological maturity in the twentieth century, after nineteenth century Liberalism had caused a sensation by denying the deity of Jesus, have been brought up in an atypical period of church history. In most periods, the problem has been that the humanity of Jesus has not been taken seriously enough and that is still the problem in most of the more vitally alive parts of the church today. Yoder wants to remind the church that both the deity and the humanity of Jesus Christ are part of Christological orthodoxy and the denial of either one is the denial of orthodoxy. Hence, Yoder starts with the biblical teachings which the doctrines of the Trinity and the two natures were designed to affirm.
and stresses the humanity, the historical particularity and the historicity of Jesus and what that half of Christological orthodoxy means for social ethics. A rule theory of doctrine emerges once again as Yoder summarizes his own position on the creeds:

The Creeds are helpful as fences, but affirming, believing, debating for, fighting for the Creeds, is probably not something which a radical Anabaptist kind of faith would concentrate on doing. Yet that gives us even less reason to join with Bishop Pike and Bishop Robinson in fighting against the Creeds. They are part of the only history we have. It is a fallible history and a confused history. A lot of dirty politics was involved in getting them defined, in explaining their meaning, and still more in applying their authority. But this is the history to which God has chosen to lead his confused people toward perhaps at least a degree of understanding of certain dangers, certain things not to say if we are to remain faithful.\textsuperscript{114}

Yoder does not place the exact wording of the ecumenical creeds on the same level as the apostolic witness of the New Testament, but he affirms the New Testament teaching which they were concerned to protect from distortion. His historicism leads him to be suspicious of attributing absolute truth to any proposition just because it is enshrined within an historic creed. But his historicism, qualified as it is at the point of the New Testament proclamation of "God with us," does not lead him to doctrinal relativism.

At this point we need to draw together the threads of the argument of this subsection on Yoder's reading of the history of Christology. Three main points need to be emphasized. First, Yoder's historicism is qualified at the crucial point of the Incarnation and this allows him to affirm wholeheartedly the biblical proclamation that God has become human in the man Jesus. Second, Yoder's non-foundationalist epistemology should not be seen as calling into question his affirmation of the Incarnation since he affirms the Incarnation on the basis of revelation, not reason. He believes that it is perfectly possible to believe (and herald) what one can not prove by means of some sort

\textsuperscript{114} PT, 158.
of "neutral" or "scientific" method. Third, Yoder sees the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds as protecting the biblical proclamation about Jesus, expressed mostly in narrative form in Scripture, by means of the use of Greek thought forms. The content of biblical monotheism and the deity of Jesus is protected from a pagan form of monotheism which is incompatible with the Incarnation and deity of Jesus Christ. For Yoder, the doctrine of the *homoousion* of the Father and the Son is not the result of the synthesis of a pagan concept of God with the biblical concept of God. Rather, it is foolishness to the Greeks and the confession of the mystery with which the church is left when she confesses both that Jesus is God and that God is One.

2. The Debate With H. R. Niebuhr Over the Doctrine of the Trinity: Having examined Yoder's reading of the development of orthodox Christology, we are almost ready to move to the final section of this chapter and consider the charge of reductionism. However, before we do that we need to examine Yoder's critique of H. R. Niebuhr's use of the doctrine of the Trinity. Yoder's use of the doctrine of the Trinity in constructive theological work is just as important, if not more so, to an evaluation of his true position on Christological orthodoxy as is his historical treatment of the creeds.

Yoder notes that, in *Christ and Culture*, Niebuhr uses the doctrine of the Trinity to critique the radical "Christ against culture" position. Niebuhr charges the radicals (of whom he gives as examples: the author of I John, Tertullian, "certain sectarians" and Leo Tolstoy) with failing to grasp adequately the meaning of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. They fail to grasp that the confession of orthodox Christian faith means that the

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revelation in Jesus Christ needs to be kept in balance with the revelation of the Father in nature and culture and that of the Spirit in the church and history. Niebuhr asserts that "radical Christians . . . regard the development of Trinitarian theology to be a result of the introduction of a cultural philosophy into the Christian faith, rather than a consequence of believers' efforts to understand what they believe." Yoder also points to Niebuhr's famous article, "The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church," which was published just three years before Christ and Culture, in which Niebuhr criticizes certain segments of the church for a "unitarianism of the Son."

What is going on in Niebuhr's article? In order to understand why Yoder does not feel that Niebuhr's critique has force against the "sectarian" or "radical" position, it is important to answer this question as carefully as possible. Niebuhr tells us that he wants to restate the doctrine of the Trinity for the modern age so that it has ecumenical significance. For him, an ecumenical doctrine appears to be one which sanctions theological pluralism under the tent of Christianity. Niebuhr says that his restated doctrine of the Trinity "will be an ecumenical doctrine providing not for the exclusion of heretics but for their inclusion in the body on which they are actually dependant." In his article, he brands almost everyone in church history as being a unitarian of one sort or another. There are unitarians of the Creator, unitarians of the Son and unitarians of the Spirit, none of whom can logically remain independent of each other, but all of whom are in reaction to the one-sidedness of the others. To do justice to the faith of the whole church, therefore, one has to accept the Arians and Liberals along with the

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117 Christ and Culture, 114.
119 "The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church," 374f.
120 Ibid., 384.
Swedenborgians and pietists and no less than the mystics and metaphysical idealists. All are heretical; all are essential to the whole faith of the whole church.

Now this modern re-statement of the doctrine of the Trinity is quite the opposite of the doctrine of the ancient, ecumenical church. There, the purpose was to define limits to orthodoxy and to exclude heretical statements of the faith. While Niebuhr accepts ongoing dialectical tensions as the price of polite, ecumenical pluralism, the ancient church faced logical contradictions and sought to prevent biblical affirmations from being turned on their heads so that later re-formulations did not come actually to mean the opposite of the assertions found in the apostolic witness of the canonical Scriptures.

The difference between the ancient doctrine and the modern one is rooted in a doctrinal development which only gradually gained ground in the ancient church and did not flower until the high Middle Ages, but which is taken for granted by Niebuhr as a given, namely, natural theology. Niebuhr presumes no need to argue for the identification of the "God of nature" with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ or for the validity of the project of natural theology. He says: "That God reveals his nature and his power in Jesus Christ and not simply in creation . . . is always implicit in the Unitarianism which asserts that the one God is the Father."\(^\text{121}\) Again: "Having begun with the rational knowledge of a first principle of nature, but having interpreted that first principle in terms of revelation . . . this Unitarianism is either required to find in Jesus Christ a reconciler to the Creator or to ask whether the Christlike God has any existence."\(^\text{122}\) Note that the source of the tension between the "unitarianisms" for Niebuhr is that the religion of nature and reason must somehow be made compatible with

\(^{121}\) Ibid., 380. Emphasis not in the original.

\(^{122}\) Ibid., 381. Emphasis not in the original.
the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Hans Frei quotes Niebuhr as stating: "When we say revelation we point to something in the historical event more fundamental and more certain than Jesus or self. Revelation means God..." Frei also notes that, for Niebuhr, "when we speak of God, we must not speak of human personality, not even of the person of Jesus of Nazareth." Niebuhr, in his doctrine of the Trinity, strives to hold together God and Jesus by means of a dialectical tension.

Niebuhr's restatement of the doctrine of the Trinity can be contrasted with the massive restatement of the doctrine of the Trinity which fills the thick volumes of Barth's Church Dogmatics. Barth is not guilty of having a unitarianism of the Son, in Niebuhr's terms, because he simply refuses to play by the rules by which Niebuhr assumes we have to play. Barth's doctrine of the Trinity is Christocentric, meaning that his doctrine of God the Father is developed, not out of natural theology, but out of the biblical witness as it is interpreted Christologically. Barth rejects the whole natural theology project including the analogy of being, apologetics and reason and history as sources, independent of revelation, of the knowledge of God. For this reason, the doctrine of the Trinity is located in the Church Dogmatics, not in the doctrine of God after the existence of "nature's God" has already been proven, but in the Prolegomena as the presupposition of all dogmatic theology. For Barth, the Christian God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus, the God of the Bible, and not Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, the God of the philosophers. So we know the Christian God (as opposed to the God of the Deists,

124 Ibid.
125 CD I/1, 295-490.
the Muslim God and the God of idealistic metaphysics) through God's own self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Any other God is simply an idol for Barth. Rather than a balance of unitarianisms in tension, Barth offers a Christocentric Trinitarianism which is distinctively Christian.

Niebuhr's account of Trinitarianism is inherently open to syncretism, to the blending of pagan and Christian notions into a culture religion. It was against trends perceived by Barth to hold the potential for this kind of deformation of the Christian faith, which Barth perceived to be more serious than anything faced by the church in many centuries, that he uttered his famous "Nein!" The "Confessing Church," in the Barmen Declaration, said that it was, in fact, the "German Christian" movement which was sectarian and heretical. Against syncretism it declared that "Jesus Christ, as he is testified to us in the Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God whom we are to hear, whom we are to trust and obey in life and in death."\(^{126}\)

Yoder's Christocentric Trinitarianism is Barthian in its rejection of natural theology. Although Niebuhr portrays the "Christ against culture" position as both sectarian and narrow, Yoder's position is not thereby threatened, for his position is both as ecumenical and as wide as Jesus Christ, the Lord of the church and the Lord of the cosmos. Yoder sees no disjunction between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament because he sees both Testaments as one story in which the climax is Jesus Christ. Yoder does theology with what could be called a "practical Trinitarianism," that is, by means of assertions which depend for their coherence on the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity. To do this is to be in continuity with the ancient

church which formulated the doctrine of the Trinity as a way of doing justice both to the deity of Jesus and to monotheism. In the end, justice can be done to both only by asserting that the one God is revealed decisively in Jesus and in this conviction Yoder, Barth and classical orthodoxy are one.

**D. The Charge of Reductionism: An Evaluation**

James Reimer raises the question of whether Yoder's Christology is orthodox and whether, in the end, he does not reduce theology to ethics and spirituality to politics. Reimer recognizes that Yoder consciously and deliberately wrote and spoke as a corrective to other tendencies and distortions, seeking to call the church to balanced faithfulness:

"The existential dimension (one's individual stance before God) is subordinated to the "political" message - "political" interpreted not in any narrow sense but as a whole new way of living with others in the world. To confess Jesus as Lord is to commit oneself to the way of the cross in human relations. This is the gist of Yoder's best known work, The Politics of Jesus. The question is whether this is an adequate Christology. In his effective corrective to the evangelical tendency to interiorize the Gospel and that of the mainline churches to sacramentalize it, Yoder offers a powerful political reading of the New Testament which unfortunately devalues the existential-sacramental power of Jesus' message - that part having to do with divine grace, the personal forgiveness of sin, the inner renewal of the spirit, and the individual's stance before God."¹²⁷

What Reimer is raising here is the very important question of reductionism. Did Yoder reduce theology to ethics? Did he reduce personal faith to political action? Did he reduce the meaning of Jesus Christ from cosmic Lord and Saviour to moral teacher/example?

To begin with, we can agree with Reimer's assessment in four ways. First, Yoder does underplay what Reimer terms the "existential" aspect of personal faith and the non-ethical meaning of the sacraments. Second, it is true that Yoder's work is essentially a corrective to the evangelical and mainstream traditions at this point. Third, there can be no doubt that Yoder's interpretation of "the way of the cross" should be construed as "political" in the sense in which Reimer construes it. Fourth, this charge is clearly an important issue and the long-term evaluation of the importance of Yoder's thought for the church will depend on how this issue of interpretation is resolved. A theologian who was guilty of the kind of reductionism which is in view here would not seem to have much to teach the ecumenical church. Does this mean, then, that Reimer's conclusion should be adopted and Yoder should be assessed as reducing doctrine to ethics and spirituality to politics? No, the argument that Yoder's Christology should be considered inadequate is not compelling. It is an understandable mistake, but in the end a mistake, to see him as reductionistic. Yoder's is a project of retrieval, not reduction. Several points need to be made in support of this position.

1. Yoder's Conversational Style of Writing: First, we need to take into consideration the conversational nature of Yoder's writings and his conception of how theology is supposed to work. Reading his essays is a bit like listening to one end of a telephone conversation. We know that Yoder preferred the essay format and eschewed the writing of a systematic book of any kind and he made it clear that this decision is rooted in his rejection of philosophical foundationalism and his consequent rejection of what he called "methodologism." He did not believe in starting from "scratch" because

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128 See the "Introduction" to FTN, 9-10 for his rejection of calls for him to write a "basic introduction" in social ethics. See also "Walk and Word: Alternatives to Methodologism," 77-90 where he explains in more
he believed that there was no such thing as "scratch." Almost all of Yoder's scholarly output was written because some institute, editor, conference organizer or panel discussion chair asked him to speak on a particular issue or topic at a particular time and place. Yoder did not regret this fact; he thought it was natural and appropriate because he believed that theology should be a practical discipline serving the needs of the church. He believed that theology is inherently dialogical and that fraternal correction is an essential aspect of the theological process, not only within the local congregation, but within the guild of theologians as well.

To criticize Yoder for leaving himself open to misinterpretation by not saying everything which needs to be said at any one time would not be fair, given the type of writing he did. Of course, that is not what Reimer is doing. He is not saying that Yoder had to pay attention to the existential dimension of faith in every one of his writings or that he had constantly to be referring to the ontological truth status of the claims of Nicea...
and Chalcedon in every exposition of the ethical implications of Jesus Christ. But why
did Yoder never, in forty years of writing, ever get around to emphasizing these themes?
That is a fair question and one which requires further discussion.

A partial response is to extend the point made above about the conversational
nature of Yoder's writings. Those with whom he was in conversation were already
making those points forcefully and frequently, so there was no need for him to reiterate
them. Evangelicals did not invite him to preach at evangelistic crusades or at deeper life
conferences; they asked him to make a contribution to the articulation of a biblically-
based social ethic in scholarly or social activist settings. Mainline groups did not
often ask him for his opinions on Nicea; they usually invited him to speak on how to have a
viable peace witness in the modern world. In the "Biblical Theology" and ecumenical
circles in which he moved during his years in Europe (which were heavily influenced by
Barthian theology), the Mennonite and free church circles in which he moved for all of
his career (which were very pietistic), and in the North American evangelical circles in
which he moved during much of his career (in which personal piety was emphasized
nearly to the exclusion of social witness), what was being denied in each case was not
orthodox Christology or the Gospel message of repentance and faith. And, of course,
sacramental theology would not exactly be the neglected theme in need of emphasis to
his colleagues of the Roman profession at Notre Dame. Rather, what was not being said
in all of these contexts, and needed to be said, was that the life of discipleship means

132 For example, he was a keynote speaker at the founding meeting of Evangelicals for Social Action in
133 For example, Yoder was invited to contribute a paper, "The Historic Peace Churches: Heirs to the
Radical Reformation," to the Theological Committee of the Caribbean and North American Area Council
of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in response to the World Council of Churches meeting in
Vancouver 1983 around the theme of "Peace, Justice and the Integrity of Creation." This essay was
following Jesus, rather than merely living up to the best moral wisdom of the pagan
world.

2. Yoder's Own Claims Not to Be Intentionally Reductionistic: The proposal
being defended here is that we take Yoder's word at face value when he says that his
intention was not to reduce Christology to ethics, but to speak a word of correction for his
time. It is important to hear Yoder's own words at this point so, begging the reader's
indulgence, we will quote Yoder fairly extensively. In the first edition of The Politics of
Jesus, at the end of his chapter on justification by faith, he emphasizes the social
character of justification in Paul's theology:

My presentation, in order to correct for the one-sided social ethic which has been
dominant in the past, emphasizes what was denied before: Jesus as teacher and
element, not only as sacrifice; God as the shaker of the foundations, not only as guarantor of the orders of creation; faith as discipleship, not only as subjectivity.
The element of debate in the presentation may make it seem that the "other" or
"traditional" element in each case - Jesus as sacrifice, God as Creator, faith as
subjectivity - is being rejected. It should therefore be restated that - as perusal of
the structure of our presentation will confirm - no such disjunction is intended. I
am rather defending the New Testament against the exclusion of the "messianic"
element. The disjunction must be laid to the account of the traditional views, not
of mine. It is those other views that say that because Jesus is seen as sacrifice he
may not be seen as King, or that because he is seen as Word made flesh he cannot
be seen as normative person.134

Published in the book Peace, War and God's Justice, ed. T. D. Parker and B. J. Fraser (Toronto: The United
134 POJ, 1st ed., 232, 2nd edition, unchanged, 226, emphasis not in the original. Yoder clarifies his criticism
of the reductionism of both liberal and evangelical Protestantism when he says: "The canonical critical
thrust is narrowed (though not necessarily betrayed) when, as we have done it in the West from Augustine
through Luther and Pietism to Kierkegaard, Bultmann and Billy Graham, its focus is upon a righteousness
which is coram deo, in 'the heart,' and not 'merely' civil." ("How To Be Read by the Bible" (A Shalom
Desktop Publication, 1996), 51) Note that the narrowing is not necessarily a betrayal because the inward
emphasis is valid in itself. Betrayal only occurs when the inward focus is allowed to crowd out the public
implications of the Gospel. Yoder goes on to say in this same passage: "That narrowing is however
potentially, if not necessarily, a betrayal. When systematized, it sets up as a screen between us and the text
the neoplatonic scheme according to which the opposite of the City of God is the earthly city, i.e. God is
located in the other world." (Ibid.) Note that Yoder exhibits hostility toward "systematizing" of inward
spiritual experience into a metaphysic, not toward the biblical emphasis on personal, inward spiritual
experience itself.
It is significant that in the second edition, written twenty years later, Yoder refers to this paragraph and says:

The last paragraph of the above text should perhaps have been placed at a more prominent place in the book. Some readers, who missed that paragraph or did not believe it, have described The Politics of Jesus as reductionistic or materialistic, some intending that description as praise, but more of them as blame.

In an apologetic or missionary perspective, I am not sure that I should be sorry, if it were to turn out to be the case that my retrieval of the straightforward gospel message should be found understandable or interesting to my contemporaries not at home in classical Christian understandings of transcendence or inwardness. Yet such a potential apologetic value was, as the reader of my first chapters know, not the point of my exercise.  

So Yoder is claiming not to be reductionistic in his intent, both in 1972 and in 1994. He reiterates the same point in his final book, For that Nations, published in 1997. In his essay "The Power Equation, Jesus and the Politics of King," Yoder speaks of the vision of the lordship of Christ over the powers and then he says:

This is then the immediate political pertinence, in a situation of frustration, of confessing with the Creed that it is Jesus who for us and who for our liberation was made human. This is the New Testament refutation of the definition of Jesus as apolitical. Gustavo Gutierrez says this by denouncing the "distinction of planes." I said it simply by calling Jesus "political."  

Then, in a footnote to the last sentence Yoder refers the reader to the discussion in The Politics of Jesus and states: "The use of the adjective did not mean a reduction; it rather sought to safeguard the wholeness of the classical Christology." In this book, Yoder is attempting to defend his thought against the charge of sectarianism and, in setting the record straight, it is interesting to note that he felt it important to affirm his commitment to classical Christology. Upon reflection, however, perhaps it is not so strange after all,

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135 POJ, 227.
136 "The Power Equation, Jesus and the Politics of King" in For the Nations, 138.
137 Ibid., note 26. Emphasis not in the original. For Yoder, the denial of the humanity of Jesus is just as much a denial of orthodox Christology as the denial of the deity of Jesus and more common.
since the charge of sectarianism, so far as pacifism is concerned, is logically rooted in and dependent upon, the charge of reductionism in Christology.

3. Yoder's Criticism of Reductionism in Others: Furthermore, we need to note that he could criticize the theology of others for not being sufficiently orthodox on occasion. How likely is it that as logical a thinker as Yoder would have indulged in such a blatant inconsistency as to hold up the substance of his own teaching as evidence of the weakness of others? For example, he criticizes Reinhold Niebuhr for not having a biblical doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus. He says:

Although the New Testament understands the cross only in the light of the resurrection, Niebuhr speaks of the cross repeatedly, of the resurrection of Christ not at all, and of the resurrection of the body only as a mythological symbol for the fact that the superhistorical triumph of the good must also somehow involve history.  

He also criticizes Niebuhr for ethical pessimism resulting from not taking the effect of personal conversion seriously enough:

The Bible teaches that there is a significant difference between the saint and the unbeliever by virtue of a change of motives so basic as to be called a new birth. Niebuhr has no place for the doctrine of regeneration since the saint is for him still a sinner, even though he may be a less offensive one.

Here we see Yoder affirming by implication the doctrines of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the new birth of the believer (and their connection: "... the Bible speaks of our resurrection with Christ") in a very clear way. It could be argued that Yoder believed in these things in the 1950's and 60's but later abandoned the transcendent in favor of more immanent theology, but it would be difficult to prove that any such gigantic shift in

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139 Ibid., 21.
140 Ibid., 20.
theology ever occurred from his writings. One theme which he constantly reiterates in many different ways is that Christian ethics is for Christians only and that how Christians are to behave is rooted in what they believe. Why would it not be legitimate to suppose that one reason why, for Yoder, Christian ethics is for Christians is that Christian believers are the ones in whom the Spirit of Christ dwells?

4. The Logic of Yoder's Position: We also need to bear in mind that the whole basis for Yoder's particular brand of pacifism, the pacifism of the messianic community, collapses if Jesus is not divine. The logic of his position depends upon a high Christology. In The Politics of Jesus, Yoder explicitly states in several different ways that his intention was to display the inner logic of orthodoxy. In referring to the War of the Lamb, he says, for example, "If Jesus Christ was not who historic Christianity confesses he was, the revelation in the life of a real man of the character of God himself, then this one argument for pacifism collapses." His point here was that his reason for pacifism is dependant on the truth of historic Christianity, unlike many other forms of...
pacifism which could still be held even if the historic orthodox doctrines of the deity of Jesus Christ and the Incarnation were not true.  

Yoder appealed in this book to the concepts of revelation and Incarnation as the basis for his reading of Christology. He asks:

"What becomes of the meaning of incarnation if Jesus is not normative man? If he is a man but not normative, is this not the ancient ebionitic heresy? If he be somehow authoritative but not in his humanness, is this not a new gnosticism?"

Later Yoder argues that his view of Jesus is not reductionistic, but just the opposite, insofar as it seeks to develop the ethical truth latent in the Christology of the creeds. He says:

If we were to carry on that other, traditionally doctrinal kind of debate, I would seek simply to demonstrate that the view of Jesus being proposed here is more radically Nicene and Chalcedonian than other views. I do not here advocate an unheard-of modern understanding of Jesus. I ask rather that the implications of what the church has always said about Jesus as Word of the Father, as true God and true Man, be taken more seriously as relevant to our social problems, than ever before.

Furthermore, Yoder explicitly rejects the notion that we must choose, as much of the recent systematic tradition says we must, between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of dogma. Yoder says: "If we confess Jesus as Messiah we must refuse this choice" and "The Jesus of history is the Christ of faith."

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147 Yoder goes to great lengths to make a similar point in his book Nevertheless. There he speaks of the underlying axiom of his own position, "The Pacifism of the Messianic Community," as follows: "although all of the positions reviewed above are held by Christians, this is the only position for which the person of Jesus is indispensable. It is the only one of these positions which would lose its substance if Jesus were not Christ and if Jesus Christ were not Lord." (134) It is important to note that one of the positions to which Yoder is referring here is the Imitation of Jesus position held by Tolstoy and others. This seems to imply that orthodox Christology, and not merely the human figure of Jesus, is seen by Yoder as necessary to his particular kind of pacifism.
148 POJ, 10.
149 Ibid., 102.
150 Ibid., 103.
5. Yoder's View of the Authority of Scripture: One reason Yoder sometimes sounds less than fully accepting of the creeds (Apostles, Nicene and Chalcedonian) is that for him, the authority of the creeds can never supersede the authority of the biblical texts themselves. The creeds are guides to reading Scripture and have a useful, though limited, function. If one takes the position that the ecumenical creeds are on the same level as Scripture or are essential to salvation or are absolute definitions of true Christian faith, then Yoder certainly can be said to be non-credal in those senses.\textsuperscript{151}

However, to subordinate the authority of the creeds to that of Scripture is not necessarily to think that the creeds are wrong. In fact, Yoder says of the Nicene Creed that it is trying to say the same thing about Jesus as the New Testament says, but in a non-narrative form, in ontological, philosophical language.\textsuperscript{152} He explains the doctrine of Trinity as arising from the New Testament concept that "Jesus, the Word in Jesus, is genuinely of the character of deity and genuinely human, and that his work is the work of God and yet the work of a man"\textsuperscript{153} and then calls the doctrine of the Trinity "a test of whether your commitment to Jesus and to God are biblical enough that you have the problem which the doctrine of the Trinity solves."\textsuperscript{154} Yoder states that the Nicene Creed is valid, not because it is itself supernatural, revealed truth, but because it "reflects the serious struggle of men, within their language and their culture, with their commitment to an absolute God and to a normative Jesus."\textsuperscript{155} The authority of the creeds is not equal to that of Scripture, but the creeds express truth precisely because they are biblical.

\textsuperscript{151} See, for example, John H. Yoder and David Shank, "Biblicism and the Church," \textit{Concern} 2 (1955), 38.
\textsuperscript{152} PT, 138. See Section C above.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 140.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 141.
6. **Yoder's Barthian Christocentrism:** One reason why Yoder did not feel it necessary to emphasize or even be all that explicit about his orthodox Christology is that he was not primarily a systematic theologian working on the problem of Christology; rather he was applying Barth's theology to social ethics. Rather than reading Yoder as having a "monotheism of the Son," this essay proposes reading Yoder as working out of a Barthian Christocentric Trinitarianism. Having adopted Barth's Christocentric approach to theology as his starting point, he may well have been puzzled by interpreters who accused him of having a "low" Christology when his whole theological method was obviously so Christocentric. It would be easy to imagine him asking his critics: "Why on earth would I make such a big deal out of a Christological social ethic if I did not believe that Jesus Christ was God incarnate?"

If it is true that Yoder built on the foundation of theology laid by Barth in the *Church Dogmatics* in developing a Christological approach to social ethics, then the issue which needs to be addressed is the adequacy of the Barthian approach itself. Of course, those of Barth's critics who accuse him of Christomonism likely will not shrink from making similar accusations against Yoder as well, but that is at least to get the real issues out on the table. If Yoder and Barth are guilty of anything, it is having too "high" a Christology, not too "low" a Christology.

How conscious Yoder was about using a Barthian methodology is not always clear because he deliberately tried not to focus too much on methodology in his writings. In a paper presented to the Karl Barth Society of North America in 1995, however, Yoder expresses his appreciation for Barth as a post-Christendom theologian and, near the end

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156 See the discussion of the influence of Barth's theology on Yoder above in Section B of Chapter I.
of that paper, makes a revealing comment about the extent and duration of the influence of Barth's theology on his own thought. Referring to one of his early articles he says:

"The words were my own, but I think the position expressed was the Barthian one I have been describing here, when a lifetime ago I read in a lecture at Drew Seminary the words that have recently been reprinted in my Royal Priesthood." Barth's influence is not always obvious on the surface of Yoder's writings, but it is fundamental to his thought. A "high" Christology is not so much a conclusion of Yoder's arguments as it is the presupposition of them.

7. Yoder's Radical "catholicity": Catholics may miss what they consider to be a "normal" emphasis on the sacraments and spirituality in Yoder's writings and Evangelical Protestants may miss what they would consider to be the necessary slogans like "born again" and "saved by the blood." But these omissions can partially be explained when one pauses to reflect that Yoder embodies the truth of Walter Klaassen's description of Anabaptism as neither Protestant or Catholic. To a certain extent, he does not fit pre-existing categories. He did not have a personal felt need to be accepted as a "card carrying evangelical" or "mainline ecumenist." He was, in the words of Michael Cartwright, a "radically catholic" theologian and he did not seem to fit snugly into either Catholic (i.e. Roman Catholic) or Protestant (either Evangelical or Liberal) categories for the very good reason that his thought cannot be reduced without remainder to either tradition. Reimer is correct in asserting that Yoder did not have a balanced

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159 Michael Cartwright, "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity: John Howard Yoder's Vision of the Faithful Church" in The Royal Priesthood, 41. Yoder explicitly accepted the label "radically catholic" as use by Cartwright as an appropriate description of his stance. ("Introduction" in FTN, 8, note 19.)
enough approach to the existential and political dimensions of the faith and that he did not emphasize orthodox Christology (or the work of the Holy Spirit or the resurrection of Christ) enough in his best known writings. But that does not mean that his ideas are not wholly compatible with a balanced approach to all of these things. The issue is balance and emphasis, not logical incompatibility. And if one's stated mission in life is to participate in the theological conversation going on in the church in one's generation and to contribute what one believes to be distinctive and helpful, how can one be faulted for beating the drum one feels is not being heard loudly enough at that particular time?

There are two logically distinct issues here. One is the interpretation of Yoder's own thought and that is an important issue of historical theology in and of itself. The other is the issue of the logical validity of this argument that the orthodox Christology of the New Testament, as expressed in the ancient ecumenical creeds, can be construed as the foundation for a view of a politically relevant Jesus because his humanity is normative for disciples of Jesus. The second issue is much more significant for the future of constructive Christian theological ethics. However, this section has, hopefully, clarified the fact that there is solid textual evidence in Yoder's writings for interpreting Yoder himself as holding to a solidly orthodox Christology as well.

In this chapter, we have attempted to expound Yoder's Christology as the source of his social ethics. We have seen that his concept of discipleship grows out of his narrative Christology, which has much in common with the postliberal Christology of Hans Frei. The concept of discipleship as correspondence is central to Yoder's ethics. Like Barth, he understands the human action of the disciple to correspond to the divine action in Jesus Christ in the sense that the model of the human Jesus enables and elicits a
response from the disciple. But we cannot fully grasp why the human action, which corresponds to the divine action in Christ, can and must take the form of pacifism until we understand the eschatological context in which Yoder's Christology functions. And we cannot fully grasp how this enabling and eliciting occurs until we understand the ecclesiological shape of Yoder's social ethics. Only in the context of the sovereignty of God in history and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian community is it possible to see how Yoder's Christological ethics actually work. We turn then to a description of Yoder's eschatology in Chapter Three as the next step in our exposition.
CHAPTER III
ESCHATOLOGY AS THE CONTEXT OF YODER'S SOCIAL ETHICS

In Chapter Two, we saw that Yoder's narrative, postliberal Christology is rooted in his reading of the canonical Gospels and in the orthodox Christology of the ancient ecumenical creeds. Yoder develops his social ethics on the basis of an eschatological concept of Jesus, which, he contends, is relevant to the church conceived of as an eschatological community. As the founder of a new social reality, which is both of this world and not of this world, Jesus introduced an eschatological tension of "already-not yet" which is embodied in an eschatological community of disciples who both reject violence and live in tension with the old social order as He did. Yoder's rejection of the violence of the imperial church is thus done fundamentally for Christological reasons.

In this chapter, we will see that mainstream Christian ethics at mid-century worked with the view of the historical Jesus as a product of late Jewish apocalyptic, a view which was first put forward by Albert Schweitzer and which was highly influential in New Testament scholarship during the first half of the this century. Reinhold Niebuhr, to take one leading representative of mainstream Christian ethics at this era, could no more imagine how such a Jesus could be relevant to contemporary Christian ethics than could Schweitzer. So Christian Realism, and mainstream Christian ethics in general, in the first half of the twentieth century, attempted to formulate an approach to ethics which legitimately could be called Christian, even though it differed in substance from the
ethics of Jesus. Yoder's original contribution to Christian ethics in *The Politics of Jesus* was to approach the problem from the other end. Instead of setting Jesus aside in order to do ethics in the context of a modern understanding of history, Yoder suggested setting aside contemporary understandings of history and trying to do Christian ethics in the context of the eschatological-apocalyptic worldview of the Jesus of the Gospels.

In the process of beginning with the Jesus of the Gospels, Yoder discovered that a distinctive and coherent picture of eschatology emerges from the New Testament, which has important implications both for how one reads the Old Testament and for how one reads the history of Western Christendom. Yoder developed a Christocentric eschatology using his Barthian method of relating all doctrinal statements to their true center - Jesus Christ as He is attested in Scripture - and the result was the clarification of the true status and character of Constantinianism as an eschatological heresy. It is the contention of this chapter that Yoder developed an eschatology which is integrally related to, and internally consistent with, his Christology. Since that Christology, as we saw in the last chapter, is both biblical in its origin and consistent with classical orthodoxy, it must, therefore, be the case that, if Yoder's eschatology can be seen as arising out of his Christology, it must also be part of the orthodox, ecumenical Christian faith and, thus, anything but sectarian.

The next task to be taken up in the exposition of the theological bases of Yoder's social ethics, then, is to expound and analyze his eschatology as the context for social ethics. The purpose of this chapter is to attempt that task by setting forth an interpretation of Yoder's view of New Testament eschatology, the understanding of Constantinianism which arises from it and the refutation of the charge of sectarianism which he develops on the basis of it. In the first section of this chapter, we will give an
interpretation of Yoder's eschatology by analyzing his understanding of New Testament eschatology. Then, in the second section, we will turn to a discussion of his concept of Constantinianism as the reversal of New Testament eschatology and a false reading of the Old Testament, and, therefore, as an eschatological heresy. Finally, we will be in a position, in the third section, to evaluate the charge of sectarianism with regard to Yoder's position.

A. Yoder's Partially-Realized, Future-Oriented Eschatology

Yoder's eschatology was developed in the context of the debate sparked by Albert Schweitzer's rediscovery of the "eschatological Jesus," a debate which took place during the first half of the twentieth century. After situating Yoder's eschatology historically in the context of this debate, we will turn, in the second sub-section, to a systematic analysis of Yoder's understanding of New Testament eschatology in eight points. Then, in a third sub-section, we will examine the roots of Yoder's eschatology in the Old Testament. This will involve a discussion of his view of the relation between the Testaments and the roots of the concept of the church in the rabbinic Judaism of the Diaspora.

1. The Problem of the Eschatological Jesus: One of the major strengths of Yoder's thought is his serious interaction both with biblical studies, on the one hand, and with systematic theology and ethics, on the other. Yoder's eschatology needs to be understood within the context of the debate in New Testament studies which occurred between Schweizer's coup de grace to the original quest of the historical Jesus and the beginning of the second quest by members of Bultmann's school in the 1950's.
Twentieth century Christological thought has been shaped significantly by the conclusions of the revolutionary book by Albert Schweitzer, first published in 1906, entitled: The Quest of the Historical Jesus.\(^1\) Schweitzer's survey of nineteenth century life of Jesus historical-critical scholarship came to two main conclusions: first, that there is no intellectually honest way to get rid of the eschatological Jesus\(^2\) and second, that the spiritual interpretation of Jesus, which has come to form the essence of Christianity, developed in the church after Jesus, rather than springing from Jesus' own self-understanding.\(^3\) Schweitzer contended that the fact that the world did not end, as Jesus had predicted it would, forced the early church to turn away from eschatology (or what we would today call "apocalyptic") and to fuse "the historical Jesus" and "the supra-mundane Christ" into "a single personality at once historical and raised above time."\(^4\)

This orthodox Christology buried the eschatological Jesus beneath mountains of dogma and it had to be shattered in the Enlightenment before the quest of the historical Jesus could even begin. According to Schweitzer, the quest now has ended with a Jesus who is a product of late-Jewish eschatology, an eschatology which, it goes without saying, we moderns cannot accept. As a result of his history of the "Lives of Jesus," Schweitzer

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2. In the preface to the third edition (1954) Schweizer writes: "The decision in favour of eschatology is hardly likely to be questioned again. It provides the only trustworthy clue to the text of Matthew and Mark, allowing words to remain as they stand, with their ordinary meaning. Otherwise meanings have to be read into the text, and the sincere student must entertain far-reaching doubts as to its trustworthiness." (Quest of the Historical Jesus, xiv.)

3. Again, Schweizer writes: "The Gospel of the Kingdom of God came into the world in its late-Jewish form, which it could not retain. ... It may come as a stumbling-block to our faith to find that it was not Jesus himself who gave its perfect spiritual form to the truth which he himself brought into the world, but that it received this in the course of time through the working of the Spirit. But this is something we have to overcome." (Ibid., xv-xvi.)

4. Ibid., 3.
concluded that it is evident that each epoch found its reflection in Jesus and each individual created him in accordance with his own character. "Lives of Jesus," therefore, tell us more about their authors than they tell us about Jesus.\(^5\)

Schweitzer had his own views of the spiritual significance of Jesus, just like everyone else. But it was not his constructive views which exerted a great influence on New Testament scholarship, theology and ethics in the following decades. It was his elimination of the option of what might be termed the domestication of Jesus that created a problem for theology after him.\(^6\) Schweizer's work exerted an enormous influence on Christian ethics during the first half of the twentieth century by forcing Christian ethicists to find ways to deal with the challenge of an eschatological Jesus in whom we moderns can not believe, while at the same time remaining adherents of the religion which bears his name. Somehow ethics must be "Christian," but not simply the ethics of Jesus, and the explanation for how this can be so must have some plausibility.

In The Politics of Jesus, Yoder offers a list of ways in which mainstream Christian ethics have attempted to deal with this problem. In the first edition he lists six approaches to this problem and in the second edition he adds five more.\(^7\) First, some theologians have thought of the ethic of Jesus as an "interim ethic," one which was meant to apply to the very short time period before the passing away of this world.\(^8\) Second,

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\(^5\) Ibid., 4.

\(^6\) See Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 205-15. Neill sums up the enduring significance of Schweitzer's work: "We can never go back behind the recognition of apocalyptic as the context, and at least part of the content, of the Gospel proclamation. We cannot be content with a picture of Jesus as a rather civilized man of the nineteenth or twentieth century." (215)

\(^7\) POJ, 4-8 and 15-19.

\(^8\) This is obviously Schweitzer's position, although Yoder does not mention him here. Instead he names Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Ramsey as examples of ethicists influenced by this position. (5 n. 9) Yoder later names Schweitzer as the father of the "interim ethic" position (103-4) and specifically defines his own view of Jesus as an attempt to take seriously the eschatological character of Jesus' message without having to set Jesus aside as irrelevant.
some would agree with the Franciscan and Tolstoyan imitators of Jesus that he was a simple, rustic figure whose ethic can only apply in "face to face" situations of the small village. Third, some point out that Jesus and his earliest followers lived in a situation in which they had virtually no control over the larger social forces of history and that his ethic, therefore, can not apply in the very different situation which prevailed after Constantine. Ninth, the message of Jesus is one of an ahistorical self-understanding, not one of social change. Fifth, Jesus was a radical monotheist who pointed people away from finite values to the sovereignty of the only One worthy of worship. Sixth, some would see the point of the Incarnation as being only to enable Jesus to die for the sins of the world and the kind of life he led as, therefore, being ethically immaterial.

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9 This position is taken by Paul Ramsey in Basic Christian Ethics (New York: Scribners, 1950). 167ff.
10 This is the Bultmannian position. See his Theology of the New Testament, vol. I, trans. K. Grobel (New York: Scribners, 1951) in which he begins with the acknowledgment of the eschatological nature of Jesus' message: "The dominant concept of Jesus' message is the Reign of God. . . . With such a message, Jesus stands in the historical context of Jewish expectations about the end of the world and God's new future." (4) For Bultmann, this naturally raises the question of whether we have to dismiss the entire message of Jesus as based upon an illusion. (22) He avoids this conclusion by using existentialist philosophy to reinterpret the message of Jesus: "The essential thing about the eschatological message is the idea of God that operates in it and the idea of human existence that it contains - not the belief that the end of the world is just ahead." (23) This "idea of human existence" becomes the proclamation of the early church: "He who formerly had been the bearer of the message was drawn into it and became its essential content." (33) The Jesus who had been "the proclaimer of the radical demand of God" (34) became the kernel of the church's proclamation and gradually the Jewish, eschatological husk was allowed to fall by the wayside. By the time we get to the Fourth Gospel we have an "historically completely different picture from that depicted by the synoptics." (vol. II, 4) But this does not matter because salvation is a matter of the decision of faith in response to the "demand for faith" in the Gospel proclamation of Jesus as the one in whom God is encountering the world. (75) The life of faith is "eschatological existence . . . a turning away from the world . . . the willingness to live by the strength of the invisible and uncontrollable . . . It means accepting the life that Jesus gives and . . . to the world's point of view cannot even be proved to exist." (75) When Bultmann comes to treat the New Testament ethical material, he presents it as a falling away from the message of Paul and John and a "sinking back into legalism." (204) The result is an ahistorical message of faith which contains or implies no specific ethical content. Theology and ethics are sundered completely.
12 This position can be held by those Roman Catholics, high Anglicans and Lutherans who emphasize the sacraments as the means of grace or it can be held by Protestants who see salvation as a matter of a changed self-understanding in response to the proclaimed Word. Although they are about as far apart as possible on the liberal-conservative spectrum, Yoder sees Rudolph Bultmann and Billy Graham as similar in that they hold to a non-ethical message of individual salvation that fits this perspective. See his "How To Be Read By the Bible," 51.
Seventh, the radical historical skepticism of the "third quest of the historical Jesus" contends that we cannot be sure enough of anything the text says to build any sort of ethic on it.  

Eighth, another critical objection to the reading of the Gospel texts as being ethically relevant is that the traditions behind the texts cannot be said to have any sort of consistency.  

Ninth, there is the "general theological bias" against the "historical/particular quality of the narrative" in favor of "Wisdom, that is, in favor of moral insights less tied to time and place."  

Tenth, there is the argument of H. Richard Niebuhr in his famous article on the doctrine of the Trinity that "one should not make Jesus too important for ethics, . . . since God the Father would call for a different (perhaps more institutionally conservative) social ethic, based on an understanding of creation or providence."  

Eleventh, some would argue that Jesus did not come to teach a way of life because his sole purpose was to achieve salvation. The purpose of the law is entirely negative.  

Obviously, most of these positions are either attempts to deal with the problem defined by Schweitzer at the turn of the century or the result of Pietistic interpretations of the Gospel which focus on an individualized and apolitical view of salvation. Yoder came to maturity as a scholar in an evangelical Mennonite community with strong  

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14 Yoder says that such an objection would be damaging to a Fundamentalist or scholastic understanding of the Bible, but not to his own postcritical or narrative understanding in which the "witness of a text consists in the direction in which it pointed, along the trajectory from earlier tradition to present challenge." (POJ, 16)  

15 Yoder interprets this a mere swing of the pendulum in reaction to the "God Who Acts" emphasis of G. Ernest Wright and others in the 1950's. (Ibid.)  

16 Ibid., 17. Yoder claims that this approach is derived from a modern epistemology alien to the New Testament. See Chapter II for a discussion of Yoder's critique of Niebuhr's doctrine of the Trinity.  

17 Yoder notes that the classical Lutheran tradition comes close to this position and views the purpose of the law as being merely to drive us to grace. (Ibid., 18.)
leanings in the latter direction and a broader Protestant culture in which the Christian
Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr was the dominant way of responding to Schweitzer.

It is important to note that, even though Reinhold Niebuhr came to believe that
the eschatological, unconditional love of Jesus was impossible to implement in society
because of the reality of original sin, he nevertheless continued to believe that it is only
honest to admit that Jesus taught the love of enemies and the rejection of violence. Yoder
specifically refers to Schweitzer later in his book as the one who set up the dichotomy of
the eschatological Jesus, who is relevant to ethics but unacceptable to modernity, versus
the Christ of faith, who is irrelevant to ethics. He writes: "As we look closer at the Jesus
whom Albert Schweitzer rediscovered, in all his eschatological realism, we find an
utterly precise and practicable ethical instruction, practicable because in him the
Kingdom of YHWH has become human history." Yoder is able to take the Schweitzer-
Niebuhr view of Jesus and argue that it is a correct view, but that Schweitzer is wrong to
assume that eschatology is unthinkable for moderns and that Niebuhr is thus wrong to
deny the relevance of Jesus for social ethics. How is he able to do this? Basically, he
does it by using the thought of Oscar Cullmann to correct the eschatology of both
Schweitzer and Niebuhr.\footnote{Ibid., 104.}

\footnote{Of course, Yoder also made use of the work of other scholars working along similar lines in the 1950's such as H. Berkhof, G. B. Caird and Gordon Rupp. Caird, in his book The Language and Imagery of the Bible (1980), led the way in challenging Schweitzer's assumption that late-Jewish apocalyptic writings (especially 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch) necessarily have an imminent end of the world in view. Caird argued that the language of apocalyptic was designed to denote events within the space-time universe and interpret them theologically. Neill and Wright cite T. F. Glasson's article, "Schweitzer's Influence: Blessing or Bane?" Journal of New Testament Studies 28 (1977), 289-302, as arguing this case as well. (Neill and Wright, The Interpretation of the New Testament, 378.) As usual, Yoder's use of New Testament is not eccentric or contrarian. Of course, no ethicist can use all the conflicting interpretations the various New Testament scholars argue over, but that is not something blameworthy in principle. The interesting debate begins when ethicists argue over which exegetical results should be employed for what purposes and why. Yoder has not been engaged often enough on this level because, for various reasons, most Christian ethicists are not involved enough in New Testament studies.}
Cullmann was a professor at Basel when Yoder studied there and his influence can be detected in the theology of Barth. As a leading member of the salvation-history school of thought, Cullmann, along with others, proposed a way of doing justice to Schweitzer's eschatological Jesus without having to reject Jesus as being wrong about the imminence of the Kingdom and also without denying the reality or radical nature of the Kingdom. In his book, The Christian Witness to the State, Yoder summarizes his understanding of New Testament eschatology and acknowledges his indebtedness to Cullmann.\(^{20}\)

2. Yoder's Understanding of New Testament Eschatology: Unlike many others, Yoder believes that it is possible to develop a viable and coherent eschatology on the basis of the exegesis of New Testament materials. The following interpretation of Yoder's eschatology is based on an analysis of how key biblical concepts are used in his various writings. The following eight concepts, considered in their inter-relationship, may be taken as constituting a biblically-based view of history, according to Yoder.

a) The Lordship of Christ. Yoder says: "the triumphant affirmation of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ, by His cross, resurrection, ascension and the pouring out of His Spirit, has triumphed over the Powers."\(^{21}\) This is the concrete meaning of the term "Lord" which is used so often of Jesus in the New Testament. The meaning of the ascension of Jesus Christ to the right hand of the Father is that he is now exercising


\(^{21}\) CWS, 9.
dominion over the world. He has attained this place of rule and authority by virtue of having been raised from the dead by the Father. He will reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. (I Corinthians 15:25)

b) The Two Ages. The present age, which lasts from Pentecost to the Parousia, is one in which the new redemptive reality ushered in by Jesus Christ overlaps with the old aeon which existed before his first coming. The old age is characterized by sin and rebellion against God. The new age, however, is characterized by the reign of Christ. The image suggested by Cullmann to describe the present age is the period of World War II between D-Day and VE-Day. After successfully landing on the beaches of Normandy, the Allied forces steadily moved toward the heart of Germany and the issue of final victory was no longer in doubt. But the war was not over yet. Soldiers still died and individual battles could be won or lost. This is the situation in which the world finds itself now, between Pentecost and the Parousia. The final victory of Jesus Christ is now assured because of the resurrection, but the war is not over yet.

c) The Powers. The "powers" are angelic and demonic entities referred to as thrones, principalities and powers, archangels and dominions in the New Testament. They correspond roughly to what we call "structures" in modern sociological language. They are not under the control of human beings, but they exercise great influence over

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22 CWS, 8.
23 CWS, 8. See also POJ, 136-7.
human affairs. In his last, unpublished section of his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth used the term "The Lordless Powers" to describe them.24

The powers are not entirely or originally evil. Even the demonic powers were once good and can never be totally evil. Yoder states that "Paul contends that the power structures of our world are not devils but creatures, intended for the well-being of humankind, yet 'fallen' and therefore oppressive."25 Jesus disobeys, disarms and saves them from enslavement by dying at their hands. He thereby "tames" them and makes them useable for his purposes.

Yoder proposes that the doctrine of the Powers could function as a substitute for natural theology: "It would not be too much to claim that the Pauline cosmology of the powers represents an alternative to the dominant ("Thomist") vision of 'natural law' as a more biblical way systematically to relate Christ and creation."26 One problem with implementing this suggestion is that most of those who have talked in terms of the "powers" so far have tended to be overwhelmingly negative, and to critics, it all sounds like a denial of the fundamental goodness of creation. But if the analysis of the powers were to explain both the good and bad aspects of the powers, it might help us get a more balanced view of a good, but fallen world.27

The present age is characterized by the defeat of the powers by Jesus Christ by

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26 POJ, 159.

27 Barth's discussion of "The Lordless Powers" in *The Christian Life* (213-33) is a good start in this direction, especially in his contention that the powers are forced to testify to God's power and Christ's lordship even in their rebellion.
means of His resurrection and by His rule over them. However, "the present, paradoxical state of the world" is seen in I Corinthians 15:20-28 where it says that, although Christ is now reigning, not all of His enemies have yet been subjected to him. So, although they have been defeated, the Powers still have great destructive capability and run rampant in the world. One day, every knee will bow "in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10-11, NIV) D-Day has occurred but VE-Day is still future.

d) The Kingdom of God. The phrase "Kingdom of God" can be misleading unless it is understood in terms of the above overlapping of the ages. Jesus came proclaiming the imminence of the Kingdom, as Schweitzer recognized. But Schweitzer failed to grasp that the Kingdom actually did come in one sense, as well as being delayed in another sense. The New Testament language which makes this differentiation is the "Kingdom of the Son" and the "Kingdom of the Father." The reign of the Son is now going on, as we have seen above, but the rule of the Father is still future. In the words of Paul: "Then the end will come, when he hands over the Kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." (I Corinthians 15:24-25 NIV) The message of the church is that the Kingdoms of this world have become the Kingdoms of Christ and are destined to become the Kingdom of God.

e) The Church. The purpose of God in this present age is to create a new society, the church or the body of Christ, in which Jews and Gentiles are made one as an

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28 CWS, 9.
29 Ibid.
eschatological sign of the future Kingdom of God. Jesus made it clear that the Jewish nationalism of his day, which wanted a resumption of the Maccabean struggle on a grander scale, was mistaken. He was a prophet in the line of Jeremiah who, after the monarchy had been given an opportunity to work and had failed miserably, had called the people to a non-national witness to monotheism in the dispersion. The church is not to be identified with any one national, ethnic or local solidarity, but is "an aftertaste of God's loving triumph on the cross and foretaste of His ultimate loving triumph in His Kingdom." The church is made up of those who hear the Gospel and consciously choose to become followers of Jesus Christ. The church is not the Kingdom, but it is the effect of the coming of the Kingdom in Jesus Christ and it bears witness to the coming Kingdom of the Father.

As in Barth's ecclesiology, for Yoder, the church is visible because it is distinct from the world. For Yoder, the church is identified by "baptism, discipline, morality and martyrdom." The church is not simply the result of the Gospel and not simply the bearer of the message. Rather, explains Michael Cartwright, for Yoder, "That men and women are called together to a new social wholeness is itself the work of God that gives

30 See the chapter "Justification by Grace Through Faith" in POJ, 212-27.
31 For an elaboration of this idea see Yoder's essay: "See How They Go With Their Face to the Sun," FTN, 51-78. After the failure of the Zealot revolt of 70 AD and the Bar Kochba revolt of 135 AD, Judaism was reconstituted by the Rabbis along these lines. The rabbis reasoned that God had said no three times to nationalistic uprisings and concluded that God's will was the maintenance of the witness to monotheism among the nations by a scattered, powerless people whose dependence on God would be obvious.
32 CWS, 10.
33 See Barth's CD IV/3:2, 653 for his rejection of "ecclesiological docetism."
34 "The Otherness of the Church," RP, 56. Barth would emphasize only confession and not morality or baptism, because of the dangers of moralism and sacramentalism. (CD IV/3:2, 696) But he would be open to martyrdom, given his contention that "none can be a Christian without falling into affliction" because "the ministry of witness unavoidably brings the Christian into affliction." (618)
meaning to history from which both personal conversion ... and missionary instrumentality are derived.\textsuperscript{35} The church is the meaning of history because it is "the new world on the way."\textsuperscript{36}

f) The World. If the church consists of those who hear Christ's call to discipleship and respond to His Lordship by identifying themselves with His body, the world consists of those who do not follow Jesus Christ. There is thus a clear distinction between the church and the world, a distinction of confession.\textsuperscript{37} Yoder makes the point that, if there is not a clear distinction between church and world, there can be no evangelistic call to a person to enter a new body of persons, distinct from the total society.\textsuperscript{38} If the call cannot be the invitation to join a new society, then the Gospel inevitably becomes interiorized and individualized. The distinction is not between the sinful and the perfect or between those who are evil and those who are good; rather it is between the sinful people who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and who live in the community which confesses Him and strives to follow Him and the sinful people who do not confess Him as Lord and who, therefore, live outside that community in the world.

It should be stressed that the world, for Yoder, is not completely evil. According to the New Testament, the world (\textit{aion houtos} in Paul, \textit{kosmos} in John) "is not creation or nature or the universe, but rather, the fallen state of the same, no longer conformed to the creative intent."\textsuperscript{39} It is "structured unbelief."\textsuperscript{40} The world is "a blend of order and

\textsuperscript{35} "Radical Catholicity, Radical Reform: John Howard Yoder's Vision of the Faithful Church," RP, 27.
\textsuperscript{36} Yoder, "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics," RP, 126.
\textsuperscript{37} See David M. Hughes' discussion of this point in "The Ethical Use of Power: A Discussion With the Christian Perspectives of Reinhold Niebuhr, John Howard Yoder and Richard Barnet," 123.
\textsuperscript{38} "A People in the World," RP, 75.
\textsuperscript{39} "The Otherness of the Church," 55.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 62.
revolt in which the good creation is distorted. Yoder does not deny the goodness of the created order, but he has a strong doctrine of its fallenness. It is the Lordship of Christ which prevents the world from descending into chaos.\(^42\)

**g) The Meaning of History.** The purpose of history is the evangelization of the world by the church so that there will some from every tribe and nation to praise God around the throne. The role of the church is to bear costly witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in word (the preaching of the Gospel) and in deed (in loving service and acts of reconciliation).\(^43\) The witness is costly because the Powers, which have not yet submitted to Christ's Lordship, are still dangerous and hostile.

The Gospel says that the cycle of violence, in which each new act of vengeance elicits a new act of vengeance in return, has been broken in the cross. Jesus absorbed all the violence and hatred the world could hurl at him and bore it without retaliation or bitterness. He died forgiving those who tortured Him. To bear witness to Jesus, the church proclaims the end of the cycle of violence through forgiving love and it does so in word and deed. This is why the church must be pacifist. Logically, there is no other way for it to fulfill its mission of witnessing to the cross and resurrection except to be "participants in the loving nature of God as revealed in Christ."\(^44\) To preach that forgiveness is stronger than hatred and that God's love is freely given to all people in Jesus Christ and then to turn around and engage in acts of violent revenge, punishing the guilty according to what they deserve, would be to contradict in one's deeds the message one preaches in words. So martyrdom will often be the result of confronting the powers

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\(^41\) Ibid., 56.
\(^42\) Ibid., 57.
\(^43\) See the final chapter of POJ, "The War of the Lamb" for Yoder's reflections on the meaning of history.
\(^44\) Ibid., 240.
with a reminder of their defeat by Jesus in His cross and resurrection. Yet, martyrdom is itself witness. Yoder elaborates: "the kind of faithfulness that is willing to accept evident defeat rather than complicity with evil is, by virtue of its conformity with what happens to God when he works among us, aligned with the ultimate triumph of the lamb." The ultimate meaning of history is the cross and the church is to bear costly testimony to this truth in word and deed.

h) The State. If the church must be pacifist in order to bear witness to the lamb who was slain, what plan, then, does God have to ensure the necessary social order for that witness to be made visible? The state plays a role in the current age insofar as it is the instrument of God's providence. Since the state belongs to the old age of sin, it is characterized by "the appeal to force as ultimate authority."

Romans 13:1-7 and I Peter 2:13-14, however, teach that God, in His providence, uses the state to maintain order in society. Since the meaning of history is found in the church and its work of proclaiming the Gospel, the state functions as a means ordained or ordered by God to provide the peace and social order necessary for the work of the church to go on. In this sense, the state is indirectly part of God's plan for the evangelization of the world.

But it is also true that the state, as part of the old order, has no future in the kingdom of God. God's new society will emerge from the church, His new creation. The state is not a means by which God brings His Kingdom into history. However, the Lordship of Jesus over the

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45 Ibid., 238.
46 CWS, 12. Yoder has no doctrine of the state. He simply observes the empirical fact that entities which establish order by the appeal to force do exist.
47 CWS, 13. Yoder does not mean by this statement that the state is Christian.
powers, of which the state is one, means that it is possible for the church to speak to the state in God's name, "not only in evangelism, but in ethical judgment as well."  

Yoder's eschatology can be said to be characterized by a theological realism which undergirds a view of the Lordship of Christ as having visible consequences in history. But his eschatology is only partially-realized. The Kingdom of God has come in the person of Jesus, but it has not yet come in its fullness. Yoder understands the present age, between Pentecost and the Parousia, to be a period of eschatological tension in which the Powers, including the state, still struggle against the church and often appear, at least temporarily, to triumph over God and His cause. The struggles, ambiguities and tensions of this age will continue until a future decisive intervention by God, which will inaugurate the age to come, the age of the final victory of the Lamb. Until then, the disciple and the Christian community as a whole must live by faith, be ready to accept suffering and continue to bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. In Yoder's eschatology there is no shallow, liberal optimism, no doctrine of historical progress, no assurance that the social order is gradually being Christianized. But, on the other hand, there also is no reason to despair, for even Caesar is subject to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the God who raised Jesus from the dead still rules sovereignly over history.

3. The Old Testament Roots of Yoder's Eschatology: Yoder's understanding of New Testament eschatology is rooted in his understanding of the specific way in which the new covenant is a fulfillment of the old covenant. Yoder looks back to the call of Abraham as the beginning of a pattern of divine activity in which a distinct people is

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48 "The Otherness of the Church," RP, 56. The implications of this statement will be explored in Chapter IV of this essay when the charges that Yoder's ethics promote the irrelevance and withdrawal of the church are explored.
called out to witness to the saving grace of God which is for all the nations.\textsuperscript{49} In Abraham, Moses, Gideon and Samuel "He gathered His people around His word and His will."\textsuperscript{50} Yoder believes that a certain continuity of divine purpose can be seen in His historical drive to create a people for Himself. Israel was called to be a light to the nations (election for service, not privilege) and the gentile mission of the New Testament is an extension of the mission of Israel.\textsuperscript{51}

\begin{enumerate}
\item[a)] The Relation of the Testaments. Yoder rejects several standard ways of relating the old and new covenants.\textsuperscript{52} First, he rejects the view of dispensationalism because it entails God acting in contradictory ways in different periods of history and, thus, not always acting in harmony with His own perfect character. Second, he rejects the idea that, in the Old Testament, God was permissive as a concession to the unreadiness of people to accept His perfect will. The problem with this view is that some of what we find problematic in the Old Testament, like the holy wars of Israel, were not permitted, but rather, commanded by God. Third, he rejects the concept of a pedagogical concession as too similar to the liberal evolutionist perspective which tends to be patronizing toward the Old Testament. Fourth, he rejects the division of levels or realms approach in which the Old Testament deals with outward, social reality, while the New Testament deals with inner, personal reality because, in his opinion, the lines simply cannot be drawn that neatly. The Old Testament has a lot to say about personal faith and the New Testament deals with social reality as well.
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\textsuperscript{49} OR, 27.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 28-29.
\textsuperscript{51} Kent Reames notes that, for Yoder, the two key elements of the Abrahamic covenant are: 1) that the people God is calling into existence through Abraham are to be separate from all the other nations and 2) that Abraham is able to trust God to provide in all things. See "Histories of Reason and Revelation: With Alasdair Maclntyre and John Howard Yoder Into Historicist Theology and Ethics," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1997) 132, cf. OR, 27.)
Yoder calls his own approach "the historical view" and he reads the Old Testament as the narrative of "a real word from the true Jahweh of hosts, speaking to His people in historically relevant terms." Like Barth, Yoder emphasizes that the commands of God in the Old Testament were not ethical generalizations or principles, but rather, specific commands directed to people in a very different society from our society. To take the holy wars of Israel as an example, the point of those events was to teach the community that it did not need "any other crutches for one's identity and community as a people than trust in Jahweh as king, who makes it unnecessary to have earthly kings like the neighboring nations." Yoder contends that the holy wars, which were commanded by God were early in Israel's experience and involved miraculous deliverance as did the Red Sea experience itself. When the monarchy arose and the holy war pattern was replaced by standing armies commanded by foreign officers, foreign diplomacy and power politics, war was one of the things condemned bitterly by the prophets, who saw the new developments as poor substitutes for standing still and watching the deliverance of the LORD.

b) The Roots of the Church in Diaspora Judaism. Since he reads the Bible historically, Yoder is able to identify a direction or a trajectory in which the Old Testament is moving and, therefore, is able to specify how the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New. In the exile, Jeremiah called the people to a new way of witnessing to monotheism, one which did not involve a nation-state, a monarchy or the institution of war. The center of gravity shifted from the land to the Diaspora, from the monarchy to

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52 For what follows in this paragraph see: OR, 92-100.
53 Ibid., 107.
54 Ibid.
the synagogue and the rabbinate, and from war to pacifism. Even in the time of Jesus, Palestine was not the undisputed center of world Judaism. After the events of 135, Rabbinic Judaism became the dominant form of Judaism until 1948 and continues to exist side by side with Zionism and the secular state of Israel today.\(^5\)

Yoder believes that the Jesus movement of the early 30's of the first century had far more in common with the Jeremianic vision of Diaspora, synagogue and pacifism, which became the shape of Rabbinic Judaism, than the Maccabean vision of nation, monarchy and war. In fact, Yoder sees the church as the final step in the development of an alternative to a racially-based, militaristic, violent, worldly, people of God.\(^5\) While Yoder sees real historical movement through the prophets and the monarchy to the exile and up to Jesus, that movement was not an evolution from primitive to higher ethical codes, but an increasingly precise definition of the nature of peoplehood. Actually, Yoder sees the Old Testament as moving upward in the call of Abraham and the Exodus, downward in the development of the monarchy, upward in the exilic vision of Jeremiah and downward in the return under Ezra and Nehemiah. None of these stages, however, could be considered as either all bad or all good. God was at work in all of them and obedience was imperfect in all of them.

The novelty of the new society created by Jesus was three-fold: first, it was a voluntary society - one could not be born into it; second, it was mixed racially, religiously and economically; and third, it was characterized by a new set of relationships.

\(^5\) Yoder notes that "after the end of kingship and the loss of the Jerusalem Temple, Jewry survived not by creating a surrogate for the Temple so as to keep using the priesthood, but by inventing a new role, that of the rabbi, steward of the Torah and a new social instrument, the synagogue, formed of any ten households with no religious specialists needed at all. (BP, 56.)
\(^6\) See "Introduction," PK, 10-12.
in which sharing, forgiving and suffering were prominent.\textsuperscript{57} We have not understood Yoder's view of the eschatological character of the church unless we have understood it as the culmination of all that God had been doing throughout salvation history and we have not understood the importance of pacifism until we have understood the mission of the church in its eschatological context. Yoder says:

> Once one's own national existence is no longer seen as a guarantee of Jahweh's favor, then to save this national existence by holy war is no longer a purpose for which miracles would be expected. Thus the dismantling of the applicability of the concept of the holy war takes place not by promulgation of a new ethical demand but by a restructuring of the Israelite perception of community under God.\textsuperscript{58}

Yoder claims that this awareness of the new concept of peoplehood proclaimed by Jesus was not entirely new. The Old Testament exilic and post-exilic prophecies were the inspiration for what Jesus taught and did, although there is definitely a sense of fulfillment in his proclamation which is new. Yoder claims that, once the covenant is seen to be open to all people, then the outsider can no longer be perceived as less important than the insider and certainly cannot be seen as an object worth sacrificing for the sake of the nation.\textsuperscript{59} No nation or state can now claim to be the bearer of the Abrahamic covenant, for that is the role of the church. But that claim, as we are about to see, is exactly what is entailed in Constantinianism.

**B. The Heresy of Constantinianism**

In order to understand what Yoder means by Constantinianism, we must first note that his concept of Constantinianism is not simply a description of the historical career of

\textsuperscript{57} OR, 29.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
the man, Constantine the Great, and his personal influence in history, but rather, a heresy named for an historical figure, like Arianism or Pelagianism.\textsuperscript{60} Constantinianism is not, for Yoder, a complete description of any single church, movement or figure in history. Nor was it embraced fully and absolutely by any particular part of the church. Nor has it ever characterized the entire church of any age.\textsuperscript{61} Rather, Yoder means by Constantinianism an heretical eschatology, that is, one which is heretical precisely in that it denies or distorts all eight of the points made above in summary of New Testament eschatology.\textsuperscript{62} Constantinianism proceeds as if the life, death, resurrection and ascension of the messiah had never occurred and this leads to the repetition of many of the errors made by God's people in the Old Testament.

While it is true that Constantinianism has been prevalent within Christendom, it would not quite be accurate to say that Yoder simply and completely equates the two. Oliver O'Donovan, in a book which defends the idea of Christendom, defines it as "a historical idea . . . the idea of a professedly Christian secular political order, and the history of that idea in practice."\textsuperscript{63} O'Donovan interprets Stanley Hauerwas as equating

\textsuperscript{60} Yoder, "The Disavowal of Constantine," RP, 245.

\textsuperscript{61} These three qualifications are necessary because Yoder is sometimes interpreted as being overly dismissive of too much of Christian history. For example, James Reimer criticizes Yoder's critique of Constantinianism as a "shibboleth for all that is bad." Reimer continues: "There were many serious Christians, including theologians, clerics and statesmen, who were attempting to address the profound issues raised by their cultures in the light of the gospel." ("Mennonites, Christ and Culture: The Yoder Legacy," CGR vol. 16, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 10-11.) It must be admitted that Yoder can sometimes sound this way and the point is well taken. However, this would not be Yoder's considered opinion.

\textsuperscript{62} Zimbleman notes that at times Yoder appears to mean by "Constantinianism" the restructuring of the Roman Empire around the faith, but more often he means to refer to "the general tendency growing out of the alliance of church and state that rejects fundamental elements of a proper eschatology." ("Theological Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Juan Luis Segundo and John Howard Yoder," 219.) The former would be just one particular historical instantiation of the latter.

\textsuperscript{63} The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1996), 195.
Constantinianism with Christendom and as attacking both. While this may be accurate with regard to Hauerwas, it would not quite be fair to view Yoder as simply an echo of Hauerwas at this point because Yoder discusses the possibility of the ruler being converted and governing in a Christian way at several points in his writings. He claims that such a possibility is highly unlikely, but should not be dismissed a priori. It is not what O'Donovan refers to as "the obedience of rulers" which is the problem, but rather, the disobedience of rulers to the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the problem for Yoder. Although Yoder does not rule out the Christendom idea a priori, he does believe that the historical period in which it was a real possibility has now passed. Therefore, he concludes that the vision of creating a fusion of church and state, a total Christian society, must be abandoned.

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64 See, for example, Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, Resident Aliens (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989) and After Christendom (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991).
65 See, for example, Yoder's section entitled "What If There Had Been a Stronger Faith?" (WPR, 53-54). Here he speculates about the hypothetical possibility that Constantine might have been converted and then obeyed Jesus Christ as Caesar. "... would not the divine sovereignty be able to bless the believing obedience of a Caesar who, taking the risk of faith like any other believer, from his position of relative power, would love his enemies and do justice?" Yoder says that his enemies might triumph over him, but that often happens to rulers anyway. He might be killed or suffer or not stay in office all his life, but these things happen to rulers all the time. He might have to ask his followers to suffer, but emperors are accustomed to asking people to suffer for them. Yoder contends that it is not necessary, but in fact a denial of divine providence, to assume that, if Constantine had "taken on the substance of Christian discipleship rather than only the name and baptism," nothing could have been achieved. See also Yoder's discussion of the Pennsylvania experiment (WPR, 259-96).
66 This is the title of Chapter 6 of The Desire of the Nations.
67 "The Racial revolution in Theological Perspective," FTN, 107. Even many of those who have thought that Christendom was a good idea in the past are now openly wondering if, perhaps, it is passe. See, for example, Paul Ramsey's questions along this line in his Speak Up For Just War or Pacifism: A Critique of the United Methodist Bishops' Pastoral Letter "In Defense of Creation" (University Park, Pa.: The State University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988). In this remarkable book, Ramsey wonders out loud if the time has not come to embrace the sectarian option and judges it to be "possible in principle." (128) He also states that the Niebuhrian charges of withdrawal and ineffectiveness against pacifism needs to be withdrawn and he recognizes that Yoder is trying to find a way out of the "guilty responsibility" versus "irrelevant purity" dilemma. (119) He asks: "Perhaps fidelity to Christ would have us, in this time and place, turn in that direction - and therefore away from speaking for the church to the church and to the nation and to one another as citizens of an armed power in the internationalism system." (142) Finding himself unable to pronounce a firm "No" to sectarianism, he finally says a halting, tentative "Not yet" to the sectarian option. (128)
1. Constantinianism As the Reversal of New Testament Eschatology: We are now ready to specify the ways in which Constantinianism denies or distorts the eight points of New Testament eschatology listed above.

a) The Lordship of Christ. It denies the Lordship of Christ by placing the human king, emperor or other ruler(s) in the place of Jesus. Now this denial can happen in different ways and to different degrees. Yoder recognizes the right of governments to command the obedience of Christians except where such commands go against the will of God. But, he says, the state must be rejected when it demands "worship us" or "kill for us." Here is the point of testing. When the concrete lordship of Jesus is modified, qualified, contradicted or otherwise set aside by the state, then we have Constantinianism.

The glorification of the Emperor also qualifies the kind of lordship taught by Jesus in a more subtle manner as well. Yoder states that:

although the original message of Jesus was compromised in other ways, in the course of the process that created 'Christendom,' the most fundamental apostasy, which enabled and ratified the other kinds of betrayal, was the reversal of Jesus' attitude toward kingship in favor of the 'Constantinian' glorification of imperial autocracy and wealth."

Jesus taught his disciples that whoever wants to be great in the Kingdom must become the servant of all. (Mark 9:34) Furthermore, he taught them that they must not be like the kings of the gentiles who rule over people and let themselves be called benefactors. Instead they are to be servants. (Luke 22: 25-27) Yoder comments:

Why then should there be anything wrong with Christianity's becoming an official ideology? It must be because that change itself calls into question something definitional about the faith. Perhaps this would not need to be absolutely true. It nonetheless tends to be the case, in the experience of the Christianity community,
that the only way in which the faith can become the official ideology of a power elite in a given society is if Jesus Christ ceases to be concretely Lord.\footnote{\textit{The Kingdom as a Social Ethic}, PK, 85. See also \textit{The Christian Case For Democracy}, PK, 156f.}

The Lordship of Christ means a new way of living for his disciples which the way of service, not power politics.

b) The Two Ages. In Constantinianism, the church basically lives in the old age, while the new age is either: 1) fused with the old age, 2) pushed into the future or 3) relegated to the realm of the ideal in some sort of metaphysical dualism.\footnote{Yoder, \textit{The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics}, PK, 140f.} All three views of what happens to the new age have been advocated by apologists for Constantinianism at different times and in different places. Yoder cites Eusebius of Cæsarea who was an advocate of the view that the two ages have come together.\footnote{WPR, 43f.} Augustine relegated the Kingdom to the realm of the ideal by means of his neoplatonic philosophy.\footnote{Ibid.} Many modern day premillenialists would justify Constantinianism by making the Kingdom a totally future reality. All of these strategies have in common the easing of the eschatological tensions between the "already" and the "not yet" which are so difficult to keep together.

c) The Powers. Kent Reames points out that, for Yoder, the structural denial of Christ's victory over the powers is a way of explicating the Constantinian error.\footnote{\textit{Into Histories of Reason and Revelation: With Alasdair MacIntyre and John Howard Yoder Into Historicist Theology and Ethics}, 186.} This can happen in two ways. First, if there is no consciousness of a need for such a victory then the Constantinian error can be understood as a denial of the Fall. This is a theological error. Second, there can be a recognition of the power of the Powers and a strategic decision to compromise with them in the name of "realism." This is a
theological error and a moral error as well. The purpose of the church is to confront the powers and bear witness to Christ's victory over them, even if this involves suffering persecution, not to give credence to their claims to be absolute.

d) The Kingdom of God. The most blasphemous aspect of Constantinianism is the arrogating to a human construction the title of the Kingdom of God. To identify the institutional church with the Kingdom of God is to remove the ideal of the Kingdom as a critical lever by which to judge the faithfulness of the church. As Yoder puts it,

with the age of Constantine, Providence no longer needed to be an object of faith, for God's governance of history had become empirically evident in the person of the Christian ruler of the world. The concept of the millenium was pulled back from the future (whether distant or imminent) into the present. All that God can possibly have in store for a future victory is more of what has already been won.\footnote{\textit{The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics}," PK, 136-7.}  

This kind of doctrine leads to the \textit{hubris} expressed in empire, conquest, crusade and persecution of religious minorities. Nationalism, however, must be rejected by those who live in the new age and look forward to the Kingdom of God.\footnote{OR, 61.}

However, it is possible to have a form of Constantinianism in which the state does not identify itself with the Kingdom of God. As noted above, the Kingdom can be spiritualized, made into a metaphysical ideal with no empirical reality or pushed into the future. By not identifying itself as the Kingdom of God, the Constantinian state can be much more humble and much more open to criticism. But what Constantinianism always does is to deny the power of the present reality of the Kingdom in the name of "realism."

e) The Church. In Constantinianism, the church is no longer a body of people who have a different lifestyle, but rather, an aspect of society. Yoder states:

Before Constantine, one knew as a fact of everyday experience that there was a believing Christian community but one had to 'take it on faith' that God was
governing history. After Constantine, one had to believe without seeing that there was a community of believers, within the larger nominally Christian mass, but one knew for a fact that God was in control of history.77

The church becomes a part of culture. It becomes the institution which services the entire population with a certain category of "religious services." The church is the service station for the "crisis experiences" and for the "depth dimensions" of life. Christianity becomes a "religion" and religion is what holds a society together.78 The church becomes the social institution which is concerned with the inward and the personal, while issues of power and justice are delegated to other institutions.79 Thus, the church is de-ethicized.

f) The World. Constantinianism's basic failure is that of not distinguishing between the church and the world. The world comes to be in the church and the church becomes worldly. The problem is not the engagement of the world by the church, but rather, the comfortable co-existence that results in the loss of witness. As Cartwright points out, the church's witness to the world in Yoder's thought takes the form of an evangelical nonconformity in and for the world.80 The term "royal" affirms the power of the servant community and the term "priestly" affirms the fact that the church does not exist for itself, but to be the bearer of reconciliation. Yoder's view of mission is similar to Barth's in that he contends that the world needs the church in order to know itself as the world.81 God allows the world the freedom to be the world, which in turn creates the

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77 Yoder, "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," PK, 137.
78 Yoder, WPR, 52.
79 Yoder, "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," PK, 141.
80 "Radical Catholicity, Radical Reform: John Howard Yoder's Vision of the Faithful Church," RP, 2.
81 See Barth's Par. 72 "The Holy Spirit and the Sending of the Christian Community" in CD IV/3:2, 681-901 and, in particular, his correction of the Reformers' definition of the church in such a way that its mission is not its essence. (767) This sense of the church being for the world distinguishes Yoder's position from that of Stanley Hauerwas and at least partly explains why Yoder entitled his last book For the
necessary pre-condition for repentance and conversion. But Constantinianism does not give the world this freedom and, therefore, ceases to witness.

g) The Meaning of History. According to Yoder, what happened in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus altered history. Indeed, for Yoder, the Lordship of Christ is what defines history. As Zimbleman points out, history is incomprehensible for Yoder apart from the self-revelation of God. Therefore, Yoder rejects all visions of history which lack a proper eschatological vision and which reflect a non-Christocentric fundamental orientation.

Yoder critiques the Constantinian theory of causation, which presupposes a closed system of cause and effect in the universe, and which therefore supposes that prediction and calculation are feasible. Zimbleman summarizes this critique in three statements. First, Constantinianism tends to underestimate the effect of sin on human ego, rationality and intellectual capacities. Second, Constantinianism makes providence no longer a matter of faith, but within the control of the ruler. Third, Constantinianism holds individuals and collectives responsible for acts of omission in ways that contradict other important formulations of human agency and culpability.

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83 Zimbleman, "Theological Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Juan Luis Segundo and John Howard Yoder," 218.
84 Ibid., 222-3.
85 Yoder has been criticized for not having a more explicit doctrine of sin. See Robert Parham's comments in "An Ethical Analysis of the Christian Social Strategies in the Perspectives of John C. Bennett, Jacques Ellul and John Howard Yoder," 197-8. But Yoder's view of sin seems to be pervasive, given his suspicion of the function of ideologies of power.
86 Yoder, WPR, 44.
87 Yoder notes that this is a Constantinian perspective because it thinks from the perspective of the one in power. But "the entire landscape looks different from a position of weakness. If you could not have
There are two problems with this theory of causation: its lack of realism and its constriction of vision. First, it is naïve because, as Yoder puts it, "It has yet to be demonstrated that history can be moved in the direction in which one claims the duty to cause it to go." This is ironic, since Constantinianism is usually defended by appeals to realism. But Yoder does not believe that the universe is a closed system. And even if it was, the Constantinian theory forgets that there is more than one moral actor. The calculation of one moral actor can be skewed by the unanticipated actions of other moral actors. The point is that human nature is not fully predictable.

Second, by assuming that if God wants something done, He is going to do it through the ruler, Christians tend to define what God wants by what it is possible for rulers to do. This leads Christians to forget that the church needs to do what only the church can do. But, says Yoder:

That Christian pacifism which has a theological basis in the character of God and the work of Jesus Christ is one in which the calculating link between our obedience and ultimate efficacy has been broken, since the triumph of God comes through resurrection and not through effective sovereignty or assured survival.

A view of history which has no need of the miraculous is one which is sub-Christian, for Yoder, because "Christian ethics calls for behaviour which is impossible except by the miracles of the Holy Spirit."  

h) The State. In Constantinianism, the state becomes the bearer of the meaning of

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stopped something, then you are not to blame when it happens." ("The Kingdom As A Social Ethic," PK, 100.)

87 POJ, 230. Yoder notes that this is the phenomenon which Reinhold Niebuhr called "irony."

89 Alasdair Maclntyre writes convincingly of the lack of predictive power by the social sciences and the reasons for it in his chapter "The Character of Generalizations in Social Science and Their Lack of Predictive Power." After Virtue 2nd ed., (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 88-108. The belief that bureaucratic managers and social scientists can predict future human behaviour rationally is part of the myth of the Enlightenment which makes us comfortable in arrogating to ourselves as a civilization god-like characteristics and roles.

91 POJ, 239.

92 "Let the Church Be the Church," RP, 174.
history and thus takes the place of the church eschatologically. Yoder notes that most Americans expect salvation in history to come from America, and not from the church. In fact, the nation has become a substitute church.\(^93\) Yoder thinks that it is possible to reject this extreme position and still have a relatively high view of the state: "In rejecting the idea that the norms for the social order are revealed in some order of creation, we do not mean to deny the foundation of human society within the creative intention of God."\(^94\) Of course, it must be remembered that, for Yoder, the ultimate intention for human society is revealed in the church and the role of the state is to provide order so that God's purposes can be revealed through the body of Christ.\(^95\) Yet, the state can be affirmed as part of God's providential care for His creation and as the means by which social chaos can be restrained so that the preaching of the Gospel can go ahead. Yoder says, "Vengeance itself, the most characteristic manifestation of evil, instead of creating chaos as is its nature, is harnessed through the state in such a way as to preserve order and give room for the growth of the church."\(^96\)

But it must not be forgotten that vengeance, even when "harnessed" by the mysterious providence of God, is evil. Therefore, Yoder argues that no doctrine of the state is given in the New Testament and none is needed. He says,

It is thus formally wrong to look in the New Testament for specific guidelines for a good civil society... We should look rather for a general orientation toward ultimate human values and the nature of redemption, and then ask for our time what those meanings have to say.\(^97\)

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 176-7. Does not the reality of American, right-wing, civil religion constitute the strongest challenge to the defender of the viability of the Christendom idea today? Yoder thinks so.

\(^{94}\) CWS, 34.

\(^{95}\) "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics," RP, 126. Yoder puts it somewhat more colorfully in his lectures to his students: "What God wants of Christians is to love their enemies and suffer. What God wants of Caesar is to be decent and not persecute the Christians." (WPR, 449.)

\(^{96}\) OR, 62.

A Christian view of the state will not expect redemption from the state and will be realistic in understanding the limits of how Christian it can become. On the other hand, the historical situation varies enormously in terms of how much can be expected. The Christians in first-century Rome or contemporary China could expect far less from their government than could the Christians in England in the age of the Wesleys or contemporary Canada, given the historical situations.

A Constantinian view of the state is one which seeks to define the state and its function of restraining evil in terms of creation orders or natural law. Yoder denies that there is any such thing as a "state as such." He points out that even theologians in the tradition of Karl Barth who reject the idea of natural law still tend to retain some conception of "the state as such" or "the legal state." However, Yoder rejects all such "legitimist" theories of that state, that is, ones which claim to be able "to tell accurately the specific point at which a state would move from sobriety into idolatry." As Yoder points out, Romans 13 does not qualify the Christian responsibility to be subject to the state by commanding subjection only to "legitimate" ones. Very often, a comparison is drawn between the "legitimate state" of Romans 13 and the "illegitimate state" of Revelation 13. But no more is said about resisting or rebelling in Revelation 13 than is

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98 The view of David Hughes that Yoder is guilty of "demonizing the state with his Hobbsian reduction of the state to a monopoly on violence" must be rejected as too extreme. ("The Ethical Uses of Power: A Discussion With the Christian Perspectives of Reinhold Niebuhr, John Howard Yoder and Richard J. Barnet," 155.) Yoder specifically refuses to "let fallenness define essence" and strongly denies that violence is the essence of the state. Rather, it is the *ultima ratio*, its outer edge. Yoder says that in taking this position he is siding with Barth and Biblical Realism against the Lutherans and Weberians. (WPR, 295.)
99 WPR, 26f.
100 CWS, 79-80.
101 Ibid., 80.
102 WPR, 449.
said in Romans 13. Yoder rejects this view also as, perhaps, the height of Constantinianism. Between these two views, Yoder carves out a third position. He urges subjection to whatever state exists, but obedience only when the commands of rulers do not conflict with the will of God. Thus, the Christian may disobey, but never rebel. Suffering is always a possibility. The basis for the Christian witness to the state is not a theory of the state, but the reign of Christ.

We have now examined how Constantinianism distorts or denies what Yoder understands to be the eschatology of the New Testament. It denies the Lordship of Christ, dissolves the tension between the two ages created by the reign of Christ, fails to recognize Christ's victory over the Powers, denies the power of the Kingdom of God, causes the church to abandon its mission and become the religious component of a particular culture, fails to recognize the freedom of the unbelieving world to rebel, operates with a naturalistic view of history by failing to acknowledge that the life, death and resurrection of Christ has fundamentally altered history, and substitutes the state for the church as the bearer of the meaning of history. Yoder responds to Constantinianism by saying: first, "Let the church be the church," second, "Let individuals be reconciled to God" and third, "Let the state be the state." Yoder's definition of eschatology is "a hope which, defying present frustration, defines a present position in terms of the yet unseen goal which gives it meaning." Constantinianism is an attempt to have peace

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103 POJ, 206.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid., 198-209.
106 OR, 75.
without eschatology, or perhaps one could say, an attempt to live as though this present
world were permanent. As such, it represents a denial of Jesus Christ as He is testified to

2. Constantinianism as a Return to the Solomonic Temptation: In spite of the
fact that Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant theologians frequently have appealed
to the Old Testament as the source of their Constantinian ideals, Yoder does not believe
that the Old Testament justifies Constantinianism any more than the New Testament
does. Yoder claims that the thrust of the canon of Scripture as a whole is narrowed when,
"as we have done it in the West from Augustine through Luther and Pietism to
Kierkegaard, Bultmann and Billy Graham, its focus is upon a righteousness which is
coram Deo, in 'the heart,' and not 'merely' civil." This narrowing is potentially, though
not necessarily, a betrayal. It is betrayal if it prevents us from seeing the fact that the
canon of Scripture as a whole also involves the social embodiment of true faith: "To this
challenge the canonical answer is clear, against all apoliticisms. From Abraham to the
Apocalypse, the city God builds is on earth." The focus on the inner and the personal
becomes betrayal when it denies that "the newness of the gospel can take on flesh." Yoder refuses to play off the supposed outward-focussed, socially-concerned, institution-
building Old Testament against the supposed inward-focussed, individual-oriented, anti-
institutional New Testament. He sees the entire canon as being concerned for a faith
which is both a matter of the heart and expressed in institutions and politics as well.

108 "The Bible and Civil Turmoil." FTN, 82.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
The "Solomonic Temptation" is the same as the Constantinian one when it reduces the reordering demanded by the prophetic Word and enables the hallowing of the present order. Speaking of both temptations, Yoder states: "It becomes betrayal when any power structure is identified as the order God desires." The prophetic critique of the David-Solomon monarchy focussed on the failure of the kings to conform to the Torah. The economic oppression, idolatry, power politics, class divisions and standing army all combined to give the monarchy a stake in the maintenance of social order and the suppression of dissent. Since no social order in this sinful world can be perfect, to sacralize or sanctify or hallow one is always a form of idolatry in and of itself. Yoder notes that the Old Testament portrays the Davidic dynasty as a disappointment, not only to Samuel, but to God.

Yoder argues that, under Jeremiah, the Jews came to see powerlessness as normal and Diaspora as a vocation given by grace and as permanent for the age until the messiah comes. He further holds that Jesus, as a prophet in the line of Jeremiah, reinforced this attitude:

Jesus' impact in the first century added more and deeper authentically Jewish reasons, and reinforced and further validated the already expressed Jewish reasons, for the already well established ethos of not being in charge and not considering any local state structure to be the primary bearer of the movement of history.

Jesus founded a renewed Israel by choosing the Twelve. He founded a renewed and restructured people of God in which the key was faith, not ethnicity. The messianic congregations which sprang up around the Mediterranean basin during the first century

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111 Ibid., 83.
112 "See How They Go With Their Faces to the Sun," FTN, 60.
113 Ibid., 61-65.
114 Ibid., 69.
were similar in structure and ethos to the synagogue-based Rabbinic Judaism which had taken shape during the Diaspora. Yoder says, "Until the messianity of Jesus was replaced by that of Constantine, it was the only ethos that made sense."\textsuperscript{115}

3. Constantinianism in Western History: Section B of this chapter so far has examined Yoder's understanding of Constantinianism as an eschatological heresy which distorts the main points of New Testament eschatology and has looked briefly at Yoder's critique of Constantinianism as constituting an inadequate reading of the Old Testament. The daunting task still remains, however, of attending to Yoder's reading of Western history as the story of the rise and fall of Christendom and the remarkable persistence of the Constantinian heresy up to the present.\textsuperscript{116} Yoder has provided both brief overviews of Constantinianism in Western history and detailed investigations of specific episodes in that story which grapple with specific issues and situations.\textsuperscript{117} This summary will follow the argument as it is developed both in the essays and in his studies in historical theology.

Yoder sees the events of the fourth century as having explicable historical causes and not as the sudden appearance from nowhere of an entirely new attitude toward the state on the part of the church. As we saw above, Yoder contends that early Christianity assumed the shape and ethos of the Jeremianic vision of Diaspora, synagogue and pacifism. As Messianic Judaism quickly spread around the Mediterranean basin, inevitably it encountered the Greco-Roman world. Yoder rejects both the view that the story of the church is one of constant, upward progress and the opposite extreme that the

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{116} The task is daunting because of the sheer volume of Yoder's historical writings. See the "Introduction," of this essay, 8, n. 21.
\textsuperscript{117} See, in particular, the three essays in "Part B: History" of PK and the early essays "The Otherness of the Church" and "Peace Without Eschatology" which have been reprinted in RP. See the works of historical theology cited above (Introduction, 8, n. 21) for the detailed study of specific episodes.
first-century Christians are the norm, from which Christendom later fell away. His own view is that no period of church history is absolutely authoritative and that the Incarnation stands in judgment of all subsequent developments. However, the early Christians at least had the advantage of reading the Bible in the same world and language as it had been written in, and so their example must be taken with the utmost seriousness.

Yoder locates the roots of the "fall of the church" or Constantinianism as early as the second century in "the betrayal of the Jewishness of the early church, as the Christian apologists of the second and third centuries moved into Hellenistic culture." Yoder observes a "slow shift" in the second half of the second century as it become apparent that some Christians were beginning to do what the leaders still said was wrong, like serving in the army. He also points to what he terms "creeping empire loyalty," which develops as persecution recedes, more intellectuals join the church and Christians find themselves occupying positions of authority, often due to their reputation for hard work and integrity. The number of Christians was also growing and is estimated by Yoder to be approximately ten per cent of the population by the year 300.

The upheavals between 300 and 410, which led to the fall of Rome, created the conditions for a drastic reversal of policy in which Christians went from being a persecuted minority to being tolerated in 311, to a favored status under Constantine, to

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118 See the discussion of this point in Chapter 1, Section A above.
120 "The Authority of Tradition," PK, 73. Yoder says that the Apologists "are missionary in that they try to show the Gentiles that they can have the God of the Jews without the Jews." He goes so far as to say that insofar as this is a sell-out to Greek or Roman provincialism instead of Hebrew universality, this move can be identified as "the Fall of the Church." (Yoder, as quoted by G. Gerber Koontz, "Confessional Theology in Pluralistic Context: A Study of the Theological Ethics of H. Richard Niebuhr and John H. Yoder," 218.)
121 WPR, 30.
122 WPR, 32.
legal establishment under Theodosius, who outlawed non-Christian worship in 390. In 420 Augustine called on the Roman government to bring the Donatists back into line and the first persecution by Christians occurred. In 436, non-Christians were excluded from the army and a two century long process can be said to have resulted in the birth of Christendom. The development of hierarchy and sacerdotalism, which gradually came to overshadow synagogue polity, are seen by Yoder as a "fall back into the pre-Jeremianic patterns of Hellenistic paganism."¹²³

But Constantine did not change everything. The monastic movement may be seen as a protest against Constantinianism, which preserves the memory of the earlier, pacifist community of disciples.¹²⁴ In the Middle Ages, Yoder points out that most of the church was still pacifist, even though the Caesars, the princes and their soldiers were permitted to kill in war. People who have shed blood even in a just war did not have access to the Eucharist without a period of penance¹²⁵ and could never become priests. There were several dissenting groups such as the Franciscan penitents, the Brethren of the Common Life, the Waldensians and the Czech Brethren, who rejected violence.¹²⁶

Rabbinic Judaism, from 135 on, was "generally characterized as never justifying violence" and was able to keep its identity without possessing national sovereignty. In other words, says Yoder, "Judaism through the Middle Ages demonstrated the sociological viability of the ethic of Jesus. Judaism in terms of actual ethical performance represents the most important medieval sect living the ethic of Jesus under

¹²³ "See How They Go With Their Faces to the Sun," 71, n. 48.
¹²⁴ Ibid., 51.
¹²⁵ WPR, 115.
¹²⁶ WPR, 118.
Christendom." This is an intriguing point. Could it have anything to do with the anti-Semitism of Christendom? It has always been difficult to explain the apparent felt need of so many Constantinian Christians to persecute Jews and Yoder's observations at this point are suggestive. Could part of the explanation be a latent Christian consciousness of the moral superiority of the non-violent lifestyle adopted by the Jews coupled with the moral questionableness of the Constantinian lifestyle with its compromise with violence? Is it possible that the witness of living out the lifestyle of Jesus cannot help but infuriate those who claim to follow Him, but live by the sword? These are the kind of questions raised by Yoder's analysis, even though Yoder himself does not raise them.

Once Christianity had become identified with empire, the concept of mission changed. Mission within the empire was basically education, rather than evangelism, and the emphasis tended to be on enforcing outward conformity. Yoder refers to this development as "the Puritan misunderstanding." Mission outside the empire was not common, except in tandem with political conquest. The era of Charlemagne was an era of annexation as "the name of Jesus is now intoned over a Germanic culture without changing its inner content, as it had been intoned over Graeco-Roman culture for half a millenium before." The Crusades represented the apex of Constantinianism because they embodied the total reversal of regard for the outsider. Rather than seeing the

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127 Ibid., 125. Yoder summarizes the basis of Jewish pacifism in five points: 1) the sacredness of blood for blood is life and belongs to God, 2) the messiah has not yet come, 3) the lessons of the Zealot experience which did not result in righteousness even when partially successful militarily, 4) the wisdom in which God presides over the affairs of the Goyim is not revealed to us in any simple way, and 5) there is a place for suffering in the divine economy. (127-8)
128 "The Racial Revolution in Theological Perspective," FTN, 112. More than just the Puritans have fallen prey to this misunderstanding.
129 Yoder, "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," 137. No doubt, defenders of Christendom would want to argue for a slow process of cultural change which would be seen as far more significant than Yoder would acknowledge. This is a partly an historical and partly a theological debate.
outsider as "the test of one's love" (Matthew 5:43ff) or as "the proof of the new age's having come (Ephesians 2), the outsider had now become the "infidel" to be destroyed as proof of one's true faith without regard even for the usual rules for a just war.  

The Protestant Reformation brought about an intensification of Constantinianism in several ways. First, there could now be holy wars against other Christian nations. Second, whereas at least a pretense of universality was possible with the Roman Empire, the nation-states of early modern Europe now take on a degree of autonomy never before seen in Western culture and each nation-state has its own church to bless its actions. The decision of the magisterial reformers to call on local princes to defend the reformation against its enemies created national churches. Third, since the wars of religion of the seventeenth century were fought for "The Faith," the identification of the Christian population with the war aims of the government assumes a new level. The foundation was laid for modern ideological and total war. As Yoder puts it, "the basic Constantinian vision remains, only on a much smaller, provincial scale." This he calls neo-Constantinianism.

After the Enlightenment and the Age of Revolution, religious liberty and disestablishment weakened the ties between church and state as institutions. But "American patriotism remains highly religious" and the nation is seen as Christian.

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130 Ibid., 138.
131 Ibid., 141.
132 This is why the just war theory becomes a matter of doctrine in the Reformation confessions for the first time. Pacifism is thus a heresy for Protestants, although it has never been identified as such in the Roman Catholic Church. (Yoder, "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," 144) See Mark Noll, Creeds and Confessions of the Reformation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) for the Augsburg Confession, Article 16: "Christians may without sin occupy civil offices or serve as princes or judges, render decisions and pass sentences according to imperial and other existing laws, punish evildoers with the sword, engage in just wars, serve as soldiers ..." (92) and the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England, Article 37: "It is lawful for Christian men, at the commandment of the magistrate, to wear weapons and serve in the wars." (226)
133 Ibid., 142.
Yoder calls this neo-neo-Constantinianism. In our own century, we see religious persecution of Christians, for example in Eastern Europe, and yet Christians remain patriotic. Their response is to claim that they should not be persecuted because their faith does not make them disloyal to the nation. In the case of the USSR, the Orthodox Church was financed by a Marxist regime because of the resultant benefit to public relations on the world stage. Yoder calls this neo-neo-neo-Constantinianism. Finally, one more twist comes when God's cause (and the loyalty of Christians) is identified with some future "revolution" or hope which is yet to come. This is termed neo-neo-neo-neo-Constantinianism.

What is lost in Constantinianism? First, there is the lost of catholicity as the unit of loyalty becomes smaller and smaller. Second, there is the loss of the church's capacity to be critical of the regime. The power of the bishops and the pope to limit violence in the Middle Ages was considerable (rules of chivalry, the Peace of God, the civil exemption of the clergy, the immunities of pilgrims, just war criteria). Third, there is the loss of connection to the example of Jesus. Yoder notes that "what the churches accepted in the Constantinian shift is what Jesus had rejected, seizing godlikeness, moving in hoc signo from Golgotha to the battlefield." The proper response to this story, Yoder asserts, is repentance: the "disavowal" of Constantine.

C. The Charge of Sectarianism: An Evaluation

Having examined Yoder's view of Constantinianism as an eschatological heresy, we now turn to the charge of sectarianism which is often leveled against Yoder's theology.

134 "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," 144.
135 Ibid., 145.
and ethics. Is it possible to reject Constantinianism without cutting oneself off from moral discourse with those with whom one disagrees in fundamental ways? By adopting what appears (from a Constantinian perspective) to be a "sectarian" stance, does Yoder forfeit his right to critique the state or the wider community? Is it possible to take the kind of position which Yoder takes on natural theology and still have meaningful conversation about moral issues with non-Christians? Yoder does believe that the grounding of Christian ethics in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ and the rejection of Constantinianism has implications for Christian ethical method, but he would not describe those implications as sectarian, except as a terminological concession made in order to facilitate the opening of dialogue.

1. Constantinian Moral Epistemology: Yoder rejects the need for meta-ethics or fundamental moral theology and identifies the attempt to formulate such systematic bases for Christian ethics as a Constantinian project. He rejects the idea that we must establish a set of agreed-upon axioms as the foundation for ethical debate. Instead, he suggests that the confession of rootedness in historical community is the place to start.136 He also acknowledges that it is impossible to establish, either speculatively or from historical examples, a consistent anti-Constantinian model: "The denunciation of paganization must always be missionary and ad hoc; it will be in language as local and timely as the abuses it critiques."137

This means that Yoder is not committed to any one method in Christian ethics. He does not think ethical approaches can be categorized as either deontological or teleological or characterial if the point is to suggest that ethics can be done using one

137 "The Disavowal of Constantine," RP, 250.
method alone. He argues that deontological rigor is good for defending the absent, but wrongly used if taken to mean that in every situation there is only one imperative with no collisions. Consequential rigor is good as an acknowledgement of the length-dimension of our actions, but wrong if it is thought that it is possible to know all the costs and benefits in advance and also wrong if it is thought that cost/benefit analyses do not themselves involve prior deontological value judgments. The language of virtue is fine to acknowledge the depth dimensions of personality and culture and to negate punctualism, but it is wrong when it suggests that the virtuous person can operate without the resources of the other orders, as if there were a built-in moral compass, un fallen or easily repaired despite the Fall. He concludes: "Instead of seeking to settle on the one right idiom, the greater value will inhere in the skills of mixing and matching according to the shape of a particular debate." Yoder contends that every moral decision involves elements of principle, character, due process and utility. He also states that no one can work in the Hebraic heritage and ignore the language of divine command. Nevertheless: "the life of the community is prior to all methodological distillations."

Constantinianism needs to find a method which is above the particular because it needs authorization for the exercise of power over others. It sees institutions as the way to shape society according to the preferences of those in power and so the way to effect social change is to get control of the institutions of society. Yoder makes the point that even those who formally renounce Constantinianism can still be Constantinian in their

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138 "Radical Reformation Ethics," 113-4.
140 "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood," PK, 36.
141 "Word and Walk: The Alternatives to Methodologism," 82.
moral thinking: "Ethics can continue to be seen as social engineering." This kind of approach to ethics is basically a debate over what legitimately can be enforced on everyone or required of everyone. To put it in Yoder's terms, ethical discourse must now meet two tests: first, can you ask such behaviour of everyone? and, second, what would happen if everyone did it? Constantinian moral epistemology thus appeals to the universal, natural law, common sense, a system or a set of universally-acknowledged axioms in order to justify the social order as it exists. If it were not for the need to impose one's ethics on others, there would be no need for such claims to universality.

2. A Non-Constantinian Moral Epistemology: Yoder contends that pluralism in epistemology is not a counsel of despair, but part of the good news. He says: "The divine command to walk in the communion of the Spirit is not in another compartment separate from procedural guidelines about how that communion works as an epistemology." Yoder is not worried about having the right method for doing ethics before getting down to work because he views Christian ethics as being rooted "in revelation, not alone in speculation, nor in a self-interpreting situation." He says: "The Christian loves his or her enemies because God does and commands his followers to do so; that is the only reason, and it is enough." He also claims: "The good action is measured by its conformity to the command and to the nature of God and not by its success in achieving specific results." Further, he claims: "Obedience means not

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143 "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," PK, 139.
145 POJ, 233.
147 CWS, 49.
keeping verbally enshrined rules, but reflecting the character of the love of God.\textsuperscript{148}

Again, he asserts, "The ethic of discipleship is not guided by the goals it seeks to reach, but by the Lord it seeks to reflect."\textsuperscript{149}

This type of approach to Christian ethics is rooted in an evangelical epistemology, which is Yoder's alternative to a Constantinian epistemology. Chris Huebner perceptively observes that "while most commentators recognize the centrality of Yoder's account of 'political Constantinianism,' his discussion of what might be called 'methodological Constantinianism' is often overlooked."\textsuperscript{150} We have attempted to describe Yoder's rejection of Constantinianism as involving a rejection of both its political and the epistemological implications. This rejection clears the way for his constructive alternative to Constantinianism on the epistemological level, what we might call his evangelical moral epistemology.

Yoder defines the word "evangelical" as follows:

What accredits news as good is that it enables or even commands wholeness or fullness, a validation or flourishing, not actualized in its absence. It cannot be imposed by authority, or coercively. It is rendered null when assent is imposed. Nor can it be esoteric, reserved for specially inducted hearers.\textsuperscript{151}

Yoder says that the Good News is news because those who hear it would never have known it unless a messenger had told them. It is good news because hearing it is liberating, not oppressive or alienating. Because it is only such when received as good,

\textsuperscript{148} POJ, 245. Richard Hays notes that Jesus as teacher of rules is minimized in Yoder's thought. He points out that Matthew 5:39 is never quoted in POJ and only referred to once in a footnote. Yoder's arguments against violence are constructed along other, more hermeneutically sophisticated lines. The basic role of Scripture is not to provide rules for conduct, but to serve as the "collective scribal memory" which the teacher draws on in teaching. (The Moral Vision of the New Testament, 248-9.)

\textsuperscript{149} OR, 39.

\textsuperscript{150} "Mennonites and Narrative Theology: The Case of John Howard Yoder" CGR Vol. 16, No. 2 (Spring 1998), 23.

\textsuperscript{151} "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel," 292.
"it can never be communicated coercively; nor can the messenger ever positively be assured that it will be received."\textsuperscript{152}

Yoder is greatly misunderstood if his stance is interpreted as promoting either cultural relativism or a form of liberal individualism. His desire to make it possible for the other person to reject his position is rooted in the very center of his theology, the non-coercive love of God which is revealed in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{153} As Gerber Koontz puts it:

Fundamental to Yoder's theology is the faith that God is agape and that agape respects the freedom of the beloved. The idea that agape respects the freedom of the beloved 'even to lose himself' is for Yoder the one solid point where no exceptions may be made: it is the starting point of theology, of history, of ethics, of church order, of every realm where agape matters.\textsuperscript{154}

Yoder's evangelical epistemology does not authorize coercion or the imposition of the truth on everyone whether they accept it or not. But he does not need that kind of ethic because he is not interested in pursuing a Constantinian project.

Gerber Koontz characterizes Yoder's alternative to Constantinian epistemology or apologetics as "heralding." She views Yoder as similar to Barth in that both reject the idea that one can begin with human unbelief and end up with God. She agrees that beginning somewhere other than faith is not likely to bring unbelievers to faith. While Barth has been criticized for simply preaching to unbelievers instead of entering into dialogue with them, she points out that, for both Barth and Yoder, the willingness to use the language of unbelievers may be a sign that Christians are buying into non-Christian value systems.\textsuperscript{155} She describes Yoder's concept of heralding this way:

\textsuperscript{152} "But We Do See Jesus: The Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth," 55.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 214.
The Christian herald must remain doubly vulnerable - vulnerable because he or she is reporting a particular relative historical event that itself may or may not speak to others, and vulnerable because the herald has disavowed those affiliations which might convince others to join the Christian movement for the wrong reasons. Defenceless confession of faith can only be 'distinguished' from the colonial or crusader truth claim if the herald's double vulnerability is clearly perceived and willingly affirmed.156

The Christian mission involves bearing witness to Jesus Christ in both word and deed and renunciation of force and the renunciation of the epistemological claims which justify force are part of that witness to the one who made himself vulnerable for us.

The strongest attack on this type of position comes from those who view pacifism as sectarian in the sense of condoning the suffering or death of innocent victims by refusing the path of violence.157 To retreat from universal, moral truth claims can be seen as an abdication of responsibility to the neighbour. Yoder's response is to deny that this is a valid argument because if it were, it would mean that God is complicit in all the evil of the world. It is part of the nature of agape to allow the other to rebel. The supreme example of this is God allowing His Son to be crucified.158 Yoder also argues that there is a qualitative moral difference between allowing evil to occur, when the only way to stop it is to resort to lethal violence, and actually committing evil oneself. The reason there does not seem to be a difference to the Constantinian is that the Constantinian is asking a different question than the pacifist. The Constantinian is asking: what should the person in power do about this situation? But the pacifist is asking: how can a Christian testify to Jesus Christ in this situation? If using physical coercion and violence to enforce the rules is part of your normal operating procedure, then refusing to intervene

156 Ibid. See Yoder's "The Disavowal of Constantine," RP, 256.
158 OR, 64-65.
in just one specific case does look morally suspicious and even unfair. But if the use of violence has been ruled out in advance, then not using violence looks quite different.

One other critique of this epistemological position is the charge that this is a position of moral relativism. But we must separate the two questions of the truth claim itself and its justification. To reject foundationalism, as Yoder does, is to reject the possibility of finding a method which will or should convince everyone that your claim is right. But it is not to reject the conviction that your truth claim is a universal truth. He denies the Constantinian notion that a claim must not be true for everyone if it cannot be rationally justified to everyone. That notion is itself part of establishment thinking because it provides a way of distinguishing between "public" and "private" truth claims, that is, between the minority ones which can be overturned and those of the power elite, which can be imposed. Yoder rejects the idea that a claim must be rationally demonstrable in order to be true. He says, "... there is the ontological problem. Does an epistemology of Evangel presuppose some specific (remember that it need not be distinctive) understanding of what kind of God can thus reveal himself? Of course it must somehow."159 There is an ontological basis to Yoder's moral claims, but he denies that that fact implies that they can be validated by means of a neutral process of moral reasoning because "the church precedes the world epistemologically."160

3. The Sectarian Character of Constantinianism: Yoder turns the accusation of sectarianism back on Constantinianism itself. Real sectarianism, in the biblical sense of un-Christian divisiveness, was the formation of churches bound to the state and

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identified with the nation." He claims that sectarianism is a concept fostered and used by the Constantinian establishment for its own purposes:

the initial intention of the 'sectarian' communities which in the course of Western history have renewed a minority ethic has not been to be sects. Division was not their purpose . . . They rather called upon the church at large to accept as binding for all Christians the quality of commitment which would in effect lead them all to be separated from the world once again in order to be appropriately in mission to the world.

Many of the groups which have been branded "sects" are simply those which have refused to buy into the Constantinian heresy.

William Placher has compared revisionist and postliberal theology and has concluded that, in the post-colonial missionary situation, " . . . the effort to ground Christianity in the broader tradition of Western culture may make it less universally accessible." He distinguishes between three definitions of public theology. The first appeals to warrants available to any intelligent, reasonable and responsible person, the second understands religion as fundamentally a public, communal activity, not a matter of an individual's experience and the third effectively addresses political and social issues. Postliberal theology, including Yoder's, is clearly public in the second and third senses. With regard to the first sense, Yoder points out that every universe of discourse, although it is likely wider than some others, is also provincial in comparison to others as well. The concept of a universal discourse is actually a myth, perpetrated by the Constantinian establishment as an ideological justification of its political suppression.

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161 OR, 72.
162 "Anabaptism and History," PK, 85. See Chris Huebner ("Mennonites and Narrative Theology: The Case of John Howard Yoder," 27) for an interpretation of Yoder's at this point which parallels the one being advocated here.
164 Ibid., 407.
165 "But We Do See Jesus: The Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth," PK, 47.
of dissent. The point is not that there is no such thing as truth, but rather, that the contested nature of truth in a fallen world makes tolerance, dialogue and pluralism both necessary and good. The anti-Constantinian, free church, tradition has led the way in the recognition of this insight in Western culture and, in Yoder's thought, the free church epistemology has been expressed systematically.

In this chapter, we have examined the eschatological context of Yoder's social ethics. We have seen that his understanding of New Testament eschatology is grounded in his Christology and takes the entire canon into consideration. Yoder understands Constantinianism to be an eschatological heresy, which distorts New Testament eschatology by denying the Lordship of Christ, dissolving the tension between the two ages, failing to recognize Christ's victory over the Powers, denying the power of the Kingdom of God, causing the church to abandon its mission of witness, failing to recognize the freedom of the unbelieving world to rebel, operating with a naturalistic view of history and substituting the state for the church as the bearer of the meaning of history. Yoder also argues that Constantinianism is a revival of the Solomonic Temptation which misreads the Old Testament by giving priority to the Maccabean paradigm of nation, monarchy and war instead of the Jeremianic paradigm of Diaspora, synagogue and pacifism.

Instead of acknowledging the Constantinian charges as to the sectarian character of pacifist dissent, Yoder describes Constantinianism itself as sectarian in that it identifies the church with particular nation-states and turns even fellow-Christians in other nations into enemies. In order for the true international, multi-ethnic, universal character of the church to be made visible, Yoder proposes repentance in the form of "the disavowal of
Constantine.” Only by separating itself from militaristic nationalism can the Christian church prepare itself for mission. Yoder not only rejects the notion that there is one universal method for accessing truth, he also identifies the search for such a method as a typically Constantinian preoccupation. The Constantinian establishment needs so-called "universal" truth or "natural theology" in order to justify its imposition of the morality of the majority on the minority. The suffering, minority church needs no such epistemology. In fact, evangelical epistemology must be non-coercive in order for it to be experienced by those who hear it as good news. Yoder's opinion is that the Gospel gains more credibility from the willingness of the church to suffer, and if need be die, for the sake of the Gospel, than it ever has received from the Constantinian willingness to kill for the sake of the Gospel.

The connection between Yoder's Christology and his eschatology often has been overlooked, with the unfortunate result that his rejection of Constantinianism has been sadly misunderstood. Criticism of his concept of Constantinianism has often begged the question because it has been rooted in assumptions which, themselves, have been placed in question by Yoder's Christology. Unless critics come to terms with the eschatological grounds of his critique of Constantinianism and also with the rootedness of his eschatology in his Christology, they cannot engage Yoder's thought adequately. The most fundamental question raised by Yoder is that of the character of the God revealed in Jesus Christ and any critique of Yoder's rejection of Constantinianism, which does not take seriously the loving character of the God who is revealed in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, is superficial.

The criticism of Yoder's position in Philip LeMasters' book is a case in point. (The Import of Eschatology in John Howard Yoder's Critique of Constantinianism (San Francisco: Mellen Research
can ever be satisfactory which does not take seriously the implications of the fact that the Incarnate Son of God died at the hands of the rulers of this world and the fact God has raised Jesus from the dead.

Yoder's rejection of Constantinianism, however, raises a question. If the state is not the bearer of the meaning of history and thus not the appropriate vehicle for Christians to use in implementing Christian social ethics, then what concrete shape can Christian social ethics take in the world today? Given our Western, individualistic, liberal heritage, the temptation is to settle for a pietistic and inner response to the call of Jesus Christ and abandon the world, structures, institutions and politics to the devil. But Yoder contends that liberal individualism does not allow for an adequate witness to Jesus Christ any more than sectarianism does. Is there a way to have a non-Constantinian, social ethic in this fallen world? Yoder argues that there is, but only if we begin to take the Christian community far more seriously than most of us are used to taking it.

Therefore, in Chapter Four, we turn to his contention that the church is the shape of a faithful Christian social ethic.

LeMasters appears to misunderstand Yoder on the central issue of the rejection of Constantinianism. He interprets Yoder as claiming that the reason we should not adopt the majority view, that the fusion of church and empire under Constantine was a blessing resulting from God's providence, is that God's providence is inscrutable. (111) LeMasters then criticizes Yoder for being inconsistent in arguing that "God did not providentially bring Constantine to power" and for speaking "substantively on any question concerning God's action in history." (112) Actually, Yoder never says that providence is inscrutable in the sense attributed to him by LeMasters. His point is just the opposite. We can know that the identification of empire and church under Constantine is wrong because it causes members of the church to act against the revealed will of God in Jesus Christ by joining in imperial violence.

In Chapter II of his book, LeMasters had already provided a good summary of Yoder's Christology (57-62) and had correctly recognized that "Yoder's Jesus is an eschatological Jesus" and that there is a general coherence between his eschatology and his Christology. (62) But then he appears to forget these excellent conclusions in Chapter III when he professes to be unable to comprehend why Yoder rejects Constantinianism. (117) Is it the case that Yoder's thought is simply too counter-intuitive to be grasped except by sustained concentration on the logic of his reasoning? Is it the challenge of suspending highly ingrained Constantinian thought patterns that defeats critics despite their best efforts? One thing is clear: it is the failure to come to terms with the logical connection between Yoder's Christology and his eschatology which, in the end, constitutes the inadequacy of LeMasters' book as a guide to Yoder's thought.
CHAPTER IV
ECCLESIOLOGY AS THE SHAPE OF YODER'S SOCIAL ETHICS

In the previous chapter, we took note of Yoder's methodological innovation of beginning with the eschatological Jesus of the Gospels and then asking how our modern concept of history needs to be revised in order to make it possible to see the relevance of Jesus for Christian ethics, rather than setting Jesus aside as irrelevant for Christian ethics. We saw that the result was an understanding of the church as an eschatological community of disciples who follow Jesus in rejecting violence and the glorification of wealth and power and embracing love and servanthood instead. Ultimately, Yoder's ecclesiology is grounded in his Christology insofar as the church is the community brought into existence by the resurrection of Christ and which is, therefore, incomprehensible apart from the resurrection. The risen Lord continues to be present in His church by means of His Spirit, who fills the disciples who follow Jesus.

Whereas the purpose of Chapter Two was to argue that Yoder's social ethics is rooted in his Christology and that of Chapter Three was to describe Yoder's eschatology as the context for his social ethics, the purpose of this chapter is to focus more specifically on Yoder's doctrine of the church as the shape or the embodiment of his social ethics. In doing so, the theme of Biblical Realism will once again be seen to figure prominently in Yoder's thought as he puts forward an ecclesiology which emphasizes the eschatological character of the visible, local, Christian community as the focal point of
God's activity in the world during this age. Thus, the church is, as Yoder and McClendon put it, "an eschatological community grounded in Scripture."¹

In the first section of this chapter, we examine Yoder's believers' church ecclesiology in relation to other approaches to ecclesiology and consider the ecumenical implications of his believers' church vision. Yoder's ecclesiology is one of an eschatological community, which is evangelical, ecumenical, catholic and reforming. In the second section, we turn to a more detailed description of Yoder's vision of the Christian community as an alternative polis, a new society in which God's future intentions for human society in general can be discerned. The pivotal role of the Holy Spirit in the community will be emphasized. In the third section, we will consider Yoder's views on how the Christian community can witness to the civil community. Finally, in the fourth section, we will consider the charges of withdrawal and irrelevance which have been made against Yoder's theology and give an account of the resources in Yoder's thought which can be deployed in response to these criticisms, so that a proper evaluation of their validity can be made.

A. Yoder's Believers' Church Ecclesiology

In this opening section, we examine Yoder's believers' church ecclesiology in relation to the other major understandings of the church in Christian history. We begin by considering the meaning of some of the relevant terminology and the justification of using the term "believers' church" to describe Yoder's ecclesiology. Then, we will look at Yoder's typology of the major approaches to ecclesiology and his arguments in favor of

the believers' church type. Finally, we will make an evaluation of the ecumenical possibilities of this approach to ecclesiology.

I. The Definition of the Term "Believers' Church:" What does Yoder mean by the term "believers' church" and why does he use it? The term "believers' church" was coined by Max Weber and is closely related to the label "the radical reformation," as used by George H. Williams and "the free church" as used by Franklin H. Littell. Harold S. Bender attempted to define the term "Anabaptist" more precisely but, as we saw in the discussion of Reformation historiography in Chapter Two, the preciseness of Bender's definition has been called into question by contemporary sixteenth century historians. Recently, James Wm. McClendon has proposed the term "baptist" as a way of referring to "this 'free church' or 'believers' church' or baptist style of Christian thought" that is, he claims, "widely displayed but only haltingly voiced."

The term "radical reformation," has a definite meaning with regard to sixteenth century historiography. Its suitability for Yoder's use today, however, is limited by the fact that it includes movements which would diverge dramatically from his ecclesiology such as the "Evangelical Rationalists" and the "Spiritualists." The problem with the term "free church" is that it is defined very differently in various geographical locations. For example, in Great Britain, the free churches include all Protestant denominations other than the Church of England, which means that the Presbyterians are "free" in England,

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2 The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. T. Parsons (New York: Scribners, 1958). Weber says that these groups sought a "community of personal believers of the reborn, and only these." (144-5.)
4 The Free Church (Boston: Starr King, 1957).
even though they are the established church in Scotland. The term "Anabaptist," as defined by Harold Bender is used quite often by Yoder, but it is really an historical term which applies to certain of the sixteenth century reform movements, rather than a description of any contemporary Christian group. McClendon's term "baptist" is a useful one in that he seeks to describe a way of thinking, rather than an historical movement or group and Yoder is open to using it. One problem with it, however, is that it is so new that no one knows yet if it will become widely used or not. Another potential problem is that it can be confused with the term "Baptist," which is the name of a family of denominations and it may not be possible to make the term "baptist" inclusive enough to cover non-Baptist believers' churches.

The term "believers' church" does have the advantage, from Yoder's perspective, of calling attention to some of the key distinctives of this ecclesiology such as the voluntary nature of church membership and institutional independence from the state. The disadvantage is it seems presumptuous in its supposed implication that members of other churches are not believers. But need it imply this? Surely Roman Catholics do not mean to imply by using that denominational name that no other Christians are part of the Catholic Faith. The Christian Reformed Church, by its name, does not mean to imply that it is the only truly reformed church. The point of the term "believers' church" is not to make a negative judgment about the status of members of other churches, but to affirm the distinctives held in common by this family of Christians in a descriptive way.

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8 "A 'Free Church' Perspective on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry," RP, 279. Yoder notes that most of the people in these movements in the past preferred to call themselves simply "brethren."
4 This is the argument of Donald Durnbaugh in his classic work: *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), ix, cf. 3-33.
Clearly, this is how Yoder uses the term in his various writings, although, for the sake of dialogue, he is usually willing to start from the definitions set down by his dialogue partners and work from there. Thus, he sometimes uses the term "Anabaptist" to describe his position, sometimes "free church," and other times "believers' church," depending on the context.

In this chapter, we will use the term "believers' church" as the best and most accurate term to describe Yoder's ecclesiology.

2. Three Types of Ecclesiology: Yoder contends that there are three basic types of ecclesiology: the theocratic vision, the spiritualist reaction and the believers' church. 

These three types can be seen with clarity in the sixteenth century continental reformation, although they recur repeatedly in church history. To the theological left and geographical southwest of the Lutheran Reformation, we see the three types clearly distinguished in the movements relating to Zwingli in the 1520's. At one corner of a triangle, we see the Anabaptists, as exemplified most clearly in Michael Stattler and Pilgrim Marpeck. At a second corner of the triangle, we see the Spiritualizers, best exemplified by Casper Schwenckfeld. At the third corner of the triangle, we see the theocratic humanism of Erasmus as carried forward by Huldrych Zwingli. Each of these

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10 See, for example, his use of "Anabaptist" in "The Anabaptist Dissent: The Logic of the Disciple in Society," Concern 1 (June 1954): 45-68, his use of "believers' church" in "The Believers' Church: Global Perspectives," The Believers' Church in Canada: Addresses and Papers From the Study Conference in Winnipeg May 1978, ed. J. K. Zeman and W. Klassen (Waterloo, Ont.: The Baptist Federation of Canada and the Mennonite Central Committee, 1979), 3-15, and his use of "free church" in "A 'Free Church' Perspective on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry," RP, 278-88. In another setting he uses the term "free church," as assigned, but defines it to mean roughly the same as the term "believers' church." ("Another 'Free Church' Perspective on Baptist Ecumenism," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 17 (1980): 149.) Yoder, at another point in his writings defines "free church" as the wider term, which includes "believers' churches" within it. Some "free churches" are not "believers' churches" as can be seen from the obvious fact that, in the United States, all the churches are "free churches." He then defines the Mennonites as one of the three "historic peace churches" which is a smaller subset of the "believers' churches," which, of course, includes non-pacifist denominations as well. So there are four concentric circles: 1) free churches, 2) believers' churches and 3) historic peace churches, 4) Mennonites. (WPR, 165)

11 "A People in the World," RP, 71-72. As Yoder notes, he is following Ernst Troeltsch and Franklin H. Littell in his typology of these groups. See Troeltsch's The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches.
groups defined itself in relation to the other two and in relation to the Lutheran
Reformation. Each group saw the other two groups as alike in their error.

From the perspective of Zwingli, (and Calvin and the Roman Catholics), the
Anabaptists and Spiritualists were alike in their divisiveness and their irresponsible
willingness to undermine Christian government. They shared the Lutheran error of
rejecting the theocratic vision and relegating government to a position outside the Gospel.
From the perspective of Schwenckfeld, the Anabaptists and the magisterial reformers in
general were too concerned with outward forms. Both Zwingli and the Anabaptists had,
like Luther, failed to carry to its logical conclusion their withdrawal from the Roman
Church and its manifold ceremonies and forms. From the perspective of Pilgrim
Marpeck, the Spiritualizers and Zwingli were very similar insofar as they both denied the
ultimate importance of proper church order. Schwenckfeld, because he thought only
spiritual reality matters, did not challenge the established worship and church structure of
Christendom and thus suffered no persecution. Zwingli argued for the invisibility of the
true church and so was able in good conscience to move as slowly in the reform of the
church as public order required. Since faith is invisible anyway, Zwingli had no problem
in continuing to baptize infants. Since faith is everything, Schwenckfeld attached no
importance to baptism in any form.

Yoder views the theocratic type of ecclesiology as a "vision of the renewal of the
church that hopes to reform society at large with one blow."\textsuperscript{12} The locus of meaning is
the movement of the whole society. It would be historically accurate to label this

\textsuperscript{vols. trans. O. Wyon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) for his famous "church-sect-mysticism"
typology.\textsuperscript{12} “A People in the World,” RP, 71.}
position "Puritanism" but he does not do so because of the negative "emotional coloring" which this term has taken on in contemporary culture. Other advocates of this type of ecclesiology in history have included Roman Catholicism, Calvin, Knox, Cromwell, Christian Realism and many segments of the World Council of Churches.

Yoder argues that the spiritualist type of approach to ecclesiology is a natural reaction to the theocratic type, which moves the locus of meaning from society to the spirit or the self. Here the historically accurate term would be "Pietist," but this is an even more emotion-laden term. Also, it would be confusing to use this term because many groups with a believers' church type of ecclesiology historically have been labeled "Pietist," such as Methodist and Brethren groups. Spiritualism is able to function quite well within the framework of the theocratic society which it rejects, as a "church within the church." As Yoder puts it, "By giving no social form to its dissent, it leaves the established church in place." It can even tolerate the structures of the theocratic ecclesiology, while insisting that outward forms are useless unless a "deep inward reality can be found." Advocates of the spiritualist approach to ecclesiology have included Jacob Spener, much contemporary evangelicalism, Rudolph Bultmann and Billy Graham.

Yoder contends that the believers' church approach "stands not merely between the other two but over against both of them." With spiritualism, the believers' church approach protests the coldness and formalism of the theocratic churches, but insists that the answer is not to eschew forms altogether or to create parachurch organizations, but rather, to reform the church according to Scripture so that the forms can express the true

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13 Ibid., 72.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
character of the disciples' fellowship. Yoder's claim is that "the church is called to move beyond the oscillation between the theocratic and the spiritualist patterns, not to a compromise between the two or to a synthesis claiming like Hegel to 'assume' them both, but to what is genuinely a third option."\(^{16}\) Yoder's believers' church approach is one which needs to be described in more detail and we will turn to such a description in the second section of this chapter. However, before we do, it needs to be stressed that Yoder's ecclesiological vision is not one of justifying or sanctifying one, small, sectarian group or family of denominations as the only true church and condemning all the mainline Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations. His vision is an ecumenical one which is addressed to the entire church and we turn to this ecumenical vision next.

3. Yoder's Ecumenical Vision: In this opening section of Chapter Four, we are attempting to situate Yoder's ecclesiology in relation to other approaches to ecclesiology. So far, we have seen that the best term to use in describing his ecclesiology is "the believers' church" and we have contrasted this type of ecclesiology with the theocratic vision and the spiritualist reaction. Now it is necessary to raise the question of the ecumenical relevance of Yoder's approach. Is he merely the apologist for a small family of minor denominations, which he regards as true churches, as over against the mass of other Christian groups? Given his stern critique of Constantinianism as an eschatological heresy which obscures the message of the Gospel and prevents the church from being a good witness to Jesus Christ, one might be inclined to suspect that Yoder thinks the vast majority of Christian churches are beyond hope. One might suspect Yoder of being a separatist. But the diligent reader of Yoder's writings, especially as found in *The Royal

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 72-73.
Priesthood, knows that such is not the case. In this section, we will examine four motifs in Yoder's ecclesiology which make his ecclesiology evangelical, ecumenical, catholic and reforming. The four motifs are the voluntary nature of membership, the conversational model of unity, the congregational focus of mission and the unfinished character of the church.

First, we draw attention to the evangelical character of Yoder's ecclesiology by considering the motif of the voluntary nature of membership. As we saw in our discussion of the charge of sectarianism in Chapter Three, Yoder believes that the church-world distinction is essential in order for the Gospel to be experienced as good news. He also believes that voluntary membership is essential to the proper ordering of the church for mission because only if membership is voluntary can the necessary distinction between the church and the world be maintained. This distinction is also a prerequisite for the evangelistic task of the church because, unless the Gospel is experienced as the call to join a new community, the social nature of the faith is obscured by individualism.

Oliver O'Donovan seriously misunderstands the significance of Yoder's concern for the voluntariness of church membership when he suggests that it is simply a matter of conformity to liberalism: "lining the church up with the sports clubs, friendly societies, colleges, symphony subscription-guilds, political parties and so on just to prove that the church offers late-modern order no serious threat." ¹⁷ For some reason, O'Donovan assumes that Yoder's defence of voluntary membership is in conflict with the idea that belief is foundational to church membership. He says: "I notice the emphasis John Howard Yoder lays upon voluntariness in his characterisation of the church, at the expense

of belief . . . A voluntary society is one that I could leave without incurring grave or irremediable loss."¹⁸ But this is little more than a caricature of Yoder's position. Where does Yoder say that membership in the church is of such little importance that it can be dispensed with "without grave or irremediable loss?" That attitude would characterize the Spiritualist type of ecclesiology which Yoder rejects. And where does he say that belief is not the basis of church membership? It is, after all, not Yoder who is concerned to defend the tradition of infant baptism, which creates church members (Christians?) who have not even reached the point of being capable of belief. Rather, Yoder defends the tradition of believers' baptism as the mark of entrance into the believers' church because, for him, the only logical reason to enter the church and accept the disciplines of the Christian life is that one has come to believe the Gospel.

O'Donovan's defence of the Christendom idea and the state church concept is strikingly eccentric in these days of religious freedom and separation of church and state and it seems to be connected with his desire to affirm the truth of the Gospel. But it is not his stout defence of the need to stand firmly for the truth of the Gospel which is the problem. The problem, from Yoder's perspective, is his method of doing so. Historically, the Christendom idea logically led to the Inquisition because, if the Gospel is true and its truth is publicly accessible knowledge, then coercing people to accept can be seen as justifiable and the debate is merely over the appropriate level of coercion, with the levels ranging from preferential taxation policies for church property to burning heretics at the stake. But Yoder is by no means suggesting that the alternative to authoritarianism is liberal individualism and religious pluralism. Rather, he is suggesting

¹⁸ The Desire of the Nations, 223.
that "communities which are uncoerced can affirm individual dignity (at the point of uncoerced adherence of the member) without enshrining individualism" and "they can likewise realize community without authorizing lordship or establishment."

O'Donovan's theocratic vision does give substance to the Christian conviction that the Gospel is true, but it does so at the cost of obscuring the uncoercive love of God which is at the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What is needed is an ecclesiology which makes the truth claims of the Gospel and the loving God of the Gospel both equally visible. This is why Yoder affirms an epistemology of evangel, which rejects foundationalist methodology, while affirming the truth claims of the Gospel as proclamation. The voluntary, disciplined community of disciples is the logical result of an evangelical epistemology and this is why Yoder associates freedom of confession with the evangelical character of the believers' church ecclesiology.

Second, we point out the ecumenical character of Yoder's ecclesiology by considering the motif of the conversational model of unity. Yoder claims that his ecclesiology is not "primitivist" or "fundamentalist" in the sense of claiming that nothing has happened since the first century. He believes that it is possible to make choices which are more or less faithful at all points during church history and that the criteria of the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, as testified to in Scripture, is the criterion by which evaluative judgments can be made about the faithfulness of the church both in history and in the present. Yoder is interested in a continuing conversation about the meaning of Christian faithfulness today.

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20 BP, 10.
21 See Chapter 1A above for a discussion of this point.
All those who identify with the historic Christian faith are part of this conversation. In the "Introduction" to his book, The Priestly Kingdom, Yoder states:

As these essays should be understood as addressed to Christians in general, and not peculiarly 'sectarian,' so also they should be understood not as 'radical' in any modern sense of the term, which places a premium on the far out and unprecedented, but rather as classical or catholic.22

Yoder not only wishes to address all Christians, but he does so on the basis of that which all Christians claim to have in common, namely Scripture. He speaks of his claim that the vision of discipleship projected in this collection is founded in Scripture and catholic tradition, and is pertinent today as a call for all Christian believers...These pages do not describe a Mennonite vision. They describe a biblically rooted call to faith, addressed to Mennonites or Zwinglians, to Lutherans or Catholics, to unbelievers or other believers.23

Yoder sees his radical reformation model as a paradigm "for all ages and communions, rather than an apology for a denomination claiming the last - or best - word."24

In spite of Yoder's strong views on the reality of apostasy, he is not, as Gerber-Koontz points out, a separatist.25 As the article, "The Imperative of Christian Unity," clearly demonstrates, Yoder is deeply concerned about the need to express Christian unity, not for superficial reasons like good manners or efficiency, but because it is a Christological imperative. According to Yoder, the unity of the church is necessary for the fulfillment of the mission of the church. With reference to the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17, he says:

The function of the unity of the future believers is, therefore, to make credible the fundamental claim ("that the world might believe," said twice) and to reflect the

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22 "Introduction," PK, 8.
23 Ibid.
24 "Introduction," PK, 4-5.
25 "Confessional Theology in a Pluralistic Context: A Study of the Theological Ethics of H. Richard Niebuhr and John H. Yoder," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1985): 154. See Yoder's argument that to say that all denominations or Christian propositions have equal validity is to be indifferent to questions of truth or ethics. (J. H. Yoder and D. Shank, "Biblicism and the Church" Concern 2 (1955): 56.)
nature of the unity between the Son and the Father, to render that credible witness substantial.\textsuperscript{26}

Yoder also refers to Ephesians 2-3, which makes the same point. God's cosmic purposes are bound up with the visible unity of Jew and Gentile in the body of Christ. Religious pluralism, however, denies this Gospel truth. By "pluralism" Yoder means: "that pattern of independence and toleration whereby each group lets the others exist without coercion or unification, also without agreement."\textsuperscript{27} The "lazy solution of pluralism" is based on the false view that unity is based on agreement, so that every dispute calls for division. This reluctance to take the sin of disunity seriously is, in part, a reaction to centuries of Christians persecuting and killing each other in order to enforce unity. We know we cannot do this any more, but we have given up on unity rather than finding different methods to pursue it.

Yoder has no magic solutions for Christian unity. He calls for unity of discipleship and discipline on the congregational level and unity of conversation on the supracongregational level.\textsuperscript{28} Yoder basically thinks that we should never stop talking and, therefore, never divide. His own life of involvement in the World Council of Churches, the Believers' Church Conferences, evangelical coalitions and so on is ample evidence that he practiced what he preached at this point.\textsuperscript{29}

Third, we take account of the \textit{catholic} character of Yoder's ecclesiology by considering the motif of the \textit{congregational focus of mission}. Yoder gives a significant clue to his concept of how ecumenical progress can be made today when he points out

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26} "The Imperative of Christian Unity," RP, 291.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 291-2.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Gerber-Koontz, "Confessional Theology in a Pluralistic Context: A Study of the Theological Ethics of H. Richard Niebuhr and John H. Yoder," 156.
\item \textsuperscript{29} See William Klassen's article for documentation of this point. "Yoder and the Ecumenical Church," CGR, vol. 16, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 77-81.
\end{itemize}
that the modern ecumenical movement is a kind of believers' church in that it "begins by relativizing those definitions of unity that depended upon an established hierarchy, one particular body of authoritative creeds, or the rejection of a particular set of heretics." It carries on a conversation in which those who choose to participate do so. The dialogical process, he points out, is thus self-defining, rather than being made possible or restricted by an "inherited institutional, ritual, or creedal status."

Yoder also is hopeful because unity at the congregational level is the most important kind of unity and it is there that the barriers are least restrictive. For Yoder, the congregation is the basic unit of the church, rather than the bishops or synods. His vision is catholic in that all churches have congregations and all congregations have a life of their own. Yoder argues that the most significant level of mission occurs at the congregational level and that, for this reason, the believers' church ecclesiology has something to say to congregations of all traditions and denominations.

Fourth, we call attention to the reforming character of Yoder's ecclesiology by considering the motif of the unfinished character of the church. Yoder refuses to accept the idea that the Reformation is over. Yoder points out that the divisions of the sixteenth century did not occur because some Christians left the catholic church to pursue their own visions of the faithful church. They occurred because the Magisterial Reformers appealed to local and provincial governments to help them in the conflict with the empire and the bishops. The institutionalization of the Reformation had the effect of freezing the process of reform: "They not only divided the Christendom which they had hoped to reform as a unit; they froze it into patterns of administration which were no longer

\[30\] "A 'Free Church' Perspective on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry," RP, 280.
\[31\] Ibid.
reformable. Since then, Western intellectual history has been a pendulum swinging between the individual and the collective. But that was not the intended result as far as the Reformers were concerned. Yoder argues that now, in this post-Christendom era, it has become thinkable that this mistake could be undone. This is the significance of the believers' church strategy of ecumenical renewal.

The polite pluralism of much contemporary ecumenism is actually a hindrance, rather than a help, to genuine progress toward greater unity. There is a great reluctance in ecumenical discussions to face up to the reality of unfaithfulness in the past in such a way as to make genuine progress possible. Yoder sees no hope for progress in what he calls the "wider strategic tendency of inclusive agency leaders to believe that ecumenical unity can be achieved by going forward together without repentance." Yoder points out that the sixteenth century Anabaptists, like the later Puritans, believed that "the way God leads is that the Spirit gathers believers around the Scriptures." This is the notion of "the hermeneutic community," a notion with its roots in I Corinthians 14:25ff. It is the conversation about what the Scriptures teach for the contemporary situation which should be the method by which the Spirit leads the community into making decisions, including decisions to repent and go in a different direction. This is how the church is to be continually being reformed. Yoder repeatedly insists on the "unfinished" character of the church and thus, as Michael Cartwright points out, articulates a vision of the church which is at the same time "radically reformed and radically catholic."

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33 Ibid., 281-2.
34 "Radical Reformation Ethics," PK, 117.
35 "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity: John Howard Yoder's Vision of the Faithful Church," RP, 41. This is the point of Yoder's article "Catholicity in Search of Location," RP, 301-20.
Yoder's believers' church ecclesiology is evangelical in its emphasis on the voluntary nature of membership, ecumenical in its conversational model of unity, catholic in its emphasis on the congregation as the focus of mission and reforming in its stress on the unfinished character of the church. Yoder contends that a believers' church ecclesiology is relevant to all branches of the church today because, to the extent that local congregations gather around the Word of God, and under the guidance of the Spirit, to make decisions which increase their effectiveness in mission through uncoerced conversation, they are implementing, at least to that extent, this ecclesiology.

B. The Believers' Church as a New Society

Having defined Yoder's ecclesiology, situated it with regard to other types of ecclesiology, and argued for its evangelical, ecumenical, catholic and reforming character, we are now ready, in this second sub-section, to flesh out Yoder's view of the church by looking at his view of those characteristics of the church which make it particularly relevant to social ethics. He views the church first, as a new humanity created by the death and resurrection of Christ, second, as a new sociological entity with distinctive practices by which community is built up and maintained, and third, as a foreshadowing of the future Kingdom of God. We now turn to a discussion of these three aspects of his ecclesiology.

1. Justification as the Basis of the Church as a New Society: In Yoder's understanding of ecclesiology, the church is not merely a means by which an essentially individualistic message of salvation is delivered to the world, but the new society into
which the Gospel invites those who believe to enter. In *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder deals with exegetical work in Pauline studies, done in the fifties and sixties, which suggests that the central message of Paul was not an individualistic message of the forgiveness of sins through faith, but rather, the message that Jews and Gentiles have been united into one body - the body of Christ, the church. Let us consider his argument.

Yoder begins by citing the well-known article by Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in which he demonstrates that "all of the constitutive elements of the classic 'Luther-type experience' are missing in both the experience and the thought of the apostle." First, rather than being preoccupied with his guilt before a righteous God, Paul was actually "robust of conscience" and he never pleads with others to "feel an anguished conscience and then receive release from that anguish in a message of forgiveness." Second, Paul's understanding of the law was not that its function was to make God's people aware of their guilt. Instead, he saw the law as "a gracious arrangement made by God for the ordering of the life of his people while they were awaiting the arrival of the messiah." Third, for Paul, faith was not a spiritual exercise of moving from self-trust through despair to confidence in God's mercy. Rather, faith is, at its core, the belief that Jesus is the messiah. To become a Christian is to accept Jesus as the messiah, which is what the Damascus Road experience was all about.

The heresy Paul combated in Romans and Galatians was not that the Jewish Christians continued to keep the law; Paul was quite tolerant of those who did so. Rather, the heresy that he exposed was the failure of some Jewish Christians to accept the fact

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36 Yoder says: "The church herself is a society." (CWS, 17.)
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
that "since the Messiah had came the covenant of God had been broken open to include
the Gentiles." Yoder comments: "In sum, the fundamental issue was that of the social
form of the church." Paul's concept of sin was not a matter of existential anguish about
the righteousness and judgment of God, but specifically his failure to recognize Jesus as
messiah and his persecution of the church. Yoder argues that it was only later, in the
context of anti-Jewish polemic, that Paul's language of justification was reinterpreted,
particularly by Augustine, into "the terms of Western self-examination and concern for
authenticity."

The inclusion of Gentiles in the new covenant is the meaning of the one humanity
spoken of by Paul in Ephesians. What had been for previous generations, a mystery, has
now been made known to him. (Ephesians 3:3, 9-10) The divine purpose is the
reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in one community (Ephesians 2:11-26) as an
eschatological sign of the renewal of all humanity in the new creation. Drawing on the
work of scholars like Markus Barth and Paul Minear, Yoder suggests that this
understanding of justification is found in Galatians as well as Ephesians. Markus Barth,
for example, argues that the issue at stake in Galatians 2 is whether Jewish and Gentile
Christians were to live together in one fellowship and "to be 'justified' is to be set right in
and for that relationship." Barth goes on to say:

Sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the means of justification:
only in Christ's death and resurrection is the new man created from at least two, a
Jew and a Greek, a man and a woman, a slave and a free man, etc. . . . The new
man is present in actuality where two previously alien and hostile men come
together before God. Justification in Christ is thus not an individual miracle

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40 POJ, 216.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., 217.
43 Ibid.
Studies* 5/2 (Spring 1968): 241ff, as quoted in POJ, 220.
happening to this person or that person, which each may seek or possess for himself. Rather justification by grace is a joining together of this person and that person, of the near and the far; . . . it is a social event.\textsuperscript{45}

Reconciliation to God and reconciliation to other human beings are thus not sequential, but two sides of the same event. Justification has a social meaning, (not an implication), which is inherent in the doctrine and, in fact, inseparable from it.

Yoder says: "That men and women are called together to a new social wholeness is itself the work of God which gives meaning to history, from which both personal conversion (whereby individuals are called into this meaning) and missionary instrumentalities are derived."\textsuperscript{46} Thus, Yoder argues, "the distinctness of the church of believers is prerequisite to the meaningfulness of the Gospel message."\textsuperscript{47} The church is the new humanity which God is creating as a witness to His ultimate intention for His creation. Yoder says:

The identification of the church with a given society denies the miracle of the new humanity in two ways: on the one hand by blessing the existing social unity and structure that is a part of the fallen order rather than a new miracle, and on the other hand by closing its fellowship to those of the outside or the enemy class or tribe or people or nation.\textsuperscript{48}

Yoder points out that what Paul was saying near the end of the evolution of apostolic Christianity about God reconciling classes of people in the new community is similar to what Jesus was saying at the beginning of the Christian movement about loving enemies,

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 259.
\textsuperscript{46} "A People in the World," 74.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 74-75.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 75.
including outsiders and drawing sinners into fellowship. The love of God is displayed in the reconciliation in one body of those who are, by nature, enemies or separate. Thus, justification is the basis of the new society.

2. The Sociology of the New Society: The new society has, as part of its constitution in Scripture, certain practices which enable it to create and maintain community. Yoder's account of these practices occupies the place in his believers' church ecclesiology which would normally be taken up by a discussion of the "sacraments" in other accounts of ecclesiology. These practices are first, binding and loosing, second, the Lord's supper, third, baptism, fourth, the universal ministry of believers and fifth, the rule of Paul. Yoder originally developed his account of these practices in his Stone Lectures at Princeton and his Morgan Lectures at Fuller in 1980 and in a 1991 article "Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture," before finally publishing a full account of these practices in his book Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World in 1992.

Yoder's account of the "politics" of the body is his attempt to provide a constructive alternative to an account of politics drawn from natural theology, philosophy or common sense. Rejecting the notion that politics is autonomous, Yoder takes Barth's "dogmatics is ethics" method to a new level by identifying politics with worship. "Body politics," as we shall see in the next sub-section, is not only the way in which members of the body relate to each other, but also the basis for the church's role as an exemplary society, that is, as the presence of the coming Kingdom. We now need to

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49 POJ, 225.
51 Although Yoder does not explicitly acknowledge dependence on Barth at this point, what he is doing is methodologically similar to Barth's approach to ethics in CD, IV/4 in which he structured the ethics of
analyze Yoder's account of the politics of the body, an account which extends and fleshes out the politics of Jesus. Yoder's thesis, stated formally, is: "The pattern we shall discover is that the will of God for human socialness as a whole is prefigured by the shape to which the body of Christ is called."\(^{52}\) This "prefiguring" is incomplete, flawed and inconsistent because it is done by sinful, imperfect human beings and it is done in a world, which is not yet fully redeemed. Yoder has no interest in illusions of perfectionism either of individuals or congregations; but he is not willing to go so far as to say that the church is invisible or that the body of Christ is incapable, in the power of the Spirit, of bearing witness in both word and deed to the Kingdom of God.

Yoder discusses five sample ways in which the church is called to operate as a polis.\(^{53}\) The first is called "binding and loosing" or fraternal admonition. Matthew 18:15-18 contains the instructions on what to do when a brother or sister sins. A private attempt to resolve the matter is the first step. Taking a witness to a second encounter is the second step. If the matter is resolved, fellowship has been restored. The third step is to tell it to the church and the expulsion of the offender from the community is the final resort.\(^{54}\) Jesus says that whatever is bound on earth in this process will be bound in heaven and whatever is loosed on earth will be loosed in heaven. Yoder notes first, that the initiative is personal (any member) and not a clergy function, second, that the intention is restorative, not punitive, third, that there is no distinction between trivial and major offenses and fourth, the point is not to protect the church's reputation or to make a

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\(^{52}\) BP, ix.

\(^{53}\) Yoder does not rule out the possibility that there could be more than five such practices.

\(^{54}\) Violence or coercion are never part of the picture.
point about the seriousness of sin, but rather, to serve the offender by restoration of fellowship.\textsuperscript{55}

Unlike most Protestants, Yoder would not limit the number of sacraments to two and he is prepared to call this practice of binding and loosing a "sacrament." Yoder notes that the coming together of human and divine action is what some denominations call a "sacrament."\textsuperscript{56} The anti-Catholic bias of most believers' churches leads them to deny that one human can forgive another in God's name, but exactly that is entailed in this passage.\textsuperscript{57} So Yoder is prepared to see in one action both a church sacrament and a political practice, both a human and a divine act. One reason why the practice of church discipline, which is what this practice is usually called, has been distorted and turned into an instrument of oppression instead of liberation is that it only fits within a voluntary community to which the members have committed themselves personally and freely.\textsuperscript{58} Outside of that context it becomes oppressive; it becomes the manipulation of the divine by humans. This practice aids the community in moral discernment because "conversation with reconciling intent is the most powerful way for a community to discover when the rules they have been applying are inadequate so that they may be modified."\textsuperscript{59} The command of God is heard communally through prayer.

Yoder also stresses the ecumenical potential of this apostolic practice:

Taking seriously this apostolic witness would seem to put us at the mercy of a number of ecclesiastical scarecrows. It gives more authority to the church than does Rome, trusts more to the Holy Spirit than does Pentecostalism, has more respect for the individual than does liberal humanism, makes moral standards more binding than did Puritanism, and is more open to the new situation than was

\textsuperscript{55} BP, 2-3.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 1.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 6.
what some called "the new morality" a quarter-century ago. If practiced it would radically restructure the life of churches. Thus the path of Christian faithfulness might lead through some positions contemporary Christian 'moderates' have been trying to avoid.60

Yoder suggests that to take this practice seriously would mean asserting that the Lutheran view that the shape of the church does not matter is wrong and that the high Catholic views that the Pope can promulgate new binding definitions which go beyond Scripture and that only a priest can give absolution are wrong. He also contends that it implies that the liberal Protestant tendency for the role of the Pope to be taken over by educated, cultural elites is wrong and that the tendency of high scholastic Protestantism to affirm the a priori authority of the propositions contained in the Bible, but to neglect the actual reading of the Bible, is wrong. Yoder obviously is over-simplifying the positions of these groups in order to make his point here. His point is that these mistakes could be avoided by taking seriously a communal hermeneutic.

In terms of sacramentalism, he calls his view a moderately realistic view which could become a viable third way when it is assumed that there is no alternative to puritanical legalism or nondirective counseling. He asserts that the "sectarian" (or believers' church advocate) believes that with the help of the Holy Spirit, the congregation can deduce from the New Testament a "set of instructions, commands, and prohibitions, which are objectively valid in that they translate the will of God adequately for all Christians at a given time and place."61 Yoder says that for the Anabaptists (and for him) there can be no opposition between the Scriptural text and the subjective conviction of the Holy Spirit.62 "The agent of moral discrimination in the doxological

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60 Ibid., 6-7.
community," says Yoder, "is not a theologian, a bishop or a pollster, but the Holy Spirit, discerned as the unity of the entire body."\(^6^3\)

Yoder surveys the ways in which this practice sporadically has been applied in Christian history. Reformers such as Martin Bucer called it the "Rule of Christ." Balthasar Hubmaier wrote an order of service for fraternal discipline.\(^6^4\) It can also be seen working in Scripture, as in the case of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. According to Yoder, the issue comes down to a willingness, or lack thereof, to trust the leading of the Holy Spirit. Yoder's proposal at this point may be somewhat naïve, given the inability of many congregations to agree on much of anything. But he would say that there is no short cut to unity. Conversation may be slow, but at least it has the potential to bring about unity, whereas other, more coercive or authoritarian methods may be more efficient in the short term, but can not bring real Christian unity.

The second social practice is the breaking of bread together, the Lord's supper. Yoder rejects the premise upon which so many Protestant-Roman Catholic polemics have rested that the "sacraments" deal with a special realm of "religious reality" which is apart from the everyday world. Yoder says that this concept of worship was taken over from paganism by Christians centuries after the New Testament, "when paganism had replaced Judaism as the cultural soil of the Christian movement."\(^6^5\) He argues that the "synthesis of Christianity and empire beginning in the fourth century had to replace the economic meaning of breaking bread together with something else."\(^6^6\)

\(^6^4\) BP, 7.
\(^6^5\) Ibid., 14.
\(^6^6\) Ibid., 15.
According to Yoder, what Jesus meant in saying "Whenever you do this, do it in my memory," was whenever you have your common meal, remember me. The connection between food and the resurrection appearances of Christ would have reinforced the correlation between eating together and following Jesus which had characterized the formation of community in the ministry of Jesus. In Acts 6 we see that the economic sharing of the Jesus movement extended into the post-Ascension life of the early church. The decision of the Jerusalem Council revolved around table fellowship and many of Paul's injunctions to the Corinthians dealt with table fellowship.

(I Corinthians 8, 10, 11) Every meal in a Jewish household was an act of worship and the word Eucharist identifies the meal with its prayer. The double meanings of meal fellowship and thanksgiving, and the placing of the supper in the context of the Passover celebration by the Gospels, means that in the Lord's supper "we affirm our loyalty to the entire Hebrew heritage and to the understandings of God as liberator and creator of a people, which the Exodus memory celebrates.\textsuperscript{67}

This new people is one in which there is economic sharing which is affirmed both symbolically and literally in the common meal.\textsuperscript{68} Yoder thinks that it would be going too far to say that the Lord's supper commits the church to social democracy because socialism is a modern theory which has become highly politicized. But it would be saying too little not to confess "that some kind of sharing, advocacy, and partisanship in which the poor are privileged, and in which considerations of merit and productivity are subjected to the rule of servanthood.\textsuperscript{69} The grounds for social justice are not in the

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 22.
original creation orders, which only need to be restored, but rather, are the beginning of the age of fulfillment, the messianic age. In Christian history, the monastic movement, the Waldensians and the sixteenth century Anabaptists are examples of groups in which economic sharing was prominent. Yoder connects the theme of economic leveling to Jesus' proclamation of the jubilee.

Yoder's concept of the economic meaning of the Lord's Supper should not be taken to be a rationalistic reduction of a mystery to outward ethical performance, despite his polemics against pagan religiosity. He should not be interpreted so much as denying the spiritual aspects of the sacrament, as seeking to retrieve the ethical meaning of it. It might help to get at his true intent to put it this way: the "religious" or "spiritual" meaning of the Lord's Supper only becomes illegitimate when it obscures or replaces the ethical meaning. This interpretation would be in harmony with what he says about the doctrines of justification by faith and the Incarnation.

The third social practice is baptism. Yoder says, "Baptism introduces or initiates persons into a new people. The distinguishing mark of this people is that all prior given or chosen identity definitions are transcended." Paul stresses this point in Galatians, Ephesians and II Corinthians. Yoder notes, "baptism celebrates and effects the merging of the Jewish and Gentile stories." The primary narrative meaning of baptism is the new society it creates. After the fifth century, there were no more outsiders to convert because the whole "world" had been declared Christian by imperial edict. That made

70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., 24-25. cf. POJ, Chapter 3.
72 See above, Chapter II, Section E, "The Charge of Reductionism," for Yoder's comments on this point.
73 Ibid., 28.
74 Ibid., 30.
75 Ibid., 32.
baptism a celebration of birth and the same mistake of making ethnicity, rather than faith, the criterion for entry into the covenant was made all over again. Yoder advocates a form of sacramental realism which sees baptism as the actual creation of a new people.

The implications of baptism for inter-ethnic inclusiveness are quite obvious. As Yoder states, "Little imagination is needed to see that affirming the oneness of humanity is one message which by its nature reaches beyond the church's membership." Yoder affirms that Christian unity is the true internationalism and Christian internationalism is the true unity. Baptism is the sign that the messianic age has dawned and that a new phase of world history has begun in which sexual, ritual, ethnic, economic statuses have been relativized.

We must be careful, however, not to forget that the meaning of baptism is not exhausted by its character as the sign of entering into the new society made up of those who confess Jesus Christ as King. If Yoder were giving a systematic account of theology, instead of writing on the specific topic of the retrieval of the ethical meaning of Christian doctrines and practices, it would be a serious omission to leave out the meaning of baptism to the person baptized. For the individual, baptism means repentance, confession and commitment. While we can not justly accuse Yoder of reductionism, we can, nevertheless, note that his account of baptism is incomplete and needs to be incorporated into a systematic believers' church theology so that its implications can be worked out and clarified.

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76 Ibid., 34.
77 "Let the Church Be the Church" RP, 180.
78 BP, 37.
The fourth social practice described by Yoder is the practice of universal ministry or the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).\textsuperscript{79} This is understood by Yoder to mean "a new mode of group relationships in which every member of a body has a distinctly identifiable, divinely validated and empowered role."\textsuperscript{80} According to I Corinthians 12:7, every member of the body has a spiritual gift which is to be used for the common good. Yoder states that one of the reasons modern Protestants have difficulty taking seriously this doctrine is that we think we already understand it.\textsuperscript{81} But it is not mere human potential or abilities that Paul is talking about. Rather, the gifts in question are supernatural enablements of the Holy Spirit.

The need for church order led the early church quite quickly in the direction of exalting the role of another kind of church officer, which became the purview of a few, as opposed to the many, males as opposed to females, and was based in ritual of installation or possession of a tradition. It would be naïve to suppose that the direction this evolution took was not influenced by the patriarchal culture into which it fit so snugly. The counter-cultural Pauline vision was soon buried beneath the new, worldly view of leadership which reversed the servant model of Jesus and made the exercise of power central to the episcopal role.

The Reformation social theory of vocation was a needed correction for the developing idea that secular callings were not really Christian. But this was not the recovery of the Pauline vision. It is highly counter-cultural to question the role of the


\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 47.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 49.
religious specialist. The Reformation questioned it in theory with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, but in practice the religious specialist continued in a different form. But already in the exile, the role of the priest had become unnecessary to the survival of the people of God. The synagogue structure and the focus on the written Torah allowed the Jewish people to maintain their identity in the Diaspora. In Jesus' day, the Temple had been restored, but he relativized it again and Paul formed messianic synagogues in which there was no sacrificial worship. As Yoder puts it, "The specialized purveyor of access to the divine is out of work since Pentecost." However, the alliance between the church and the sacral notion of kingship in Constantinianism has meant a return to the pre-exilic form of peoplehood and the centrality of the religious specialist has been re-asserted. The Pauline vision has yet to be "consciously and consistently lived out," according to Yoder, although the Plymouth Brethren, Salvation Army and Friends have come close. Again, note that Yoder is not arguing for "restoration" but for the church to move forward and claim that which God is offering to it in this messianic age.

For Yoder, the reformation which has yet to happen will involve the elimination of the clergy-laity distinction and the implementation of the congregational practice of binding and loosing. In the process, there will also be the recovery of the economic meaning of the Lord's supper and that of the inclusivist meaning of baptism. It is not so much a matter of recovering something which was lost in the past as it is a matter of moving forward into the fullness of what God has for the church. Part of the key to such

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83 *BP*, 56.
84 Ibid., 57.
a reformation would be to recover the rule of Paul, the fifth social practice of the body, which Yoder discusses next and which could itself be the means by which reform occurs.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul instructs his readers on how "to hold a meeting in the power of the Spirit." Central to his advice here is the principle that everyone who has something to say should have a chance to have the floor. The mode of speech called "prophecy" should be taken with particular seriousness and all members of the body should "weigh" carefully what the prophets have to say. The conviction underlying Paul's teaching here is that the Spirit will guide the community into consensus if there is a willingness to dialogue, wait and trust the process. This process can be seen in Acts 15.

As the churches were established around the Mediterranean world, they expressed their unity and sought to resolve their differences through synods or councils modeled on the pattern of Acts 15. Throughout church history, the vision of ecumenical councils has been held up as a method of achieving church unity and today the World Council of Churches continues the tradition. At the time of the Protestant Reformation, the "disputation" format was borrowed from the university as a way for local councils or princes to settle theological disputes. Zwingli argued that the local church had the right to act to make changes concerning images, the mass and other issues based on his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14. Unfortunately, Zwingli "did not trust this vision fully" and, once he had the city fathers on his side, he equated them with the elders of the Jerusalem church and no longer felt it necessary to consult the community as a whole. From then on, the Reformation was carried out by the state.86 There has always been a

85 Ibid., 61.
86 Ibid., 65-66. Luther also appealed to 1 Corinthians 14 as the warrant for the congregation's taking its order into its own hands.
fear of anarchy on the part of the paternalistic hierarchy. But, says Yoder, "because Jesus Christ is always and everywhere the same, any procedure that yields sovereignty to the direction of his spirit will have ultimately to create unity." 87

Yoder bases his concept of the universal ministry on the gifts of the Spirit and is careful to define the gifts as supernatural, not natural human, abilities. However, his account of the universal ministry leaves many important questions not only unanswered, but not even asked. For example, who discerns who has which spiritual gifts? Which spiritual gifts are in effect today, all or only some? What is the relationship of church offices to the gifts? What is the relationship of education for ministry to the gifts? What role does the pastor have in the congregation, for will there not continue to be pastors even if the clergy-laity distinction is eliminated? If each congregation is autonomous, should we expect different churches to develop varying structures of ministry and leadership? Would it be ethically wrong to have some models of congregational leadership which were more hierarchical than others? The compressed account of the universal ministry and the congregational model of decision-making which is given by Yoder leaves too many questions unanswered. While it is suggestive and helpful, it needs to be systematically articulated.

3. The Exemplary Character of the New Society: All five of these biblical practices can be translated into non-religious terms. Yoder elaborates:

The multiplicity of gifts is a model for the empowerment of the humble and the end of hierarchy in social process. Dialogue under the Holy Spirit is the ground floor of the notion of democracy. Admonition to bind or loose at the point of offense is the foundation for conflict resolution and consciousness-raising. Baptism enacts interethnic social acceptance, and breaking bread celebrates economic solidarity. 88

87 Ibid., 70.
88 Ibid., 72.
But is it right to "secularize" doctrine in this manner? Is it even appropriate? Yoder argues that it is right and appropriate because of the exemplary character of the church as the foretaste, herald and model of the partially-present, future Kingdom of God.

In an important essay entitled: "Why Ecclesiology Is Social Ethics: Gospel Ethics Versus the Wider Wisdom," Yoder offers a reading of a section of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* in which Barth makes the programmatic statement that "True Church law is exemplary law."\(^8^9\) Barth denies that the church has a law which is to be imposed upon the world. But the Gospel can be expressed to the world in terms of its particular law. Barth says:

> The decisive contribution which the Christian community can make to the upbuilding and work and maintenance of the civil consists in the form of the order which it has to give to it and to all human societies in the form of the order of its own upbuilding and constitution . . . It is itself only a human society moving like all other to His manifestation . . . its cognitive basis, the lordship of Jesus Christ ad dexteram Patris omnipotentis, is the actual basis of all temporal law as well. Is it not to be expected therefore, that in its forms - however defective these may be . . . there will be at least some analogies or correspondences to ecclesiastical law?\(^9^0\)

Yoder notes that what Barth has begun to do, by distinguishing between the civil and the Christian communities,\(^9^1\) is to affirm, for the first time since Constantine in mainline Protestant theology, "the theological legitimacy of admitting, about a set of social structures, that those who participate in them cannot be presumed to be addressable from

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\(^9^0\) Ibid., 721-2.
\(^9^1\) In his 1946 essay, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community," Barth goes so far as to refer to the "pagan State." See *Community, State and Church*, ed. W. Herberg (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), 163.
the perspective of Christian confession." Barth's church-world distinction leads him toward what Troeltsch would call a "sectarian" approach to ecclesiology, or what Yoder would call a "believers' church" approach.

Yoder also notes that Barth emphasizes the narrative character of the church in that the meaning of Jesus is made known within the categories of ordinary, historical reality by means of the re-presentation or re-enactment of His story in the ongoing life of the church. This re-enactment is what Barth means by speaking of the life of the church as "liturgical." In the eschatological context of the time between the resurrection and the return, Barth says, the community achieves "this representation provisionally but in concrete reality." Barth is not ascribing perfection to the witness of the church at this point. He should be understood as making the minimalist claim that the witness of the church, while remaining imperfect, inconsistent and flawed, nevertheless is visible. It is the visibility of the witness that prevents a fall into ecclesiastical docetism. True church law is thus a proclamation of the Gospel by the church to the world. The content of the proclamation is not mere words, however, but also the very life of the community itself.

Yoder stresses that, "when we speak with Barth of the Christian community as a liturgical or celebrating community we are accepting . . . our rootedness in the particularity of Judaism and Jesus." But this is in no way a relativizing of the proclamation. Yoder makes this point strongly in his essay "To Serve Our God and to

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93 CD IV/2, 698f.
94 For both Barth and Yoder it is true to say that, if the old age is characterized by rebellion and sin and the new age is characterized by harmony and shalom, the church in the present age should be thought of as participating in both ages and, therefore, as being characterized by both rebellion and harmony, sin and shalom. This is the result of the "already-not yet" eschatological tension of the presence of the Kingdom of God.
95 "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics," RP, 113.
Rule the World," when he says of the worship of the early Christians as it is recorded for us in the New Testament: "For them, to say 'Jesus Christ is kyrios' was a statement neither about their subjective psychic disposition (as pietism would say) nor about their sectarian belief system (as scholasticism would assume) but about the cosmos, the way the world really is." To reject the "wider wisdom" in favor of the historically particular story of Jesus does not condemn us to provincialism, Yoder argues, because the content of what we celebrate in the Christian community is not itself esoteric or provincial.

Primal religion assumes the total known community as the bearer of the meaning of sacral history, but since Abraham that has changed. When the fourth century Christians bought into the sacral kingship of Constantine and identified empire with church, they, in effect, reverted from their Jewish/Christian universalism into a pagan provincialism.

Only as the church repudiates this narrowing of its vision and the sectarianness of Constantinianism can it regain its true universal message and display the truth of the message in its worship. This is why the subtitle of Yoder's book, Body Politics was Five Practices of the Church Before the Watching World. Yoder believes that the church is the bearer of the meaning of history in that God in now doing something in the Christian community which He one day intends to do in all His creation. This is why to work on building community in the church is also mission. The church is the "new world on the way."

One implication of the narrative and eschatological understanding of the social ethical mission of the church is that "the story of the church is constantly redefined in the

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98 Ibid., 116.
99 This is the title of Yoder's Stone Lectures, which were delivered at Princeton in 1980.
encounter of principle and place, of identity and situation. Social ethics is always an encounter between the story of Jesus as it is unfolding in the church and the situation in which the church finds itself. Thus, it will not be systematic (any more than theology is systematic), but rather, occasional and specific. What was wrong with the fad called "situation ethics" was not that it expected guidance in the situation, but that it conceived of this guidance as arising from the situation all at once in a "temporally punctual decision made all at once." Yoder rejects what he terms "strong occasionalism" that abandons ethical accountability to intuition, but he affirms what he calls a "weak occasionalism" which insists on the leading of the Holy Spirit in the process of moral discernment, just as Jesus promised would happen. (John 16:13)

Yoder's description of his believers' church ecclesiology as an alternative society is rich and full of suggestiveness for social ethics. He portrays the believers' church as a new society which is established by means of justification by grace through faith. It is characterized by social practices which demonstrate its eschatological character and re-enact the story of Jesus: baptism, universal ministry, binding and loosing, the rule of Paul and the Lord's supper. It has an exemplary character as the new world in the process of being born or a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. The eschatological Christian community is one in which the Kingdom of God has become present, though not yet in its fullness. The Christian community thus lives in an eschatological tension, participating in both ages at once: the old age of sin and the new age of salvation. Thus, it is possible to view the church as not having a social ethic, but rather, as being itself a

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100 "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics," RP, 121.
101 Ibid., 122.
social ethic. Yoder states: "The believing body of Christ is the part of the world that confesses the renewal to which all the world is called . . . A church that is not 'against the world' in fundamental ways has nothing worth saying to and for the world." The very existence of the Christian community is a sign of hope in the world.

C. The Witness of the Church to the State

We are now in a position to describe how Yoder conceives of the church as witnessing to the state. It should be clear by now that Yoder's social ethic is not public in the sense that non-Christians can hold to it just as well as Christians can, but that it is public in the sense that it has relevance for all human beings and not just Christians. We need to note three characteristics of Yoder's view of the witness of the church to the state: first, its basis in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, second, its essentially ad hoc character, and third, its use of the doctrine of analogy. We will need to compare Yoder's use of the doctrine of analogy to that of Karl Barth.

1. Its Basis in the Lordship of Jesus Christ: For Yoder, the basis of the Christian witness to the state is not the doctrine of creation alone. Like Barth, he rejects the possibility of knowing God's will by means of norms which are not subject to the norm of Jesus Christ, and which, therefore, sometimes contradict the teaching and

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102 This phrase "The church is a social ethic" comes from Stanley Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 99.
103 BP. 78.
A true Christian doctrine of creation would not only view creation Christocentrically, but also would speak of the goal of deriving norms for the present messianic age, not from the fallen creation or even from the original good creation, but rather, from the creation as it is in the process of being transformed by the power of the resurrection which has been unleashed in the cosmos. This would mean deriving norms for the present messianic age from the messiah.

Yoder thinks that Christians often make the strategic error of thinking that they can persuade people who reject the Lordship of Jesus to accept the Lordship of God the Father by means of a doctrine of creation which does not speak of Jesus Christ. If such a doctrine of creation exists, it is not biblical because John 1 (not to mention many other texts) identifies Jesus as the Word who was with God in the beginning. If such a doctrine is biblical, it is so to the extent that it is actually Christocentric, whether this is admitted or not. Yoder stresses the necessity of beginning with "the confession of rootedness in historical community."105 But he does not see this as a handicap for Christians because everyone else must do the same thing too. There is no such thing as a "scratch" from which one can begin.

The basis for the Christian witness to the state, for Yoder, is the cosmic Lordship of Jesus Christ. In His resurrection/ascension, Jesus Christ has triumphed over the powers and has ascended to the right hand of God the Father, the place of rule and authority. The church has been created by the power of the Holy Spirit in the teeth of the opposition of the powers of this world and represents the advance guard of the new

104 See Yoder's discussion of natural theology and natural law in WPR, 46-9 and his discussion of "General Revelation" in CWS, 33-35.
creation. So, in a sense, the witness to the state is based on the doctrine of creation, as long as it is understood clearly that: first, the creation being spoken of is the New Creation which God is bringing into being and, second, the church is the key to understanding the shape of this New Creation.  

2. Its Ad Hoc Character: Next we examine the ad hoc character of the witness of the church to the state. The witness is ad hoc first, in the sense of not being systematic, second, in the sense of dealing with only one issue at a time, third, in the sense of usually taking a negative form, and fourth, in the sense of arising out of its own life as example. We now examine these four aspects of the church's witness to the state.

First, we note that Yoder has no positive doctrine of "the state as such." The state, for Yoder, is one of the powers in creation which has been overcome by Christ in His resurrection, but is still in rebellion. The lordship of Christ over the church and the state takes different forms as long as this age persists. Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 teach that the role of the state in this present age is the maintenance of order in society. Yoder argues that Romans 13:1 does not say that God creates or institutes or ordains the powers that be, but that he orders them. So we can speak of an "order of providence," says Yoder, "where Christ reigns over man's disobedience, through the 'powers' including the state, side by side with the 'order of redemption' where Christ rules in and through the

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106 For further discussion of Yoder's views of the Lordship of Christ, the state and the church see Chapter III, Section A.2 "Yoder's Understanding of New Testament Eschatology."
107 On this point, he follows Barth who, in speaking of the church, says: "It is not in a position to establish one particular doctrine as the Christian doctrine of the just State." See "The Christian Community and the Civil Community," Community, State, and Church, 160.
108 CWS, 12.
109 POJ, 201.
obedience of His disciples." Both are orders of grace and both are eschatological in nature, but they are different. Yoder says:

Since we cannot say that God has any "proper" pattern in mind to which unbelief should conform, the Christian witness to the state will not be guided by an imagined pattern of ideal society such as is involved in traditional conceptions of the "just state," the "just war," or "the due process of law." An ideal or even a "proper" society in a fallen world is by definition impossible.

The state is to punish evildoers and reward those who do good. The role of the state is limited and mostly negative in character; it is not of primary importance in achieving God's purpose in the world.

This understanding of the state explains why the New Testament does not provide a list of functions which are necessary for the state to perform and criteria for how to tell a good state from an evil state. Nowhere are we told to submit ourselves only to good states and to overthrow rebel against tyrannical, despotic or totalitarian ones. Instead, we are told to be subject to the state regardless of how good or evil it is.

Yoder points out that Romans 13:1-7 is found in the context of a block of material in Romans 12-13 which begins with a call to nonconformity to this world. Within the Christian community, this nonconformity takes the form of a new quality of relationships and outside the community, it takes the form of serving and suffering. Yoder states that "any interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 which is not also an expression of suffering and serving love must be a misunderstanding of the text in its context." Yoder points out the eschatological context of this passage, (Romans 13:11-14), which looks forward in hope to "a salvation so concretely imminent and historical as to be 'nearer than when we..."
first believed.\textsuperscript{114} Yoder, following Oscar Cullmann, contends that the command to be subject to the powers in 13:1 is "motivated and exposited by the hope in 13:11-14."\textsuperscript{115} Christians are told in 12:19 never to exercise vengeance but to leave that to God. Then, in 13:4 we are told that the ruler is God's agent and is referred to as "executing the particular function which the Christian was to leave to God." Yoder concludes: "This makes it clear that the function exercised by government is not the function to be exercised by Christians."\textsuperscript{116} Christians have a different and much more important calling, that is, the calling to be church.

Second, the church should speak prophetically to the state on one issue at a time. This is how real social progress has been made in the past. Yoder says: "The Christian social critique will always speak in terms of available, or at least conceivable, alternatives. It will not request from the state the establishment of a perfect society."\textsuperscript{117} The church knows that all utopias are illusory and that romantic visions of perfection, which do not take the realism of sin into account, uniformly lead to social disasters. Therefore, the church will not advocate large scale ideologies like socialism or capitalism. Instead it "will call for the elimination of specific visible abuses."\textsuperscript{118}

Third, the church's witness to the state will usually take a negative form. Yoder notes that the message of the prophets always took a negative form: "In spite of all the ammunition which the social gospel theology took from the Old Testament prophets, those prophets do not propose a detailed plan for the administration of society."\textsuperscript{119} Yoder's reason for this approach is important to note: "This is necessary in the nature of

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 197.  
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 198.  
\textsuperscript{117} CWS, 38.
the case, for the state is not an ideal order, ideally definable; it is a pragmatic tolerable balance of egoisms and can become more or less tolerable.\textsuperscript{110} To act courageously and take the lead in denouncing specific abuses is the role of Christians, who do not have to fear the power of the state because they know that Christ is Lord.

Fourth, the witness of the church to the state should arise out of its own exemplary character and should be backed up by action. The strength of Yoder's book, \textit{Body Politics}, is that the account of politics given there is described as operative in the life of the body of Christ before it is ever recommended to the state. If the church can practice equality of the genders, then perhaps the state, seeing this, can come to believe that such behaviour is a real possibility. This has happened with public education, hospitals, and perhaps even democracy itself. Yoder says:

\begin{quote}
The historian A. D. Lindsey is credited with giving wide currency to the idea that Anglo-Saxon democracy (different in important ways from the enlightenment democracy of Latin Europe) is an extension of the Puritan vision of the hearers freely gathered under the preaching of the Word and free to talk back to the expositor as he is their servant, not a mouthpiece of the king, the bishop or the university.\textsuperscript{121}
\end{quote}

So the church should not presume to speak on every issue, but only when it has some special expertise or reason to speak.\textsuperscript{122}

If church leaders speak on issues on which there is no consensus in the church or on issues on which the church as body is failing to provide a viable alternative, then their credibility is extremely low. There are few sights more pathetic (and few actions less effective) than denominational bureaucrats urging secular governments to take actions to

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} OR, 79.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} BP, 67.
\textsuperscript{122} CWS, 21.
enhance social justice which their own denominations are not able to take, or do not choose to take, themselves. The church does not have to express itself on every issue but it should not be shy about expressing itself whenever it can say to the state: "Do such and such. We do it all the time and it is, therefore, perfectly realistic. Here are the results of our work. Will you join us in addressing this problem?" The witness of the church to the state needs to be ad hoc, in Yoder's view, but it need not be without power and effect.

3. Its Use of Analogy: Yoder notes that Barth used the analogy of faith in his 1946 essay "The Christian Community and the Civil Community" to describe the content of the church's message to, and evaluation of, the state. Yoder says that "the very structure of this essay presupposes and explicates a denial that a state or civil community as such can be a self-aware moral agent so as to stand immediately before God" and he points out that Barth appears to be uncomfortable about this fact. In his earlier writings, Barth was thinking of Christian ethics as directly applicable to the state. But in the 1946 essay, he recognizes that the idea of Christian ethics for the civil community would "in a direct sense" be a contradiction in terms. In this essay, Barth develops twelve analogies between the state and various things: "The direction of Christian judgments, purposes, and ideals in political affairs is based on the analogical capacities and needs of political organisation" says Barth. But he quickly adds: "Political organisation can be neither a repetition of the Church or an anticipation of the Kingdom

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123 KBW, 100-1.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid., 101.
126 Barth says: "There is therefore no such thing as a Christian State corresponding to the Christian Church." ("The Christian Community and the Civil Community," Community, State, and Church, 160.)
127 Ibid., 168.
of God." This leaves one wondering what Barth means at this point. How are church, state, the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ related by analogy?

Yoder speaks of a certain "exploratory whimsicality" at work in Barth's use of analogy in both the 1946 essay and in Church Dogmatics IV/2 where he uses analogy with regard to the state. Yoder resorts to the theory that the argument by analogy is probably offered "tongue-in-cheek" by Barth. The analogies given in the 1946 essay certainly are a mixed grab bag. As Yoder points out, "Sometimes in Barth's examples the comparison was to the church as body: but other times it was to the nature of God about whom the church speaks . . . sometimes to major doctrinal emphases and sometimes to less central descriptions of the church's work." Yoder's comment on this is: "If we are to take seriously the notion of the mission of the church as constituting the backbone of social ethics, it will need to be disciplined more firmly." What will need to be disciplined more firmly? Certainly Yoder is not referring to the mission of the church, as the grammar of that sentence would imply; rather, he is referring to the use of the notion of analogy.

Yoder does not distinguish between Barth's use of analogy with regard to the state in the 1946 essay and his use of analogy in Church Dogmatics IV/2 but there is a major difference. In Church Dogmatics IV/2, Barth never draws analogies between the state and Jesus Christ or God or the Kingdom of God, as he does in "The Christian Community

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128 Ibid.
129 719ff.
130 "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics," 125.
131 KBW, 126. This seems hard to accept, given the utter seriousness with which Barth usually takes social ethics.
132 "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics, 125."
and the Civil Community." In the later work, Barth consistently draws the analogy between the law of the Christian community and the law of the state. This is a highly significant move because it disciplines the use of analogy by refusing to move directly from the Gospel to the state, as though he were doing Christian ethics for the state.

Yoder is correct to point out that Barth is the first major, mainline theologian since Augustine to presume that the state is not directly addressable from a Christian perspective. Will Herberg contends that Barth rejects both the very positive Thomistic view of political order as rooted in natural law and the much more ambiguous Augustinian view of political order as an order of preservation.133 Herberg correctly sees that Barth criticizes his own Reformed tradition for separating creation from redemption and thus falsifying the radically Christocentric character of the faith.134 John Webster's judgment that Barth's vision is "Augustinian-Calvinist in temper, though modified in favour of a greater sense of the range of human responsibility" and Webster's statement that, for Barth, "Jesus Christ relates to the human agent not only as substitute, rescuer, giver of status, but also as assigner of roles and model of performance" defines the nature of Barth's modification of his tradition a bit more precisely.135 Barth realizes that if Christian ethics is to be both grounded consistently in Jesus Christ and applicable to the non-Christian state, then there must be a middle term. The "pagan state" (Barth's term) is not addressable by the Gospel directly. But, because the church, as the body of Jesus Christ, is the "earthly-historical form" of the existence of Jesus Christ,136 it has bodily

134 Ibid., 29.
135 Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation, 230.
136 CD IV/2, 719.
existence in history in common with the state. Thus, Barth can propose six ways in which church law can be a model for the state's law, even though he recognizes that the church can never make clear to the world its authority - Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{137}

We make a two-fold suggestion here. First, we need to see development in Barth's theology as his ecclesiology is developed Christocentrically in Volume IV of the \textit{Church Dogmatics}. The development of Barth's ecclesiology in a Christocentric manner results in the elucidation of the narrative and eschatological aspects of the doctrine of the church. This is rightly called a development, not a reversal, or material alteration. But the later Barth does definitely view the church as much more central to Christian social ethics than does the earlier Barth. The 1946 essay is a transitional point in which Barth's thought is not quite consistent, but by the time he has written \textit{Church Dogmatics} IV/2, a refinement has taken place in that his ecclesiology now allows him to see the church as the model (exemplar) for the state. Second, this refinement of Barth's social ethics brings him and Yoder into agreement on the ecclesiological shape of social ethics. What Yoder does in \textit{Body Politics} is precisely an expansion and elaboration of the same insight that drives Barth's exposition of the statement "True Church law is exemplary law."\textsuperscript{138} The method is identical: the indirect use of the analogy of faith in the form of analogies between the state and the church as a means by which the church witnesses to the state.

Yoder's approach to the witness of the church to the state needs to be understood in terms of Barth's ecclesiology. Yoder's approach is a development of Barth's Christocentric method from an Anabaptist perspective, as well as a creative appropriation

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 723.
of Barth's method of analogy in Christian ethics. Yoder's development of themes in Barth's theology in a believers' church direction is one of Yoder's significant and original contributions to Christian social ethics. Yoder's appropriation of Barth at this point allows him to offer a third way besides the usual alternatives of either a doctrine of the state which is not specifically Christian because it is not derived from a Christocentric account of the church or the inability of Christians to say anything to the state at all, which is the charge of irrelevance often made against those in the believers' church tradition. By understanding the church as an eschatological community, a new society in the process of being redeemed with an exemplary role as the foundation of its witness, it is possible to draw analogies from the nature of the Christian community to the will of God for human community in general. This is at least the beginning of a solution to one of the most important perennial questions of Christian social ethics and one worth being given further consideration by the ecumenical church. Although a foundation now has been laid, in the last sub-section and in this one, for seeing how the frequently-made charges of withdrawal and irrelevance are not valid with regard to Yoder's ecclesiology, it is still necessary to address these charges explicitly and directly and to this task we turn in the final sub-section of this chapter.

D. The Charges of Withdrawal and Irrelevance: An Evaluation

Now we are finally ready to consider the charges of withdrawal and irrelevance which are often made against the kind of ecclesiology defended by Yoder. Usually the procedure is that the critic takes note of some of Yoder's pacifist statements and then, from the critic's own Christendom perspective, makes certain deductions about what then
must be the case with regard to Yoder's social ethic. Sometimes the critics ask of
Yoder's theology questions which assume Constantinian presuppositions, and then label
Yoder's position as deficient because it fails to answer questions to which their position
requires answers. Yoder claims: "That discipleship means social withdrawal is a
caricature projected by Troeltsch and the Niebuhrs, on grounds related to their own
assumptions, not drawn from historical facts."139 The procedure here will be to evaluate
Yoder's claim at this point by asking if withdrawal and irrelevance are the logical
implications of Yoder's theological position, considered as a whole, and of his
ecclesiology in particular.

1. The Charge of Withdrawal: An Evaluation: Throughout his career, Yoder
engaged in debate with Christian Realism and with the thought of the Niebuhr brothers in
particular. H. R. Niebuhr's classic work Christ and Culture,140 has been a highly
influential apologetic for an Augustinian-Reformed approach to social ethics and a
devastatingly effective refutation of the Anabaptist-Mennonite approach to social ethics
which Yoder represents. Why has this book been so influential? What accounts for its
wide appeal and significant staying-power? Is there any way for Yoder to evade its
force? These are the questions we address in this section. In order to do so we will first
examine Yoder's critique of Christ and Culture and then present Yoder's alternative
perspective.

The well-known structure of Christ and Culture does not need to be rehearsed
extensively in this context, so we will move directly to Yoder's analysis of Niebuhr's
work. He points out that Niebuhr's two poles, around which he structures his typology,

139 "Introduction," PK, 11.
"Christ" and "culture," are both defined in problematic ways. First, culture is defined sometimes as "everything people do, every realm of creative behaviour," but other times the state is defined as prototypically the representative of culture. So Tertullian, for example, could be an excellent Latin stylist, a lawyer and philosophical thinker, but he is considered to have been against culture because he refused to kill in war. Niebuhr calls him "inconsistent." If you reject the state, you are against culture, despite the fact that many aspects of culture have nothing to do with the state. Yoder argues against Niebuhr by saying that the radicals do not reject language, education, culture, the arts and urbanity. "What the radicals reject is the uncrirical importation of value-laden substance that is extra-biblical or pagan."

Niebuhr's tendency to define culture monolithically means that one has to be against all of it, for all of it, hold it all in paradox, be above all of it or transform all of it. This is unfair to the radicals because, instead of sticking to his definition of culture as everything people do, he sometimes employs the definition of culture as the majority position of a given society. This allows him to portray people who discriminate between certain aspects of culture which are good and to be embraced and aspects which are evil and to be rejected as anti-culture. Could one not easily find aspects of American culture (racist institutions, for example) that Niebuhr would be against? If Niebuhr took a stand against the Vietnam War or condemned the racism behind school segregation laws, would that mean he was against culture? Is it not more plausible to speak of all of

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142 Christ and Culture, 55, 69-70.
143 "The Disavowal of Constantine," RP, 249.
144 "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasons," 56.
us as being against culture in some sense? Of course the answer to these questions is the affirmative. It is possible to oppose even long-standing, firmly-held, majoritarian positions of the culture in which one lives without necessarily being against culture as such. So the problem of slippery definitions vitiates Niebuhr's argument.

However, Yoder is not content to make this point. He presses his case further by pointing out that "the historical fact that movements which at the outset use anti-cultural rhetoric turn out to be very culturally creative" is a sign of inconsistency and hard for Niebuhr to explain. But it is quite understandable if, in fact, being against significant aspects of culture is actually a prerequisite for transforming culture. He says of the pacifism of consistent non-conformity, for example, "precisely because this type of pacifism takes culture seriously, it discerns worldliness as a cultural reality and identifies those practices which are to be avoided." Yoder notes:

Over against the depersonalizing effects of mass education, they have created not a cultural vacuum but an alternative pattern of transmission and value definition. In case of disaster, this just might be the only subculture capable of surviving in North America outside the mainstream or without the mainstream. Whatever is wrong with the Amish and Hutterian patterns, it is not that they are against culture. Yoder notes that if the choice is between uncritical involvement and non-involvement, then the radical reformation person chooses non-involvement. But he denies that Christian involvement always has to be uncritical. This is especially true when it is focussed on service to the poor, rather than on governing the power structures.

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145 Ibid., 57.
146 Ibid., 104.
147 Ibid.
Yoder's position is that Christians deny their Lord when they admit that there are certain realms of life in which it would be inappropriate to bring Christ's rule to bear. But his contention is that it is the Christian Realists like H. R. Niebuhr who do this by contending that Christian must conform to some of the evil aspects of culture because those aspects cannot be expected to change. As Cartwright notes, Yoder is critical of the degree of accommodation in American Protestantism which is justified by appeals to "realism." The roots of this accommodation lie in Christology and so we now turn to a discussion of the definition of the other crucial term in Niebuhr's typology: "Christ."

The real difference between Yoder and Niebuhr is theological because they have different understandings of revelation. Cartwright notes that H. R. Niebuhr's understanding of revelation is different from that of Barth. Cartwright follows Hans Frei in viewing Niebuhr's understanding of revelation as being rooted in Troeltsch's historicist vision of pluriform revelation. For Barth, on the other hand, revelation must be understood in relation to the divine perichoresis of the Triune God, which means for Barth that revelation must be unified. But Niebuhr exhibits little interest in the immanent Trinity and has "no integral conception of perichoresis operative in connection with God's revelation." Yoder's concept of revelation, on the other hand, is Barthian in that it is Christocentrically controlled and, therefore, unified. He says:

To confess Christ as Lord differs from some other fundamental stances, in fact, in that its very structure does claim to incorporate other value data. It does this neither by affirming them all (which would be a mindless pluralism) nor by denying specifically any of them, but by a nuanced interlocking which

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151 Ibid., 83.
152 Ibid., 81.
153 Ibid., 81-82. See above, Chapter II, Section C.2 for further discussion of Niebuhr's doctrine of the Trinity.
understands other values as at once created, fallen, in the process of being judged, and in the process of being led toward restoration.154

Yoder's position is not Christomonist in the sense of rejecting all sources of knowledge except Christ, but it is Christocentric in the sense of testing all knowledge by the norm of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, which is always central.

Yoder notes that Niebuhr's definition of "Christ" is one-sided. He points out that Niebuhr's Jesus is a moralist who affirms the transcendence of the spiritual and therefore condemns concern for this world. He "points away" from the world and from himself to his Father, who alone is worthy of loyalty. He does not condemn culture as sinful, he simply points toward something incomparably more important.155 But if we compare Niebuhr's portrait of Christ to the New Testament or to the mainstream of Christian thought, we find that it leaves out a great deal. The orthodox tradition teaches that Jesus was the Son of God incarnate who died an atoning death for sin and rose from the dead. If we compare Niebuhr's portrait to that of the New Testament, we find that Niebuhr ignores Jesus' role of an exemplary human who calls people to discipleship, Jesus' lordship over nature as seen in his miracles, and over history as seen in his resurrection. Also, the New Testament writers would not agree in contrasting the will of the Father or that of the Spirit with the teaching and example of the Son. Yoder concludes:

he has excised from his picture of Jesus precisely those dimensions, clearly present in the biblical witness and in classical theology, which would have made impossible the interpretation of Jesus as 'pointing away' from the realm of culture, and thereby as needing the corrective of a 'more balanced' position.156

The "Christ" who is against culture is a straw man.

154 "How To Be Read By the Bible," 23. See "Introduction," PK, 11 for similar statements.
156 Ibid., 60.
In Yoder's opinion, the real point of the book is to argue against the radical position. Ironically, this radical position is one which Niebuhr himself apparently held early in his career. In 1935 he published an article in a book entitled: The Church Against the World\(^{157}\) in which he said that the world has always been against the church. He spoke of the church as being in bondage to idolatry, capitalism, nationalism and the spirit of class and to optimistic humanism.\(^ {158}\) He had already disagreed with his brother, Reinhold Niebuhr, in the 1932 article "The Grace of Doing Nothing,"\(^ {159}\) but gradually came to modify his views in the direction of those of his brother. So Niebuhr, in Christ and Culture, is arguing against the position he himself had once held.

Ultimately, the crucial point on which Niebuhr's book stands or falls is Christological. It is true that the doctrine of the church is as absent from H. R. Niebuhr's work as it is from his brother's work. But why? The reason is rooted in Christology and eschatology. The eschatological, Jewish, impossible-to-take seriously Jesus of Albert Schweitzer haunts the thought of both of the Niebuhrs. In order to overcome the idealistic limitations of Christian Realism, it is necessary to retrieve classical, orthodox Christology by means of a more adequate Biblical Realism and this is Yoder's project.

There is one further point which should be made in relation to the issue of withdrawal from culture. In the twentieth century, the main problem the church is facing is not that it has no involvement in culture, but that it is too conformed to culture. Since the church has bought into the socially corrosive ideology of liberal individualism, the


\(^{158}\) Yoder, "The Kingdom as Social Ethic," PK, 89. See also the comments by James McClendon in the "Foreword" to Charles Scriven, The Transformation of Culture: Christian Social Ethics After H. Richard Niebuhr (Scottdale, Penn.: Herald Press), 10.

withdrawal from social responsibility actually is the result, not of sectarian ecclesiology, but of liberal individualism. As Gayle Gerber-Koontz observes, in modern Western society, with its emphasis on individual rights, the breakdown of the family, high mobility, and an emphasis on personal fulfillment as the purpose of life, the real danger is not the withdrawal into sectarian communities, but into the world of privatized religion.\footnote{160}

In their book, Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life, Robert Bellah and his co-authors document the effects of individualism upon contemporary American life. One story stands out as, perhaps, the epitomy of this trend. They actually interviewed one person, a young nurse who had received a great deal of therapy, who had named her religion after herself. Her "faith" (her term for it) is called "Sheilaism."\footnote{161} She heard God speak, but the voice was her own. The authors make the point that the identification of self and the cosmos as a whole is not ridiculous nonsense; rather, it is a different worldview from the biblical one. It is an attempt to liberate one's self from what is perceived to be an oppressive set of social demands coming from society.\footnote{162} Yoder's ecclesiology is the affirmation of local community, modeled on the extended family, which has the potential to be a viable (non-oppressive because freely chosen) alternative to liberal individualism. Any contemporary Western ecclesiology which does not challenge liberalism is already conformed to the world around it.

The strength of Yoder's believers' church ecclesiology is that it can oppose
individualism without coercion. The voluntary nature of membership means that the
discipline people take on when they join the community is self-imposed. But there is still
discipline within the community. Individuals can not make up their own rules for
belonging. The community has its own standards, which it adopts on the basis of its
communal hermeneutic under the guidance of Spirit. The community is thus able to act
as a force for social change without resorting to violence or coercion. In this way, the
community is able to bear witness to the heart of the Gospel, namely, the love of God as
expressed in His sending of His Son to die for the sins of the world and the free offer of
salvation and new life to all who repent and believe. It is in this important sense that
Yoder's ecclesiology is truly evangelical.

2. The Charge of Irrelevance: An Evaluation: The objection still remains, that
Yoder's project leads perhaps to faithfulness, but it also results in the irrelevance of the
church to the social problems of our day. It would seem that both Niebuhrs believed that
the account of Jesus and discipleship ethics given by the tradition in which Yoder was
raised is perhaps closer to the New Testament than was the liberalism in which they were
raised. But they could not imagine how to make such an account relevant to social ethics,
and, finding themselves caught between a choice of irrelevant faithfulness and less than
totally faithful responsible relevance, they viewed the latter as the lesser of two evils.
Yoder disagrees with their choice for the very simple reason that in this dilemma, (a
recurring one for Christians down through the centuries), unfaithfulness is ineffective in
transforming culture anyway. So the choice is to be faithful to Jesus and see your culture
transformed partially sometimes or turn away from faithfulness and see culture gradually
"squeeze you into its mold." (Romans 12:1, J. B. Phillips)
Yoder identifies the temptation to choose "responsibility" over faithfulness as the original temptation. Commenting on Philippians 2, he states:

The renunciation of equality with God (v.6) has been understood in later Christian doctrinal development as referring to the metaphysical meaning of deity and incarnation, but probably the first meaning in the hymn was the more concrete Godlikeness promised by the serpent to Adam in the garden, which would have consisted in unchecked dominion over creation. Or perhaps it refers as well to the kind of Godlikeness claimed by Caesar. What Jesus renounced was thus not simply the metaphysical status of sonship but rather the untrammeled sovereign exercise of power in the affairs of that humanity amid which he came to dwell. His emptying of himself, his accepting the form of servanthood and obedience unto death, is precisely his renunciation of lordship, his apparent abandonment of any obligation to be effective in making history move down the right track. So the grasping of "responsibility" by Adam leads to condemnation and cosmic disaster, while the renunciation of "responsibility" by Jesus leads to exaltation to the right hand of the Father and the renewal of the cosmos. As Gerber-Koontz points out, the issue ultimately is one of trust in God.

But does this mean giving up on social change as a goal of Christian action in the world and becoming entirely passive in the face of evil? By no means, according to Yoder. The church has an effect on culture in several ways. First, the very existence of the church as counter-cultural community will have an indirect effect on what can be conceived of as possible in the world. Second, the church takes the lead in providing services in areas such as health, education, refugee relief and so on. Third, the church provides Christian education to some who do not choose to identify with the church as adults and these individuals often reflect a higher form of morality which positively affects society. Fourth, the church can speak a prophetic word to the state on the basis of

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163 POJ, 235.
165 CWS, 16ff.
the Lordship of Christ. A Christian community which seriously seeks to live out the 
Gospel will not blend in with the wider society and, therefore, will inevitably affect that 
society. Thus, Yoder argues, choosing to spend one's energies in building up the church 
is not withdrawing from society or taking a defeatist attitude. The church is a lab for 
social experimentation, a pilot project, a new paradigm, a nurturing ground for counter-
cultural values, a live alternative to a society structured around retributive sanctions.\textsuperscript{166}

Charles Scriven, in his book \textit{The Transformation of Culture: Christian Social 
Ethics After H. Richard Niebuhr},\textsuperscript{167} argues that Yoder's approach is a more theologically 
adequate account of how Christ transforms culture than the Augustinian-Calvinist one 
advocated by H. R. Niebuhr and Scriven's thesis is essentially correct. But we would be 
misrepresenting Yoder if we were to go further and interpret him as holding to his 
position because he thinks it is the most pragmatically effective position. Yoder says: 
"Nonresistance is right, in the deepest sense, not because it works, but because it 
anticipates the triumph of the Lamb that was slain."\textsuperscript{168} Yoder doubts that the criterion of 
effectiveness is ultimately coherent:

\begin{quote}
The longer I look at the question of effectiveness the less I trust that way to put 
the issue to be of any help. . . . The person who says, 'You must give up some of 
your scruples in order to be effective' is still saying that because of the goal for 
the sake of which to be effective is in principle a good goal. So the argument 
which takes the clothing of 'principle versus effectiveness' really means this 
principle versus that principle. . . . Likewise the people who say 'You must simply 
be true to God' . . . and 'let the heavens fall' . . . really say that because of a 
conviction about Providence, trusting that if the heavens fall God has another set 
of heavens ready, which is part of the process, so even this is not thumbing your 
nose at the results. It's trusting God who gave us the rules to know more about
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[166] OR, 131. cf. "Firstfruits: The Paradigmatic Public Role of God's People" and "The New Humanity as 
\item[167] (Scottdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1988).
\item[168] OR, 64.
\end{footnotes}
the results than we know. So I am increasingly convinced that the debate between the effectiveness ethic and the principle ethic is a false debate.\textsuperscript{169}

For Yoder, what is needed is obedience to the revealed will of God and trust in Him for the results. If He is sovereign, then He will use our obedience to glorify Himself. If He is not, then the whole debate is beside the point anyway and we might as well trust our own best moral insights in the situation. In the end, Yoder's whole social ethic stands or falls on the reality of God of the Bible and the reliability of Jesus as a true revelation of His character.

In this chapter, we have examined Yoder's ecclesiology and demonstrated its interconnection with his Christology and eschatology. We have seen that his believers' church ecclesiology, which can be contrasted with the theocratic vision and the spiritualist reaction, is evangelical, ecumenical, catholic and reformed. His description of the Christian community as a new society, brought into existence by justification by faith, is characterized by practices which enable the community, in its communal life, to become exemplary in terms of what God's ultimate intention is for the whole of creation. He shows how it is possible to say that the church not only has, but is a social ethic. The politics of the Christian community, by means of the doctrine of analogy, becomes the basis for the witness of the church to the state. Thus, the charges of withdrawal and irrelevance, which are often made against the believers' church tradition, are not well-founded, at least so far as Yoder's ecclesiology is concerned.

\textsuperscript{169} WPR, 436-7.
CONCLUSION

Yoder wrote literally hundreds of different works, including scholarly translations of primary sources, scholarly monographs, articles in scholarly journals in disciplines ranging from philosophy to biblical studies to history, popular articles in denominational publications, and close analyses of classic texts. In all of this writing, over a period of over forty years, there is a definite constancy of themes and a clear logical consistency between the various arguments. This is all the more impressive, considering that Yoder did not write one big book which could serve as an introduction to his thought and a reference point for the interpretation of his writings.

There are some developments in his thought, however, which can be noted. The prominence of rabbinic Judaism and the themes of Diaspora, synagogue and pacifism certainly became more prominent in his thinking in the last third of his life. He spent 1976 living in Jerusalem and wrote the essay "The Disavowal of Constantine" during that year. From that point on, Yoder developed his alternate reading of the Old Testament and thereby deepened his critique of Constantinianism significantly. Some of the fruit of this study appears in his last book of essays: For the Nations. In reading Yoder's material on Judaism, one gets a definite sense of "unfinished business" and it is fascinating to speculate on what more Yoder would have had to say about Jewish-Christian dialogue had he had the opportunity to continue thinking and writing along this line.
Another development is a move from the "politics of Jesus" to "body politics."
The material which eventually was published in the book *Body Politics* originated as one of the series of lectures given at both Princeton and Fuller in 1980. Yoder's work on Jesus and Christian ethics in the early seventies was highly significant, but one suspects that his work would be much easier to dismiss if he had not moved beyond the focus on individual discipleship to develop his ecclesiology in such significant ways during the last two decades of his career. His book of essays, *The Royal Priesthood*, shows that ecclesiology was hardly a new theme in his writings; but this book makes the originality and comprehensiveness of his ecclesiology apparent in a new way. Here we have a compelling, believers' church ecclesiology not just described, but engaged in dialogue with mainline Roman Catholic and Protestant thought.

In this concluding section of this essay, we will attempt to draw together the main conclusions this essay has reached concerning the correct interpretation of Yoder's thought. We will then examine some of the weaknesses and gaps in Yoder's theology and ethics as well. Finally, we will close with a few comments on the importance of Yoder's thought for the church of the twenty-first century.

**A. Conclusions Concerning the Interpretation of Yoder's Thought**

First, we need to summarize the main line lines of the interpretation of Yoder's thought which have been developed throughout this thesis. What kind of social ethicist was John Howard Yoder? In what follows, we seek to answer that question by pulling

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1 See RP, 381.
together various threads of the argument of this essay. We will note eight characteristics of Yoder as a social ethicist.

1. A Barthian, Anabaptist Social Ethicist: By creatively uniting aspects of his own Anabaptist-Mennonite theological heritage with the method and major themes of Karl Barth's theology, Yoder was able to build on and to develop social ethics in the tradition of Barth. A common caricature of Barth's theology is to see it as "scholastic" or "conservative" and detached from everyday life and the social and political problems confronting humankind. Yoder demonstrates the social ethical relevance of Barth's theology by developing a social ethic which is as radically Christocentric as Barth's theology. The result is not irrelevance, but a powerful and internally consistent system which forces us to rethink our whole approach to what it means to address social problems from a specifically Christian perspective.

Yoder's other main source of his ethical method and major themes, his own Anabaptist-Mennonite theological heritage, is also caricatured as one which is not relevant to, or involved in, social issues. But Yoder demonstrates that a separate, disciplined community is not only relevant to the wider society, but also can be shown to be the intentional strategy of Jesus in the Gospels. Yoder is critical of his own denomination for not living up to the "Anabaptist vision," which he believes is consistent with the New Testament. He seeks to employ a Christocentric criterion for evaluating the social stance of all denominations. Thus he unites a Barthian method with themes from his Anabaptist heritage to create a social ethic which is both highly original and highly consistent. Yoder's social ethics cannot be understood unless both his indebtedness to Barth and his rootedness in the Anabaptist tradition are clearly understood.
2. A Postliberal Social Ethicist: Yoder is best understood as a postliberal, but his thought should be distinguished from that of the postliberal theologians connected with Yale because of the way in which he combines a clear-cut commitment to theological realism, his in-depth engagement of Scripture, and his emphasis on pacifism as central to a Christian social ethic. Yoder's clear commitment to theological realism is shared by the postliberal theologian George Hunsinger and Yoder's emphasis on pacifism is shared by the postliberal ethicist Stanley Hauerwas. His extensive engagement of the biblical text is matched by that of the biblical scholar Brevard S. Childs, who shares many postliberal concerns with Yoder. Yoder's originality, however, consists in the way in which he combines these three emphases.

This essay has argued that Yoder should be understood as a postliberal theologian in the sense of having rejected liberalism in both its nineteenth century optimistic, culture-Protestant form and its twentieth century, chastened, revisionist form, and also in the sense of having been influenced by Barth. However, Yoder should be distinguished from the "Yale School," especially George Lindbeck and Hans Frei to the extent that their commitment to theological realism is doubted. This essay has not been able to take the time to give sustained attention to the thought of individual postliberal thinkers, although we did see in Chapter Two that there are some definite parallels between what Frei and Yoder do with regard to the interpretation of the Gospels. We also noted that there is some similarity between the way Lindbeck and Yoder treat the significance of the ecumenical creeds as rules for Christian speech. While Yoder and the Yale postliberals share many common concerns and a common appreciation for the theology of Barth, they nevertheless should not be interpreted as all affirming the same position.
The biggest problem in Yoder interpretation arises with regard to Stanley Hauerwas. Since Hauerwas' work is better known than Yoder's, and since Hauerwas gives Yoder so much credit for influencing him, readers tend to interpret Yoder through the grid of Hauerwas' writings. But the degree of difference between the thought of Yoder and that of Hauerwas is still somewhat unclear. The really important question, more fundamental than issues of temperament or style,² is the issue of theological realism. We know that Hauerwas and Yoder share a commitment to non-foundationalist epistemology. We may debate the issue of relativism with regard to Hauerwas, although Yoder makes it clear how and why he is not a relativist. What is less clear is the question of whether or not Hauerwas is prepared to embrace the classical realism of Yoder and Barth. Yoder himself, in an unpublished supplement to his article "Meaning After Babble: With Jeffrey Stout Beyond Relativism," had this to say about Hauerwas:

One reason Hauerwas does not do text-based Bible study is that he is overawed by the notion of community-dependency and underawed by the objective reality of salvation history. Also underawed by the study of real (unsaved) history. He would rather read novels.³

Yoder obviously perceived a crucial difference between Hauerwas and himself on the issue of the "objective reality of salvation history."

At this point, we cannot go into a detailed analysis of the thought of Hauerwas and we cannot settle the issue of whether Hauerwas' critics, such as Biggar,⁴ for example, (and Yoder himself), are being fair to him in doubting his theological realism. But the

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² See Michael Cartwright's discussion of the relationship between Yoder and Hauerwas in "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity," RP, 15, n. 25. Cartwright sees Yoder and Hauerwas as differing on the issues of ecclesiology, but he does not trace the origin of this difference back to their Christologies as is done in this essay.


⁴ See the discussion of Biggar, Hauerwas and Yoder in Chapter II, Section B.
important point to note here is that, whether fairly or unfairly, *critics do in fact doubt it* and that, under the present circumstances, it is almost inevitable that the perception of Yoder by the scholarly world will be colored by this fact. One is reminded, to mention a perhaps somewhat more extreme example of the same phenomenon, of the way in which Barth’s thought was (mis-) interpreted in the English-speaking world because of its having been read through the grid of Brunner during the forties and fifties. Since Barth’s thought was only available in very large books, not yet translated from German, and since Brunner’s thought was accessible in shorter works which were translated almost immediately after their publication in Europe, the very real differences between the two thinkers were ignored or minimized and Brunner was read as representative of something called "neo-orthodoxy," an entity supposed to include within its scope the thought of both Brunner and Barth. To the extent that it becomes common to speak of Hauerwas and Yoder together as representatives of something called "narrative ethics," some crucially important differences between the two thinkers are in danger of being overlooked. Yoder should be seen as a postliberal, but as one of the postliberals who remained most faithful to Barth’s theological realism and Christocentric method.

3. A Theologically Orthodox, Radical Social Ethicist: Yoder’s major challenge to the church today is his controversial contention that a discipleship ethic centering on pacifism and community is the logical implication of classical, Christological orthodoxy. His social ethic is firmly rooted in a very coherent and orthodox theological system. Unlike many liberal theologians, who derive radical social ethical conclusions from their radical, heterodox theologies and many conservative theologians, who derive conservative social ethical conclusions from their scholastic, orthodox theologies, Yoder
derives a radical ethic, centering on pacifism and separation from all forms of nationalism, militarism and hierarchy, from classical, Christological orthodoxy.

This makes Yoder's social ethic attractive to people who usually regard orthodoxy as an ideological tool of patriarchy, militarism and capitalism. If Yoder is correct to argue that the pacifism of the messianic community is simply the logical implication of taking seriously what the church has always taught about Jesus, then the advocates of what might be termed "Left-wing Constantinianism" and "Right-wing Constantinianism" are both challenged to abandon their Constantinian social strategies.

The "Right-wing Constantinians" are those who see the nation-state as the bearer of the meaning of history and who, therefore, emphasize national security and the maintenance of the status quo. They are challenged by Yoder's critique of Christian Realism as lacking a doctrine of the church and as knowing nothing of the power of the Holy Spirit. They over-emphasize maintaining social order and under-emphasize serving the poor. They are also suspect, from Yoder's perspective, because Jesus came into conflict with the Powers, including the state. His call to his disciples to take up their crosses is evidence of the fact that He expected the same destiny for them. "Left-wing Constantinians," on the other hand, are those who see themselves as being against the maintenance of the status quo and the advocates of the poor, the oppressed and those discriminated against by the conservative establishment. But their solution is to replace the current ruling party and ideology with a new and better ruling party and ideology. They are also challenged by Yoder's critique of Latin American Liberation Theology as

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5 See above, Chapter I, Section A.5, for Yoder's critique of Reinhold Niebuhr.
not being radical enough. Yoder contends that it is Constantinianism, not the current set of rulers or the currently dominant ideology, which is the deeper problem. Yoder argues that those who seek the power which is rooted in coercion, seek something which is incompatible with a clear witness to the Gospel of God's uncoercive love as it is expressed in Jesus Christ.

4. A Non-Foundationalist, Non-Relativist Social Ethicist: Although Yoder is non-foundationalist in his epistemology, he nevertheless rejects moral relativism and clearly proclaims the ontological reality of God and the ability of Christians to know God's will. Yoder is often misunderstood at this point, because his critics often make their criticisms on the basis of Constantinian assumptions which he has already rejected. For example, Yoder strongly rejects the notion, that one cannot proclaim as objectively true that which one cannot prove to be true by means of some sort of universal, neutral method, as part of the ideology of the Constantinian establishment. Yoder rejects what he calls "methodologism."

Yoder's epistemology is non-foundationalist, but not anti-foundationalist. By this he means that his rejection of foundationalism is not itself a new foundationalism which subverts all meaning systems and thereby allows a social revolution to occur. His rejection of foundationalism consists of a recognition that all of us, Christians and non-Christians alike, begin our narratives from an historically particular perspective. All thought is rooted in historical communities. However, the ruling establishment of all civilizations have a need to legitimize their rule and justify their resort to violence and

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coercion. So the apologists for the ruling elite attempt to ground the authority of the state in religion, science or whatever is taken to be of ultimate truth in their culture.

Yoder's epistemology is not relativist, even though he rejects the possibility of a neutral, scientific method by which any rational person can have access to the truth and can demonstrate the truth to any other rational person. The reason Yoder does not fall into an absolute relativism is that he roots his thought in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. He builds everything in his social ethics on the conviction that, in Jesus, we have the true revelation of the character of the living God of the Bible. Since the Christian church grounds its story in the biblical narratives centering on the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, its story is the true story of what God is doing in history. The good news of the Gospel is that God has acted in history, in Jesus Christ, to reconcile and redeem His creation. So a social ethic which re-enacts Jesus' story in the power of Jesus' Spirit, bears witness to the forgiving love of God and is, therefore, true in the sense of being consistent with the ultimate meaning of the universe.

5. An Evangelical Social Ethicist: The fact that the Gospel is rooted in an historical event and, therefore, consists of the proclamation of an historically particular narrative, is not a liability from Yoder's perspective. Indeed, this is part of what makes it "good news." Yoder's "epistemology of evangel" is an original contribution to Christian thought and serves as an integrating concept for a distinctively Christian doctrine of God as love, a believers' church ecclesiology and an eschatology characterized by a tension between the old era and the new era.

in 1970. As the possibility of successful social revolution has receded into the distance, Latin American Liberation Theology has had to learn how to think from a non-Constantinian perspective.
Yoder's "epistemology of evangel" can be defined as his non-coercive concept of the way in which God presents Himself to His creatures, revealing His grace and yet doing so in such a way as to leave the creature with the option to accept that grace freely or to reject it. The pacifism of the messianic community is rooted in the loving character of God, who does not want mere obedience, but love and fellowship from His human creatures. Yoder views the message of the church to the world as consisting of heralding the message of Jesus Christ, not as proving the existence of God. He draws a connection between the Constantinian political coercion of membership in the church by the outlawing of unbelief and the Constantinian epistemological coercion of assent by means of a smothering and irrefutable argument for the existence of God.

Yoder's view of the mission of the church as being primarily witness, his view of the nature of the membership of the church as voluntary, and his view of the importance of the church-world distinction, are all rooted in his evangelical epistemology. His social ethic, which he sees as one aspect of the mission of the church and, therefore, primarily as a matter of witness to Jesus Christ, can never involve coercion or the use of violence. The point of social ethics, for Yoder, is not to do the task of the state, which is to maintain some basic semblance of order in a fallen world, but rather, to bear witness to the Gospel.

The context for this witness is the eschatological tension of the present age between the "already" and the "not yet" of the Kingdom of God. Yoder's eschatology is partially-realized and yet basically future-oriented. He looks forward to a point in history where God will vindicate Himself in judgment. This means that the messianic community does not need to vindicate itself here and now. Since God raised Jesus from
the dead, the community need not fear even martyrdom and can, instead, trust fully in the God who is able to raise the dead. Yoder argues that part of the reason why Constantinianism feels the need to resort to violence is that it has lost this future hope and the freedom for obedience which it brings. The messianic community does not need to impose the truth on anyone, for God does not need to be vindicated by His creatures and, in any case, the truth of love can not be communicated by violence. Yoder's epistemology is evangelical in the sense of emphasizing a non-coercive witness to the good news of God's love.

6. A Jewish, Christian Social Ethicist: By describing Yoder as "Jewish," we are making the point that Yoder's theology re-affirms the Jewish roots of the believers' church vision and the Old Testament roots of the pacifism of the messianic community. Yoder's retrieval of, and appreciation for, the Jewish roots of Christianity and his "disavowal of Constantine" opens up significant possibilities for Jewish-Christian dialogue, particularly between the believers' church tradition and orthodox Judaism. Yoder's theology is original insofar as it lays a foundation for dialogue between Christians and Jews in a post-Holocaust situation.7

Unlike most approaches to Christian social ethics, which denounce the Holocaust, yet remain within the Constantinian framework which led to it, Yoder "disavows" the Constantinian arrangements by which Christianity was identified with the power structures of Western culture. Yoder's epistemology of evangel leads him to reject forced conversion, the application of sanctions to non-Christians by government and the

7 Of course, the dominance of Zionism and the views of many Jews that pacifism was part of what allowed the Holocaust to occur mean that this dialogue cannot readily take place with the majority of Jews today. I am grateful to Gayle Gerber-Koontz for highlighting this important point.
exclusion of Jews from full citizenship, all of which actions have been common in the history of Western Christendom. No one knows if the Holocaust would still have occurred even if Christianity had not been the official ideology of the rulers of Western Europe, but it certainly would not have been possible to view Christian anti-Semitism as being at least partially responsible for it, had Christianity not been the official religion of Germany.

Yoder's disavowal of Constantinianism not only rejects the legitimacy of Christian persecution of Judaism, it also rejects the paganization of the church which caused it to lose much of its Jewish character. Yoder sees Constantinianism as a false reading of the Hebrew Scriptures and he sees the reading developed by the rabbis of the exile, centering on Diaspora, synagogue and pacifism as a non-Constantinian reading which the non-Constantinian Christian church can affirm. By describing Judaism as the sect which most consistently lived out the ethic of Jesus in Medieval Europe, and by highlighting the story of the pacifism of Rabbinic Judaism, Yoder finds much more common ground with Judaism than most other Christian theologians do. Yoder believes that Jewish and Christian understandings of God have more in common with each other than either has with pagan concepts of God.

Yoder's reaching out to Judaism, therefore, should not be understood as a backing away from the affirmation of classical, Christological orthodoxy. Rather, it is Yoder's argument that Arianism was a more appropriate religion for the Empire, which is part of his explanation for why a court apologist like Eusebius of Caesarea would lean in that direction. The Nicene homoousion was a re-affirmation, in Greek philosophical categories, of the biblical teachings on the oneness of God and the deity of Jesus. Jewish
historical particularity is preserved by Nicea, and pagan understandings of God, as eternal and detached from the temporal, are rejected. The revelation of God in the history of Israel and in Jesus have in common the conviction that God's self-revelation is historical in nature. The concept of God as known by means of human reason is rejected as pagan by Nicea. Yoder's Barthian rejection of natural theology thus ties in with his retrieval of the Jewish roots of Christian faith with his re-affirmation of classical Christological orthodoxy.

7. **A Christocentric, Trinitarian Social Ethicist:** Yoder does not emphasize the doctrine of the Trinity, if by emphasizing that doctrine one means speculating on the nature of God with no practical end in view. But Yoder's Christology presupposes the two natures doctrine and the full deity of Jesus Christ, his eschatology presupposes the ontological reality of God and His sovereignty over history, and his ecclesiology presupposes the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian community. Yoder thus can be said to be a strong advocate of what could be termed "practical Trinitarianism."

Yoder's Trinitarianism is Christocentric, as opposed to that of H. R. Niebuhr, which is a pluralistic type of Trinitarianism. For Yoder, the deity of Jesus means that any view of God which is inconsistent with God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, is false. So the whole project of natural theology, as a separate enterprise alongside a theology of revelation, is rejected. Any knowledge of God we claim to get from reason, nature or tradition must be tested with reference to the norm of Jesus Christ as He is attested in Scripture. This Barthian approach to the Trinity means that Yoder never has the kind of problem a theologian like H. R. Niebuhr had, namely, that of trying to reconcile the tensions between the God of natural theology and the God of revelation. Whereas
Niebuhr attempted to do this by locating the tensions within the Trinity itself. Yoder stressed the unity of purpose of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In this respect, Yoder's doctrine of the Trinity may be seen to be more orthodox than that of Niebuhr.

In his eschatology, Yoder presupposed the sovereignty of God over history and the ability of God to act in history. This led Yoder to take history very seriously as the location of God's self-revelation and the arena of His redemptive activity. Yoder refused to set aside the eschatological Jesus or to minimize His importance for the messianic community. By resisting the temptation to idealize the Kingdom or to make it either completely realized or completely future, Yoder maintained the eschatological tension that runs through the New Testament.

In his ecclesiology, Yoder presupposed the activity of the Holy Spirit in calling, building up, equipping, guiding and empowering the messianic community. It is important to see that Yoder's understanding of the witness of the church as being imperfect, yet visible, is only viable on the assumption of the reality of the Spirit's work in the community. The Spirit makes the witness of the community possible.

Yoder clearly treats the doctrine of the Trinity as a second-order doctrine, as a set of rules for proper Christian speech about God, much as Lindbeck does. He sees the doctrine of the Trinity as a necessary doctrine for preserving the Christian doctrine of God from distortion by pagan notions of God which are ahistorical, rational and non-biblical. Yoder's view is not a form of Christomonism, in the sense that no other sources of knowledge are valid, but it is Christocentrism, in the sense that no other sources of knowledge can be declared valid until they have been shown to be coherent with the
center of Christian thought and worship, Jesus Christ. Yoder's social ethic is rooted in his Christocentric Trinitarianism.

8. A Biblical, Ecumenical Social Ethicist: The casual reader of Yoder's work should not be misled by Yoder's rejection of scholastic doctrine of verbal inerrancy into thinking that Yoder has a low view of biblical authority or that his theology is unbiblical in any substantial sense. Yoder actually believes that the Bible proclaims a coherent message, which is narrative in structure, though diverse in expression. He uses historical criticism in the confidence that, if one can just get close enough to the original meaning of the author in the original context, one will have a baseline upon which to construct an application which can both be in harmony with the thrust of Scripture as a whole and also relevant to our situation today.

Yoder's historicism is limited by his confession that, in the person of Jesus, God has become incarnate. The Incarnation is what gives the Bible authority, for it is precisely the testimony to the Incarnation which makes the message of the prophets and apostles true. Yoder's communal approach to interpretation is not an evolving free-for-all in which the interpretation has no fixed reference points and biblical texts become hostages to ideologies and political powers. Again, the reason for that is his commitment to the truth of the Incarnation. It would be conceivable, for Yoder, to have a hermeneutic community coming to decisions about the proper interpretation of biblical texts, and then proceeding to enact those interpretations in its communal life, and yet for that community to be wrongly interpreting the text and living unfaithfully. More importantly, in Yoder's perspective, it would be possible to critique such an unfaithful community both from
within and without that community, on the basis of Scripture. In fact, Yoder does precisely this in his critique of Constantinianism.

Here is where the ecumenical potential of Yoder's theology becomes apparent. He offers a way forward in ecumenical debate which is more realistic than simply saying that no one is wrong and that we can all go forward happily together into a pluralistic future which does not take seriously the possibility of apostasy. Yoder's appeal is not on the basis of institutional indefectability, which, after all, is just as problematic a concept for advocates of the believers' church doctrine of the church as it is for the advocates of apostolic succession. Ecumenical unity can not be built on the foundation of the wood, hay and stubble of human institutions, human performance or human faithfulness. It can only be built on the gold, silver and precious jewels of the person of Jesus Christ, the work of Jesus Christ and the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. In appealing to the Bible as witness to the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, Yoder is appealing to that which all Christians have in common. Therefore, insofar as all Christians acknowledge this norm of faith and practice, ecumenical debate has a starting point. Unity is not guaranteed, but it is at least conceivable, providing there can be repentance and reformation by all parties to the discussion.

**B. Criticisms of Yoder's Theology**

Yoder's theology is, of course, far from perfect and, at this point, we need to make mention of a few of the areas in which his theology is open to criticism. In the concluding sections of Chapters Two, Three and Four, we have seen that there are adequate resources within the theology of Yoder itself to invalidate the criticisms of
reductionism, sectarianism, withdrawal from cultural engagement or irrelevance to social issues. We will now examine three points of valid criticism.

1. The Rejection of System: Yoder's critique of "methodologism" has a point, but it probably is pushed too far by Yoder. In rejecting the call to systematize his thought by writing some sort of major book on Christian ethics, Yoder has left his thought open to misinterpretation and caricature. The point is that one does not, and cannot, evade the systematic questions by refusing to write a systematic book. Yoder's "system" is implicit, unarticulated and very much in the background of his writing - but that he has a system is undeniable and part of the purpose of this essay has been to bring this fact to the surface. The high degree of consistency in his thought is evidence of the existence of a logical system of thought which governs his approach to various topics.

What happens when the systematic challenge is refused, as is so often the case with Anabaptist-Mennonite theologians, is not that systematic questions and problems go away, but that they are dealt with in a more ad hoc and dialogical manner. Now Yoder would undoubtedly say that that is all for the best and that theology works better when done that way. No doubt there is far too much preoccupation with method in contemporary theology and we ought to be thankful that Yoder did not neglect the task of constructive, situational theology in order to indulge himself exclusively in that sort of preoccupation. But is it not possible to have a better balance? And, more importantly, can a systematic presentation of a believers' church ethic not itself be part of a larger, ongoing conversation?

In suggesting that Yoder should have given more attention to a systematic presentation of his thought, the point needs to be made that the criticism being made here
is not that Yoder should have created a neutral, scientific method which would be able to generate universally-accessible truth. What is being suggested here is that Yoder's Barthian, Christocentric method of relating all theological statements to their center, Jesus Christ, would not prevent the articulation of a believers' church systematic theology or theological ethics any more than Barth's Christocentric method prevented him from writing the *Church Dogmatics*. Richard Mouw's point that Anabaptists have left themselves open to misunderstanding by their refusal of the systematic challenge is a point which is well-taken. What is being called for here is not the creation of a rationalistic metaphysic to replace the biblical, Christocentric theology Yoder developed. Rather, what is being called for is the systematic unfolding of Yoder's theology in such a way as to display its inner logic, consistency and breadth. This type of theological writing need not be any different than the occasional type of writing, which Yoder undertook throughout his career, as far as method is concerned. But it would make misunderstanding and caricature more difficult.

Perhaps one of the reasons why Yoder did not feel the need to pursue the large-scale, systematic questions is that he believed that there was work enough to be done in unfolding the social ethical implications of the systematic work done by Karl Barth. The problem with this hypothesis is that Yoder was never explicit enough about this to be sure that it was a conscious strategy on his part. But the suggestion is not without merit, especially when one considers the high degree of agreement between Yoder and Barth on issues of method and system.

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8 "Preface," RP, viii
2. The Resurrection of Christ: Yoder believed in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as an event in history. It would be hard for any serious reader of his writings to conclude otherwise. However, Yoder talked a great deal about the cross, especially in *The Politics of Jesus*, without so much as mentioning the resurrection. One supposes that if he had known how widely read that book was going to become, and to what extent he was going to be judged by its contents and emphases, he might have considered giving more prominence to the resurrection of Jesus. But then again, given his commitment to emphasizing what was currently being denied or under-emphasized, he might not have changed a thing.

We need to remember that Yoder's main work in biblical, historical and systematic Christology, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method*, was only published informally and has never received a wide readership. The publication of this work would certainly help create more appreciation of the balanced and orthodox view of Jesus which underlay his other writings. It is unfortunate that Yoder's orthodoxy has been called into question, not simply because it is unfair to him personally, but because his main point is thereby obscured. Yoder's main challenge to the church was that, to the extent that the church takes seriously the two natures doctrine and the doctrine of the Trinity, the life of discipleship characterized by pacifism and servanthood must also be taken seriously. His main challenge to the church is his claim that pacifism is implied by Nicene orthodoxy.

This criticism is really a concrete example of the first criticism above. If the resurrection had been treated as part of a systematic presentation of the theology underlying his social ethics, then it would not only have received treatment in such a way
that no one would doubt the importance of this doctrine to Yoder's system, it would also have made the orthodoxy of Yoder's pacifism of the messianic community more obvious. If Yoder and those who follow him want the pacifism of the messianic community to be taken seriously as Christian social ethics, then the systematic challenge of presenting the orthodox, biblical, theological basis for that approach to social ethics must be taken up. Fortunately, Yoder has provided much of the raw material for such a believers' church systematic theology in his writings.

3. Prayer and the Spiritual Life: Richard Hays makes a fascinating observation when he points out that, of the five moral theologians he has surveyed on the issue of methodology, Barth, Hauerwas, R. Niebuhr, Schussler-Fiorenza and Yoder, "only Barth, in his account of moral decision-making, requires - at least implicitly - a constant reliance on prayer and listening for the guidance of God." This is an indication of a serious gap in Yoder's account of Christian ethics and one area in which he did not work out the implications of his strong implicit emphasis on the Holy Spirit in ecclesiology. Yoder's system needs an emphasis on the Spirit, the new birth, prayer, spiritual disciplines and worship as praise of God.

The fault can not be attributed to Yoder's Anabaptist heritage, any more than to the influence of Barth. Arnold Snyder points out that, for the sixteenth century Anabaptists, the spiritual life preceded and nourished the ethical life:

The work of the Spirit provided the essential underpinning for biblical interpretation, for conversion and rebirth leading to baptism, and for discipleship (as the enabling power which made discipleship possible). Anabaptist ethics and ecclesiology rested on the living presence of the Spirit.²

³ Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction (Kitchner, Ont.: Pandora Press, 1995), 96.
Snyder puts forward the important thesis that those Anabaptists who emphasized the inner life of the Spirit tended to emphasize love, healing and reconciliation as the goal of pastoral discipline, while those who lacked this emphasis tended to emphasize unity, purity and obedience to the Word. Over time, Snyder attributes to the lack of emphasis on the spiritual life, the growth of a more literal, legalistic, "outer" emphasis. So the issue is the nourishment of the church as body by the Holy Spirit. Without an emphasis on the inner life of the disciple, the outer life of community can degenerate into legalism and even coercion. Yoder's theology is not incompatible with an emphasis on prayer and the spiritual life. In fact, his theology is incomplete without it. Yet one finds these emphases inadequately dealt with in Yoder's writings.

C. Yoder and the Future of Christian Social Ethics

As we slowly and painfully enter into the post-Christian phase of Western culture, Yoder's pacifism of the messianic community cannot help but become more relevant. If we can not simply accept his ecclesiology, we cannot avoid debating it as one of the live options for the church after Christendom. Paul Ramsey's animated wrestling with the pacifist and sectarian option in his final book is an example of the kind of interaction with Yoder's thought which can be expected in the future. The full potential of Yoder's rich and complex thought has yet to be appropriated by the ecumenical church. But in the years ahead, it would appear that the importance of the thought of this wide-ranging, creative, logical thinker will grow. Ultimately, his legacy is the simple challenge that to be a disciple of Jesus means following Him by taking up one's cross.

11 Ibid., 339.
Yoder's approach to social ethics is so highly counter-intuitive and so much against the grain of contemporary Christian social ethics that his position is difficult for many people to take seriously. However, this essay has demonstrated that James Gustafson's assertion that "theological integrity more than moral distinctiveness is the challenge of the traditional radical Protestant view" is accurate with respect to Yoder's thought. The undeniable Christocentric focus and the high degree of logical coherence of the theological foundations of Yoder's social ethics make it extremely difficult simply to dismiss him. One difficulty in coming to terms with Yoder is that it is hard, in the end, to take bits and pieces of his thought and to leave behind the hard-to-digest parts, because of the logical coherence of his theological system. Yoder's work thus stands as a whole and invites either acceptance or rejection. This frustrates those who would seek to let him be a "corrective" without accepting his core affirmations about the concrete meaning of following Jesus. This absoluteness, one strongly suspects, is not accidental or incidental; but rather, integral to the central logic of Yoder's position which is consciously developed from his conception of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

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The primary sources are listed in chronological order so as to display the development and emphases of Yoder's thought over the four and a half decades of his writings. Many of his writings have been published more than once and in slightly different forms. Some of his writings have been circulated informally among friends or made available in photocopied formats in response to demand for them. Each essay is cited at the point of first publication, although many of them have had an extended life as an unpublished, informally circulated papers prior to that date and many have also been reprinted in one of the several collections of essays published at various points. Later reprints are noted, especially in cases where they are easier to find.

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