

The Problematic Development of the Sacraments in the Thought of John Howard Yoder

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In recent years the later texts of John Howard Yoder's body of work have increasingly gained an audience through Mark Nation's biographical study and the efforts of scholars like Michael Cartwright, who has been integrally involved in the recent editing and publication of Yoder's *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*.¹ As readers "discover" the texts published after *The Politics of Jesus* (1972) and *The Priestly Kingdom* (1984), familiar issues like pacifism and Constantinianism frequently resurface, while new or latent themes also find a voice. For example, "the Jeremianic turn" and the notion of sacraments both emerge to play pivotal roles in Yoder's late writings.

In this paper my limited intention is to examine one of these shifts – the emergence of the sacraments – in order to begin to indicate a much larger innovative development in Yoder's thought.² I want to illuminate and critically engage Yoder's progressive development of the sacraments from their humble, original appearance in a 1967 edition of *Concern* as ordinances for church discipline through to the secular social processes found in *For the Nations* in 1997.

Although my own position vis-à-vis Yoder's will be clear, I do not believe all the questions I raise are settled. I do believe, however, that a potentially critical posture may need to be adopted about certain developments in Yoder's thought that point in a direction undermining the very basic Christian convictions he seems to hold dear.

The Historical Progress of Sacraments as Social Process

Much is intentionally and unintentionally gained and lost in Yoder's account of the sacraments, but this is often difficult to see without attending carefully to how his thought develops over time. For this reason, I will briefly trace Yoder's emerging position through a diachronic analysis of his published writings that explicitly and intentionally address the sacraments. One can divide his writing on the sacraments into three distinct chronological periods.³

Stage 1: Pre-1979

Unless one has read his later descriptions of sacraments, one would never guess that Yoder was already laying their foundation in two issues of *Concern* appearing in the late 1960s: “Binding and Loosing” (1967) and “The Fullness of Christ” (1969). These essays are endeavors in scriptural interpretation for the purpose of addressing internal church issues of paramount importance.

The first essay clarifies and (re)defines church discipline by focusing on Matt 18:15-20. Yoder’s primary contribution here is to intimately intertwine forgiveness and moral discernment, presupposing and including both in the practice of binding and loosing.⁴ He goes on to claim that this is the central working of the church, and the Holy Spirit is promised only to the church that practices binding and loosing. Following the Reformers, he also refers to binding and loosing as “the rule of Christ.”⁵ At the conclusion of the essay, Yoder suggests that wider implications of this practice might include the following: (1) the witness of the church always includes and may center upon the quality of personal relationships that even the outsider may observe;⁶ (2) we should not be surprised to discover that Christian duty, in this sense, is also secular good sense;⁷ and (3) forgiveness is not a generally accessible human possibility but the miraculous fruit of God’s own bearing the cost of man’s rebellion.⁸

Two years later, “The Fullness of Christ” appeared, making explicit the anti-hierarchical, anti-specialist sentiments latent in “Binding and Loosing.” To make his case for the universality of ministry, the priesthood of all believers, Yoder appeals to a wide variety of texts within the Pauline corpus. In essence he argues that all members of the congregation are gifted by the Holy Spirit and, on this basis, all should minister according to the specific grace they have been given. Taking a cue from the business world, he notes that if division of labor is at the heart of the efficiency of business, why should it not be realistic in the congregation?⁹

These two definitional essays, unlike any others, carefully develop Yoder’s early position on (what will become known as) sacraments. Although each essay addresses a single sacrament and Yoder himself draws no attention to their relationship, their formal similarities are striking; practices demanded by both ordinances are: biblical; interpersonal; enabled

by the Holy Spirit; internal to the church yet observable by those outside; missional; critical correctives to historical and contemporary practices; individualizing in the service of the covenant community; and, in short, absolutely necessary for the church to be the church.¹⁰ Yet Yoder explicitly identifies neither process as worship or sacramental.

In 1979 this changed. At the Society of Christian Ethics¹¹ annual meeting, Paul Ramsey presented “Liturgy and Ethics,” and in 1980 an entire issue of the *Journal of Religious Ethics* was devoted to this topic with Ramsey’s paper headlining the issue.¹² Yoder quickly took steps to address the relation between liturgy and ethics from his own idiosyncratic perspective. During the second stage of his writings on the sacraments – 1979-91 – he penned three very different articles that try to address that relationship. Sacramentality begins to receive serious consideration.

Stage 2: 1979-91

In answering Ramsey’s challenge, Yoder began to graft concerns for worship into work already in progress. This is most evident in “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood” (1982),¹³ where he makes two advances and a further entrenchment. First, he articulates an account of practical moral reasoning that provides the appropriate context and constraints for binding and loosing and the universality of charisma. Yoder refers to this process, in which every prophetic voice is heard and every witness evaluated as suggested in 1 Cor 14, as “dialogical liberty.”¹⁴ Logically and practically, binding and loosing and the expression of individual gifts of the Holy Spirit occur only under the assumption of the existence of dialogical liberty, communal discourse that is not prematurely censured or restricted.

The second very tentative advance Yoder makes is relating these church processes to worship. Although he affirms the unity of worship and morality, and thereby worship and practical moral reasoning (dialogical liberty, etc.), he goes no further than defining worship in essentially moral/empirical terms: “Worship is the communal cultivation of an alternative construction of society and history.”¹⁵ But this step is substantial in that it opens the door for all the sacraments described thus far – impetuses for “alternative constructions of society” – to be included under the broad umbrella of worship. Finally, the further entrenchment of the notion that

sacraments are visible phenomena significantly aids the integration of sacraments into the task of worship.¹⁶

Two years later, in 1984, Yoder makes his most monumental developments: for the first time, he applies the notion of sacramentality to binding and loosing, and he also places binding and loosing alongside baptism and the eucharist. In “The Kingdom as Social Ethics,” Yoder, leaning heavily on Barth, explicitly claims that the church as an alternative community has a modeling mission. This, too, is new. As a “firstfruit” of the kingdom, the church exemplifies sacramentality, which Yoder cryptically describes by stating that “meanings which make sense on an ordinary level make more of the same kind of sense when they are embedded in the particular history of the witness of faith.”¹⁷ He follows this claim with an affirmation that the church is a sacrament because the empowerment undergirding her witness and presence in the midst of society is not accessible in the same way to the wider society.¹⁸ Whether these claims are the same (or even compatible) is debatable;¹⁹ his point is that the specific practices of the sacraments suggest what the world can and should be. For example, baptism could again become the basis of Christian egalitarianism, as it was in the New Testament, and the Lord’s Supper could again become an expression of sharing bread between those who have and those who have not.²⁰

While Yoder mentions only baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and binding and loosing in “The Kingdom as Social Ethics,” this essay truly prefigures the position that solidifies later in the 1990s. Before moving to the final configuration of five sacraments, Yoder briefly returns to the original three ordinances again in 1990. In a lecture in honor of James McClendon’s retirement, entitled “Catholicity in Search of Location,” he articulates the marks of catholicity.²¹ Although the term sacrament does not appear here, Yoder is clear that the authority of the Holy Spirit would be functionally discernable where every member would know herself bearer of a particular charismatic empowerment (universal charisma) and where everyone would have the authority to take the floor in a meeting (dialogical liberty). In addition, he reaffirms that the Holy Spirit is working wherever the church practices binding and loosing. Here, locally, is where catholicity is located.²²

In sum, Ramsey’s instigation in 1979 produced an important initial response from Yoder, yet his notion of the sacraments also developed

significantly in the subsequent decade. First, although he has not yet sorted out their formal similarities, he has examined all five future sacraments. Second, he has definitively described worship as a communal phenomenon that can be empirically verified. Third, sacraments are not only for the church but signal what the world can and should become. Still, some confusion exists about whether they are fully understandable only by those in the church, or whether they make sense in a way discernable by the wider world.

Stage 3: 1991-94

In “Sacrament as Social Process,”²³ Yoder again (re)turns to Ramsey’s reflection on liturgy and ethics, as well as to alternative responses that also emerged in the intervening years. Challenging all these options, he states:

What these varied efforts have in common is that they begin with problem of the qualitative distance between the two realms of liturgy and ethics and maintain that a bridge of some kind needs to be built.... I propose to set beside them a simpler account.²⁴

With that, Yoder launches into a description of the commonality underlying all five practices already discussed as concerned with both the internal activities of the gathered Christian congregation and the ways the church interfaces with the world.

Over the next three years he wrote on the sacraments three more times (aside from “Sacrament as Social Process”), but because of space limitations here I will focus on “Firstfruits: The Paradigmatic Role of God’s People” as representative of this entire stage.²⁵

Throughout each stage of his authorship, Yoder builds incrementally upon the previous stages. In this last stage, the possibility of the church modeling what the world can and should become turns out to be the critical issue. His justification for this centralizing focus is rooted in the theological claim that Jesus Christ is Lord not only of the church but of the whole cosmos.²⁶ In the face of this claim, the self-imposed challenge Yoder attempts to meet is to purify, clarify, and exemplify the church’s witness so that the world can perceive it to be good news without having to learn a foreign language.²⁷ Elements of this have emerged previously, but the

innovation here is its placement as the central concern around which the sacraments are servile.

In their first appearance in “Firstfruits,” Yoder labels the sacraments “marks of the church” that make evident the unity of the message and medium of the first Christians.²⁸ The list includes all five: baptism, the rule of Christ, the eucharist, dialogical liberty, and universal charisma. Upon closer examination, however, by the time he is finished the sacraments are no longer merely marks of the church but “sample civil imperatives”: egalitarianism, socialism, forgiveness, the open meeting, and the universality of giftedness.²⁹ Let me illustrate at least one transition or, perhaps, translation.

Yoder does not begin to discuss baptism as “a sign of [a believer’s] cleansing from sin” or as “a pledge before the church of their covenant with God to walk in the way of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit,” as one might expect from a Mennonite theologian.³⁰ Rather, he starts to describe baptism as the reconciliation between Jew and Gentile, male and female, and so forth. This, he claims, is the early Christian root of egalitarianism. He then goes on to refer to it as trans-ethnic inclusivism. He completes the translation as follows:

Our world still needs to learn that the reason every person and every kind of person must be seen with equal respect is not that their culture is equally healthy, or that they have earned equal treatment, but that equal dignity is ascribed by virtue of a divine bias in favor of the Other.³¹

In sum, “neither the substance nor the pertinence of the vision [practiced in the sacraments] is dependent on a particular faith.”³² Nothing stands in the way of: sharing bread being a model for Social Security and negative income tax; dialogical liberty explaining why the Japanese make better cars than Detroit; dialogue under the Holy Spirit functioning as the ground floor of democracy.³³

Throughout all four texts in this stage, Yoder tirelessly reduces the sacraments to social processes he hopes will avoid Catholic sacramentalistic and Zwinglian symbolic/rationalistic temptations.³⁴ The former is simply unbiblical and useless for social ethics; the latter is too individualizing and explains symbolic, not social, behavior. Yoder applies the notion of paradigm as a means to circumvent these false options. He argues for

the paradigmatic because most communication works not by projecting and then reassembling a maximum number of atoms of information, or by axioms and maxims, but by pattern recognition.³⁵ Language and text are rejected; empirical and sociological practices remain the only possible means of uninhibited communication. If the sacraments are merely social processes, they mesh perfectly with this notion of paradigmatic. The expected result, therefore, is that they can be communicated without the wider world having to learn a foreign language (i.e., Christian theology or the Christian narrative) but simply by recognizing the obvious efficiencies and values of the form of the church's social community as polis. There is nothing "esoteric" or opaquely ritualistic about the sacraments; "they lend themselves to being observed, imitated, and extrapolated."³⁶ In this way Yoder cleanly and effectively concludes his development of the notion of sacraments in the final stage. He has now moved some distance from his initial beginnings in 1967.

Whether Yoder ever pursued any of the sacraments for their own sake is doubtful, but somewhere along the way they became pawns for a specific purpose (or group of purposes) that warranted his continued interest. I propose that their final appearances are a means of supporting what I call "Yoder's Yiddish Experiment," and I will turn our attention briefly to this project as a critical conclusion to my analysis.

Re-examining Yoder's Yiddish Experiment

In the "Introduction" to *For the Nations*, the book that contains his last two writings on the sacraments, Yoder states:

This collection may be described as an analogy to the development of Yiddish. I am expositing, not in my own ancient in-group language but in my own variant of the common idiom, the claim that the position I represent is the line of the gospel.³⁷

Yoder's claim that *For the Nations* is analogous to the development of Yiddish is interesting but puzzling. Looking at his brief own elaboration (see above), it seems to me that by "ancient in-group language" Yoder means Anabaptist Christianity, and by "common idiom" the language of the wider world (which could also apply to other "Constantinian" Christian or secular

languages). If I am right thus far, the most qualified candidate for “my own variant” seems to be his construal that the social processes of the church as polis “represent the line of the gospel.”

But is this analogous to the development of Yiddish? At the most basic level, Yiddish is a language that emerged in the early second millennium in central Europe among a group of Ashkenazi Jews. It is not linguistically related to Hebrew though it uses the Hebrew alphabet; it is not German though it shares 70-80 percent of its vocabulary. Of course, its origins are contested, but at certain times in history it did become a language capable of bridging diverse, often persecuted Jewish communities around the world. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, amidst revolutionary upheavals in the life of the Jewish people and its redefinition of selfhood, Yiddishism (the Yiddish language movement, the Yiddish cultural movement, or both) emerged as a modern expression of Judaism.³⁸

I believe Yoder appeals as much to the analogy of Yiddishism as to the development of Yiddish. For example, his paradigmatic language is anti-authoritarian (as Yiddishism challenged the domination of Hebrew among the Jews), anti-establishment (as Yiddishism challenged the centrality of the synagogue and the medieval Church), and anti-Constantinian (as Yiddishism challenged the aspirations of Zionists and German nationalists). What Yoder does not counter, however, is that along with anti-clericalism, Yiddishism also sought to graft secularism onto Judaism.³⁹ And, although Emanuel Goldsmith argues that the secularism of the Yiddishists was mostly a dogmatic illusion that detached them from the deepest emotions of Jewry and robbed them of the “sustaining power of the religious regimen and religious symbolism,” he freely acknowledges that “the truth of the matter is that Yiddishism was for many but a stepping stone to assimilation.”⁴⁰

At this point I return to Yoder to ask just how far the analogy of the development of Yiddish applies. Of course, he intends significant ecumenical and missional gains with his interpretation of the sacraments. But at what cost? Are there unintended gains one ought to be aware of, or even be wary of?

Conclusion

Intended Gains

As Yoder's authorship advances, he employs the practices of the sacraments for several intended purposes. First, the practices, right from the start, are communal; Yoder acknowledges the social nature of humans and his account of redemption therefore includes the fact of human interdependency. Secondly, as he rejects derogatory definitions of passive or apolitical sectarianism (such as those leveled by H. Richard Niebuhr and James Gustafson), he also tries to move beyond Troeltsch's nonjudgmental objective/descriptive account of sectarianism. By claiming the Christian distinctiveness of the sacraments, Yoder desires to demonstrate that these are the most intentionally relevant social processes not only for the church but for the wider world. He also seems to reject Hauerwas' version of Christian community that refuses to theorize about the wider world for this same reason.

Thirdly, and related to the above, his later construals of the sacraments are clearly intended to be understandable to other Christians and non-Christians alike. By defining the sacraments merely as empirically discernable phenomena, one needs no special gnosis or esoteric insight to understand or practice them. In defining them thus, one can also appreciate Yoder's ecumenical intentions. Fourthly, Yoder intends to articulate the possibility of concretizing the Lordship of Jesus by both the church and the wider world. He intends his five practices to incarnate the kingdom tangibly and visibly.

Therefore, if one accepts that the sacramental practices (as variants of the common idiom) are the good news (the line of the gospel) for the wider world, Yoder's experiment appears to succeed. But what if there is more to the good news than the sacramental practices? This would pose a significant problem for Yoder. Another pressing difficulty, however, is the possibility that a further option is true: that he is merely presenting a form of Christianity that is but a stepping stone to assimilation into secularism. With the possibility of this strong claim in mind, allow me to suggest some problems with the role of the sacraments in Yoder's "Yiddish Experiment."

Other Intentional and Unintentional Gains

First, how far does Yoder remain faithful to his own Anabaptist tradition? The question is not whether he intended to reject Anabaptism or not, but whether the consistent refusal to speak the “in-group” language explicitly leads to an implicit revision of “in-group” practices and reflections about them. I think it does, and the very fact that nothing Yoder writes remotely addresses much of what Anabaptist and Mennonite confessions of faith have always claimed about the sacraments indicates something is amiss.

Second, and related, I have serious questions about Yoder’s assumption that the church is important only as a secular social community. This element is not present in the early writings under discussion here, but it is another of Troeltsch’s ideas that is present early in Yoder’s thought and works itself out powerfully in the later writings.⁴¹ Is there no mystery in the church? Is there any divine activity that is unexplainable? Is there something that is not relevant solely to community concerns? Is there something important to the church that is either non-ethical or non-empirical? If the answer is yes to any of these questions, would these features not be important in their own right? How can we rule them unimportant a priori?

Third, again relating to the first and returning to the question of language, why is Yoder so quick to give up Christian theological language, an “in-group” language, in favor of sociological descriptions? Must we translate all theological – or dogmatic, to use his more derogatory term – language, without remainder, into sociological language? How is sociological language the key to the church’s definition and mission? Even if the occasional use of sociological language has some merit, must we translate everything into the “common idiom?”

Lastly, in the final stage of his authorship, does Yoder end up presenting a demythologized or reductionist Christianity? Granted, the Holy Spirit may still be functionally observable in the practices; but the force and frequency of claims that neither their substance nor pertinence depends on a particular faith seems to leave us with very little specifically Christian and very much reduced to social ethics. Craig Carter, an enthusiastic admirer of Yoder, speaking about baptism, self-consciously backs away from the charge of reductionism. Yet he notes that Yoder’s account of baptism is incomplete

and needs to be incorporated into a systematic believers' church theology.⁴² I too am still nervous about asserting this charge, but I believe we need to consider the possibility that Yoder's ethical thought may be a stepping stone (like Yiddishism) for Anabaptist assimilation into a form of secular ethical discourse.

Perhaps these questions would not matter so much if Yoder had quit writing in the mid-1980s, if he had not achieved the stature that he has, or if his position was not simply and unequivocally conflated with Anabaptism as a whole all too frequently. But none of these hypothetical conditions applies. We are, therefore, forced to wrestle with Yoder's substantial legacy, a task that is merely beginning.

Notes

¹ John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

² My focus in this context is merely to indicate that there is change in Yoder's thought, and I have made very little effort to historicize or psychologize this change.

³ The specific stages that I suggest here apply only to Yoder's writings on the sacraments. And, although I do believe there is a general progression in Yoder's thought driving the writings on the sacraments, attention to other themes may produce different stages or groupings of texts.

⁴ John Howard Yoder, "Binding and Loosing," *Concern* 14 (February 1967): 4-7. This essay also appears in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), 327-29. Subsequent references are formatted as the *Concern* page number/*The Royal Priesthood* page number.

⁵ "Binding and Loosing," 15/338.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 30/351.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 30/352.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 30/352.

⁹ John Howard Yoder, "The Fullness of Christ," *Concern* 17 (February 1969): 91. See also *The Fullness of Christ: Paul's Vision of Universal Ministry* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1987), 102. On the oscillating direction of sacraments, see also note 20.

¹⁰ By church (*ekklesia*), Yoder means "the assembly, the gathering of people into a meeting for deliberation or for a public pronouncement;" not "a specifically religious meeting." See "Binding and Loosing," 9/332.

¹¹ Yoder was president of the Society of Christian Ethics in 1987.

¹² See Paul Ramsey, "Liturgy and Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7 (1979): 139-71.

¹³ Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood: A Protestant Perspective on Practical Moral

Reasoning,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 10.1 (1982): 40-67. Yoder directly refers to Ramsey’s essay on page 54.

¹⁴ “Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” 46. This clearly continues the anti-hierarchical, anti-specialist trajectory present in the earlier writings.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 46. Although Yoder recognizes that Ramsey initiates the larger discussion by linking ethics and *liturgy*, he always reverts to framing the question as the relation between ethics and *worship*. It appears that the term “liturgy” is unhelpful because of its ritualism, its association with a hierarchy (or at least a single specialist), its insinuation of mystery, and its resistance to public expression. In this way, Yoder believes his use of “worship” avoids the alleged false externality of liturgy while also avoiding its excessive interiority.

¹⁷ *The Priestly Kingdom*, 93.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ The logic becomes even more convoluted when Yoder claims that “Sometimes this sacramental quality is read in the direction of saying about the church what one says about the rest of society” (93).

²⁰ *The Priestly Kingdom*, 93.

²¹ See *The Royal Priesthood*, 316-18.

²² *The Royal Priesthood*, 318.

²³ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *Theology Today* XLVIII (1) (1991): 33-44. See also *The Royal Priesthood*, 359-73. Both paginations are included below.

²⁴ “Sacrament as Social Process,” 33/360-61.

²⁵ Yoder, “Firstfruits: The Paradigmatic Public Role of God’s People,” in *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 15-36. The other two writings are *Body Politics* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), which presents five sample ways (the “good news”) in which the church is called to operate as a polis in ordinary human language; and “The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm” (*For the Nations*, 37-50), which expresses the functional necessity of the church speaking paradigmatically, that is, through pattern recognition.

²⁶ “Firstfruits,” 24.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁰ These are parts of the first two sentences in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, published jointly by the General Board of the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church General Board (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995), 46.

³¹ “Firstfruits,” 30.

³² *Ibid.*, 32. Yoder uses this particular phrase in the context of his discussion of the eucharist, but it is certainly applicable to all other sacraments.

³³ *Body Politics*, 77-78.

³⁴ See “Sacrament as Social Process,” 36-37/364-65.

³⁵ One could think here of what this might imply about some of his other early writings, such

as *The Christian Witness to the State* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1964), 71-73.

³⁶ *Body Politics*, 75.

³⁷ *For the Nations*, 4.

³⁸ Emanuel Goldsmith, "Yiddishism and Judaism," in *The Politics of Yiddish: Studies in Language, Literature and Society*, ed. Dov-Ber Kerler (London: AltaMira Press, 1998), 11. See also Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Architects of Yiddishism and the Beginning of the Twentieth Century: A Study in Jewish Cultural History* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1976). Admittedly, one might challenge my interpretation and application of Yoder's cryptic reference to "the development of Yiddish." But Yiddishism is the dominant social and cultural culmination of the development of Yiddish, a fact that would not have escaped Yoder when he appealed to this particular analogy.

³⁹ Goldsmith, "Yiddishism and Judaism," 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴¹ This emphasis is prevalent already in Yoder's dissertation, where he summarizes his project: "[T]he course of our research has established that it is possible to recognize a 'true Anabaptism,' with its own pre-history and own organic development, in a completely different way. The Anabaptists who first introduced believers' baptism, who established ordered church communities, who held out despite persecution; the Anabaptists who repeatedly engaged the reformers in dialogue, show themselves to be a unified group with definite boundaries." See *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland: An Historical and Theological Analysis of the Dialogues Between Anabaptists and Reformers*, trans. David Carl Stassen and C. Arnold Snyder (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004), 135. Notice the verbs in this citation: Anabaptists "show themselves;" we "recognize." Notice also the activities of the Anabaptists: they baptize; order communities; face persecution; dialogue; maintain defined boundaries. In short, their meaningfulness lies in their observable actions. Formally, it is clear right from the outset of Yoder's corpus that the appropriate language to describe the Christian community is through socio-political or functional language.

⁴² *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001), 199.

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