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Special Issue: John Howard Yoder

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Editorial

When theologian John Howard Yoder died on December 30, 1997, individuals at Conrad Grebel College, along with the wider Mennonite and theological communities, paused to reflect on the suddenness of his passing. This reaction was followed immediately by conjectures regarding the importance of his legacy to the Mennonite church over the past four decades. The editorial team pondered the wisdom of dedicating a special issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review* to John Howard Yoder just six months after his death.

The editorial team decided to go ahead, and the result is this special issue with an assorted mix of scholarly articles, personal essays, and reflective tributes. We are especially grateful that Yoder's family allowed us to publish the tributes given at his memorial service at College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana, on January 3. The cover photo was taken by Jim Reimer when Yoder visited the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre in the winter of 1997.

The life and career stages represented by the authors certainly point to the longevity of Yoder's impact on the Mennonite theological community. From younger scholars like Chris Huebner, to former students of Yoder like Duane Friesen and Mark Thiessen Nation, to colleagues, whose relationships with Yoder date back to the 1950s and 60s, like William Klassen and John Miller, the writers here have engaged with Yoder and his thought over four decades. During the past decade, Yoder's legacy came to include allegations of sexual misconduct, followed by a lengthy process of church discipline. We solicited an article for this issue of *The Review* that examined this process of restoration and healing in the context of Yoder's own ideals about church discipline. As publication deadlines approached, we recognized that, for a number of reasons, this piece required more time and reflection.

The literary refractions for this issue include a piece by a giant in the literary world, Rudy Wiebe. His essay, and also the poems by Sarah Klassen, ponder the themes and stories of martyrdom that are central to the Anabaptist story. Literary editor Hildi Froese Tiessen has creatively offered a linkage between Yoder and Wiebe. Because of space limitations, the book review

section includes only Conrad Brunk's review of John Howard Yoder's last book.

Undoubtedly the design changes were the first thing you noticed when you picked up this issue of *The Review*. We thought the recent editorial transition offered a good opportunity to give the journal a slight makeover, given that the overall look has remained the same for about ten years. The full cover photograph was especially suitable for this special Yoder issue; we'll try to follow this one with different images for each subsequent issue. Other modifications include larger and more varied fonts, as well as more white space to enhance readability. Please let me know how you respond to the new look.

There have also been some personnel changes at *The Review* which deserve mention. I welcome Arnold Neufeldt-Fast, who recently completed a doctoral degree in theology from St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto, to the position of Book Review Editor. Wendy Stocker, who managed circulation and generally kept the production process moving, has left *The Review* after four years. Wendy's overall competence was greatly appreciated and I offer warm thanks to her. Trijntje Miller has taken on circulation duties and we welcome her to the team.

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Mennonites, Christ, and Culture: The Yoder Legacy

A. James Reimer

Recollections

John Howard Yoder was not the easiest man in the world to relate to casually and informally. I would run into him regularly at the American Academy of Religion meetings, an annual gathering of academics teaching at universities and colleges, but our greetings to each other until recently were no more than perfunctory. I was always surprised at how well he was known outside Mennonite circles, even though he was always an enigmatic and silent presence at such international academic conferences. He would virtually never say anything but would take notes prolifically. What did he do with all those ideas? Write books, I guess! I do remember him once accusing me in front of others of trying to Catholicize the Mennonites at Conrad Grebel College. I punched him good-humoredly. He seemed to be taken aback.

In the past few years, we managed to establish what I would consider to be a kind of relationship. In the Fall of 1994, I had breakfast with him in Chicago, at a conference for which I had flown in from Amsterdam, where I was spending my sabbatical. He was sitting alone and I joined him. We talked about Dutch Mennonites and how they differed from North American Mennonites. I told him about my wife's (Margaret Loewen Reimer) article on Mennonite hymnody. He was particularly interested in the high regard Harold S. Bender had had for the Russian Mennonite choral tradition. An issue that was of special interest to me, but one that Yoder never fully answered, was the role that dogmatics (as in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*) played in his ethics.

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In October 1996, I drove Yoder back and forth to the Believers Church conference sessions which we were both attending at McMaster Divinity College. We rode the hour distance between Waterloo and Hamilton a number of times. The discomfort of my 1982 AMC Concord, an awkwardness compounded by trying to find a place for his ever-present crutches, did not hinder us from engaging in lengthy conversations on a range of topics, including his reflections on Karl Barth, with whom he had studied in Basel. The influence of Barth on Yoder's thought always fascinated me, but my probings into the matter never received satisfactory answers. Then in March 1997, I helped to arrange a series of lectures by Yoder at Conrad Grebel College and at the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre. Again we spent a lot of time in conversation at lectures, in my car, and at my house. I was struck by the "patriarchal" style of his presentations and interaction with audiences. Discussions were question-and-answer periods more than conversations. He lectured on Tolstoi, The Politics of Jesus Revisited, Judaism as a Non-non Christian Religion, and The Jewishness of the Free Church Tradition. These lectures confirmed what had been my impression over the years: here was a man who seemed never to have changed his mind. His *The Politics of Jesus* (1972) was simply a working out of his Concern Group theology of the 1950s and 1960s. And in his last book, *For the Nations*, he sets the record straight about what he has always thought, said, and meant, for those who misunderstand him. In this final book he is especially concerned to defend himself against the charge of a sectarianism that is apolitical and withdraws from engagement with contemporary culture. My last memory of Yoder is a vigorous handshake at the American Academy of Religion meetings in San Francisco in November 1997.

Yoder's influence on the Mennonite church in the twentieth century is irrefutable. Through his writings, his lectures at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, his administrative responsibilities for a variety of Mennonite Institutions, and his ecumenical presence, he has profoundly shaped the Mennonite self-understanding of a whole generation of pastors, lay persons, and academics. While his importance should not be underestimated, his passing does free the next generation of Mennonite theologians and ethicists to reconfigure the question that preoccupied him above all others: What does it mean to be "in the world but not of it?" What

does it mean to follow Christ in contemporary society and culture? The impact of Yoder's reading of the sources and the logic of his argument does not preclude the possibilities of other interpretations of what it means to be faithful in the world at the turn of the millennium.

Yoder's claims reconsidered

Yoder's intellectual pursuits were eclectic: Biblical studies (*The Politics of Jesus*, *The Fullness of Christ*, *Body Politics*), historical and systematic theology (*Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method*), Reformation studies (his German doctoral dissertation on the Swiss Anabaptist disputations, *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, *Balthasar Hubmaier* (ed.), ecclesiology (*The Royal Priesthood*), ecumenicity (*The Ecumenical Movement and the Faithful Church*), and innumerable other articles and pamphlets on topics from capital punishment to sexuality. Underlying all of these impressive contributions, however, is one over-riding concern: the nonviolent peace witness that all who confess Jesus as Lord are called upon to give without compromise. It was the topic that compelled Yoder and is the explicit focus of many of his books (*The Christian Witness to the State*; *He Came Preaching Peace*; *The Original Revolution*; *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*; *Nevertheless*; *The Priestly Kingdom*; *For the Nations*; *Karl Barth and Pacifism*; *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism*; *What Would You Do If ?*; *When War is Unjust*). Yoder's views on this subject, part of the much larger issue of the relation of church to world, of Christ to culture, might be summarized with the following six propositions.

1. To say that Jesus is the messiah is to say that the "way of the cross" is the way to particular and universal reconciliation (at-one-ment). The "suffering servant" vision of the messiah, already present in the messianic passages of the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g., Isaiah 53), is the one appropriated by Jesus from a number of options, a fateful choice forged through struggle with intense temptation in the desert in preparation for his mission. Retrospectively, it is most profoundly expressed in the Pauline kenosis (Jesus emptying himself of his divinity) passage of Philippians 2, one of the oldest hymns of the early church. This "way of the cross" (the resurrection somehow does not get equal treatment), the way of self-sacrificial love, is not a means to salvation but is

itself the gospel, the good news, the kerygma. It is not primarily an existential, inner reality but a social-political alternative for how people ought relate to each other in community.

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.

2. The earliest Christian community consisted of messianic Jews who accepted Jesus' messianic vision. The Jesus movement in its earliest phase was quite compatible with the range of Jewish possibilities at the time. It was in the synagogue tradition of exilic Judaism. Only gradually, with Christianity's transformation into a Gentile religion, did Christianity and Judaism separate into two discreet, even hostile, religious entities. Until the end of the third century, there were still Christians who went to the synagogue on Saturday and heard Origen preach on Sunday. The tragic split emerged gradually with the Hellenization of the Christian movement. The apologists of the second century (like Justin Martyr) are at least partly to blame for it. They use non-Hebraic philosophical categories to make universal, rational claims for Christianity (what in modern academic jargon might be referred to as "foundationalism"). The struggle against so-called "heresies" (Jewish on the one side and Hellenistic on the other), together with the conversion of the Emperor Constantine, signals the completion of the rift. In the process Christianity isolates Judaism into a defensive, non-missionary religious culture quite different from its earlier Babylonian version.

In Yoder's reading of the Hebrew Scriptures, the dispersion of the peoples in the Babel story (Genesis 11) was not a punishment but a blessing.

It represented God's "nonfoundationalist" intention in creation–diversity (plenitude) rather than conformity. Again and again God's people were tempted by a "foundationalist" tendency to conform and unify. Centralized military and religious bureaucracies were the result of falling away from God's intent. Through the Babylonian captivity and the consequent scattering of the Jews from their homeland, God (as God had done in the "Tower of Babel" event) once again was trying to teach his people the missionary task of contributing to the welfare of alien cultures in foreign cities. The formation of the Hebrew canon was not orchestrated by a central hierarchy in Jerusalem but emerged in the diasporic community as a way of achieving Jewish identity–an identity based not on central authority but on text(s). This is the line of argument in Yoder's last book, *For the Nations*.

Yoder's compelling interpretation of the exilic Jewish and early Christian story fails to do justice to the importance of organized, institutional religious and political life both in Judaism and in historic Christianity. Jerusalem and Constantinople/Rome, symbolically speaking, played a more important role (both historically and theologically) in the development of Judaism and Christianity, respectively, than Yoder allows for. His selective reading of the history of each appears to be driven by his Free Church agenda. Furthermore, there is diversity in the prelapsarian biblical vision of creation, to be sure. But underlying this plenitude is a foundational unity and divine harmony that Yoder underestimates. It is the Fall that brings disunity, fragmentation, and estrangement.

3. The great Christian reversal took place with the so-called "Constantinian shift." The conversion of Constantine in the fourth century is for Yoder the dominant symbol for the reversal of the messianic vision of early Jewish-Christianity. Whereas the early Christian community was a suffering and persecuted minority within a larger, hostile culture, Christianity gradually becomes first the privileged minority and eventually, in the medieval period, virtually coincident with society. It now supported the state in persecuting non-Christian minority groups like the Jews. Constantinianism becomes a shibboleth in Yoder's theology for all that is wrong, especially centralized and military top-down authority which presumes to be in charge of running the world. It is a code word for everything that faithful Christianity should

not be, and characterizes the basic stance of all mainline denominations in Eastern and Western Christianity up to present.

Within this Constantinian worldview, Christian ethics is always premised on what is universalizable and pragmatic. Only if it is possible to think that something works for everybody can it be considered realistic. In this way of thinking, Jesus' "way of the cross," and nonviolent love (agape) no longer is the one criterion–you obviously can't run a society that way. Other criteria, taken from the larger culture (norms based on what is considered rational or common sense) are now more important than the Christological one. The theory of the Just War, originating with St. Jerome and St. Augustine, replaces the official pacifism of the early Church during the time of Constantine. The medieval church (in exempting the clerical estate from bloodshed) still bore witness to the higher nonviolent ideal–war was an evil only to be tolerated ("justified") in extreme circumstances and required penitence. But with the Reformation the duty to defend one's country militarily becomes imbedded in the very articles of faith (in effect it is dogmatically justified). The Crusade (or "holy war"), in contrast to the "just war" which plays by certain restraining rules, is divinely ordained violence, a position adopted by the Church during part of the Middle Ages, and by certain groups in the modern period (some Puritans and Liberation movements). Only the Jews of the Middle Ages, some medieval Christian sectaries, the Anabaptists, parts of the modern Believers Church (Mennonites, Quakers, Church of the Brethren et al.), and some humanists and Christian dissenters in mainline traditions have kept the pacifist vision alive. The Constantinian reversal is to blame for this loss of Jesus-based pacifism. Christians began thinking that they were responsible for running the world, that Jesus' love ethic was irrelevant, unrealistic, and irresponsible. This is the basic argument of Yoder's twenty years of lectures on the subject published as *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace: Companion to Roland Bainton*, and *When War is Unjust: Honesty in Just War Thinking*.

There is no denying the power of Yoder's critique of Constantinianism and the "fall of the church." It is a message that is not original with Yoder, and one that the church caught in civil religion needs to hear over and over again. But there is an injustice to history, including the Contantinian era, that is committed by Yoder and others for whom "Constantinianism" is a shibboleth

for all that is bad. The third and fourth centuries were a time of great upheaval and diversity. 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. One cannot dismiss the working of the divine in the movements of history, even in its most unlikely places and persons (like Constantine). What Yoder, in my view, does not adequately account for are the tragic ambiguities of human existence and the ethical dilemmas of concrete social-political (including ecclesiastical) life in the fallen world in which all of us still find ourselves. Theologians like J. Lawrence Burkholder have seen these matters more clearly.

4. The history of Christian theology and ethics from the second century to the present is predominantly the story of Constantinian apostasy. Although the theologians of the second to fifth centuries asked some significant questions, and the ecumenical councils and creeds (Nicaea, Constantinople, Chalcedon) dealt with important issues, they transposed the narrative approach of the apostolic message into a Greek metaphysical and ontological way of thinking. In the process, obedience to the moral-ethical challenge of Jesus' life, teaching, and ministry was no longer central. This Platonizing of Christian theology suited imperial politics. Constantine called the council of Nicaea in order to unite the Empire. He chaired the Council and played a key role in its theological formulation using Greek philosophical terminology. Dissenting voices were pronounced anathema (heretical) for the sake of unity. This becomes the story of institutional Christianity from then on. It is not altogether clear whether Yoder believes that the Trinitarian and Christological developments of the classical period were necessarily linked to the Constantinianization of the church. He equivocates on this issue. It is also not entirely evident whether or not he thinks the truth lies with those minority views (the heretics) that were excluded. What Yoder certainly objects to is the exclusion of the dissenters for the sake of unity.

Yoder's over-riding concern in his historical-theological approach to the treatment of Christian thought through the millennia is with the unfaithfulness of the church to the original messianic vision of Jesus. Yoder does not claim that we can in any simplistic sense turn the clock back and return to the origin, but again and again the Christian community needs to

loop back (as a vine) to the initial Christ-event for renewal and reform in the present. This is the substance of Yoder's *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method*.

Yoder's encyclopedic grasp of the variety of theological controversies and systems throughout the ages never ceases to amaze. Yet the sharply-focused ethical glasses through which he views every event, text, and theory filter out too cleanly the rich plenitude of historical possibilities and contingencies. The theological seriousness of historical moments and individual Christians caught in the messiness of life never quite get their due. The development of a Christian doctrine of God in the first few centuries, with its distinctive metaphysical and ontological character, is not sufficiently appreciated as the grounding for the ethic that Yoder proclaims. Both theology and pneumatology are eclipsed by a low christology interpreted primarily in ethical-political terms. In the process the mystical, spiritual, and sacramental get lost.

5. The Believers Church tradition, prototypically present in the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, is a reform movement in which the concerns of the early, pre-Constantinian Jewish-Christian community are recovered. Anabaptism, and the Free Church tradition it exemplifies, represents the retrieval of the Jewishness of Christianity. Although Yoder had been interested in the early Jewish period of Christianity for a long while, the similarity of the Free Church tradition to exilic Judaism seemed to engage him more intentionally toward the end of his life. He saw not only sociological parallels between Mennonites and Jews, but also sociological-theological ones between the synagogue culture of Babylonian Judaism and the ecclesiology of the Believers Church more generally. Both were suspicious of centralized authority structures, particularly those enforced by the state. Both were small messianic-type communities intent on living faithfully in alien cultures, their identities similarly shaped by the reading and discussion of texts and the pre-eminence of ethical obedience. Both espoused nonviolence. These insights are spelled out in Yoder's essay "The Jewishness of the Free Church Tradition" (a lecture he gave at the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre in March 1997). In drawing out the historical and ethical similarity between the synagogue culture of diaspora Judaism and Free Church Christianity–a valuable analogy which is illuminating and helps to mitigate anti-semitic

elements present in the Christian tradition–Yoder does not do justice to the genuine theological differences that developed early on between the two religions (seen from both perspectives). He also, thereby, distances Mennonites and the Believers Church movement even further from the historic development of catholic Christianity, particularly from its ecumenical, "dogmatic" foundations.

6. The task of the Christian in contemporary culture is not to run the world, not to make history turn out right, but to live faithfully within a believing community as a witness in and to the world of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Christians have only one norm–Jesus Christ, who incarnates the way of self-sacrificial, nonviolent love in the world. They cannot expect the world (dominant culture and society in general) to live by this standard. This norm can be presumed only for those who have voluntarily joined the believing community, for whom faith is a presupposition, and who have committed themselves to a life of Christ-like love. Yoder identifies many different forms of pacifism, but the one he espouses is "the pacifism of the messianic community." It is a pacifism that does not depend on effectiveness in any usual pragmatic sense, but on the corporate confession of Jesus as Lord. Such a community is not sectarian, it is not quietistic, it does not withdraw from the world but seeks to live out the way of Jesus in human relations. It does not take direct responsibility for the political life of the state but does so indirectly by "witnessing" to the state. It does so with the use of "middle axioms," by which Yoder means norms that society in general can understand (justice, freedom, equality, etc.). For Christians these norms receive their content from the one christological norm of redemptive love; but in communicating with society this ultimate criterion remains indirect. At no point in its engagement with society is the church justified in compromising this Christological basis for ethical thinking or behavior. The "church" is to be distinguished from the "world," not sociologically and institutionally but in terms of response. It is a community of faith response to the way of Jesus Christ. This is the heart of Yoder's theological ethics, and it is found throughout his work but concentrated in books like *The Christian Witness to the State, Nevertheless,* and *The Priestly Kingdom*.

The logical tightness of Yoder's system makes it difficult to refute. But its inner consistency fails to square with the inconsistencies, ambiguities, fallenness, and messiness of real life either in the church or in the world. There is little room for personal or group failure within the messianic community. Nevertheless, his is a powerful critique of much mainstream ethics which is theologically too prone to justify failure, sin, and violence.

After Yoder, what?

Yoder was known in recent years to say with just a little too much modesty that others had passed him by. It is tempting to think that after a great era that produced thinkers like Bender and Yoder, we the epigones enter a period of mediocrity. It is certain that Yoder himself would rightly refute any such conclusion. He would encourage those who come after him to find new ways of being more faithful to Christ within contemporary culture. Yoder's death will without a doubt usher in a time of intense scrutiny and reappraisal of his way of reading the Gospel. In his lifetime there were contemporaries of his, like Gordon Kaufman and J. Lawrence Burkholder, who saw things quite differently. Even fellow members of the original European-based Concern Group, like John Miller, have come to interpret the Bible and the responsibility of the Christian within society differently than Yoder.

I myself believe that the Trinitarian foundations for Christian ethics are not sufficiently worked out in Yoder's thought. The Christian doctrine of God that emerged in the Biblical and post-Biblical period is the foundation for all Christian ethics, and is not exhausted by an ethic of agape. God cannot be said to be a pacifist in any strict sense (he gives and takes life; "'Vengeance is mine,' says the Lord")–this, of course, does not justify our human use of violence. But there is a sense in which a theology that begins and ends with a Jesus-ethic of nonviolent love cannot fully account for the irrational depths of evil and suffering in the world which also are mysteriously in the hands of God and can be used for divine purposes. God is an unfathomable and inexhaustible abyss, and the disclosure in Christ does not fully (without residue) annul the hiddenness. Wasn't it William Blake who asked, "Did he who made the Lamb make thee [the Tiger])?" Where is the Tiger in Yoder's God? In Yoder's Christ?

Mennonites and Narrative Theology: The Case of John Howard Yoder

Chris K. Huebner

Introduction

Ever since Harold Bender's now classic statement of the "Anabaptist Vision" presented at the American Society of Church History in 1943,[1] there has been substantial discussion regarding the nature and possibility of a specifically Mennonite theology. More recently, however, attempts have been made to bring this discussion up to date by addressing the question of Mennonite theology in terms of the categories of modernity and/or postmodernity. Among these accounts, one noteworthy development has been the appeal to narrative theology as helpful for describing the character of Mennonite theology.[2] Although there is no consensus on the matter, many contemporary Mennonite theologians agree that the category of narrative meaningfully captures the characteristic emphases of the Mennonite tradition. Indeed, the burden of proof often appears to lie with those who would question the value of narrative.

In this context the work of John Howard Yoder figures prominently. Yoder is appealed to more than any other Mennonite theologian in order to support the claim that Mennonite theology is best understood as a version of narrative theology. However, aside from the work of Stanley Hauerwas,[3] Yoder is conspicuously absent from the list of those more commonly associated with narrative theology, such as Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, Ronald Thiemann, William Placher and, more recently, Gerard Loughlin.[4] Similarly, Yoder does not himself embrace the label of narrative theologian. At the same time, he does not explicitly eschew it either. In light of such

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apparent difficulties, an explanation of the connection between Yoder and narrative theology is in order.

This essay attempts to provide such an explanation. One characteristic weakness of existing discussions of Yoder and narrative theology is that they tend to restrict their accounts of narrative theology to the work of Hauerwas. However, when placed in the context of the larger movement of narrative theology associated with Frei and the others noted above, certain tensions prevent a ready association of Yoder with narrative theology, and by extension raise concerns about the adequacy of narrative for Mennonite theology as a whole. This is not to ignore the arguments already made against a narrative interpretation of Mennonite theology. In fact, there is an identifiable and perhaps growing contingent among contemporary Mennonite theologians who have consistently raised questions about the viability of narrative theology. What separates my argument from theirs is that I raise concerns about narrative theology for precisely the opposite kinds of reasons. The standard Mennonite account against narrative theology tends to locate Yoder in continuity with the general movement and argues that both are problematic because they are too particularistic and hence sectarian and insular; this account advocates instead a more universalistic, often humanistic, move in the direction of "public theology."[5] In contrast, I suggest that narrative theology is problematic from a Mennonite perspective because it is insufficiently particularistic, but I argue that this does not render Mennonite theology sectarian or insular for reasons which have been most adequately defended by Yoder.

The rise of narrative theology

It is appropriate to begin with Hans Frei's *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. Frei's appeal to the category of narrative is best described as an emphasis on the integrity of the text itself. In attempting to rescue the Bible from the subservience to external or extra-biblical interpretive and justificatory categories it has been subject to since the rise of critical exegesis in the eighteenth century (such as authorial intent or actual historical fact), Frei contends that no intelligible distinction can be made between the biblical narrative and its subject matter. He supports the revival of the genre of "realistic narrative," which closes the gap between stories and the "reality"

they represent by envisioning the world as itself informed or absorbed by the biblical story.[6] Frei defends a New Critical conception of textual essentialism or absolutism, according to which meaning is located solely in the text itself.[7] Although some suggest that Frei's later work places greater emphasis on the role of the church as the proper context in which the Bible is to be read,[8] it nevertheless seems that the role of the church in his conception of biblical hermeneutics is much less significant than some of his defenders claim. Frei's appeal to the church amounts to the claim that the church reads the Bible as just the kind of narrative unity that he has described. As Frei states it, "the literal sense is the paradigmatic form of such intertextual interpretation in the Christian community's use of its scripture."[9] He does not accord a significant role to the church in the actual process of interpretation. Rather, when he appeals to the practices of the church, it is at a second-order level, in order to justify his view of the integrity of the text itself. Thus, the appeal to the category of narrative with respect to biblical hermeneutics remains a defence of textual absolutism.

Others have followed Frei in arguing for the importance of narrative as an alternative to what are taken to be errors characteristic of modernity. However, these subsequent discussions have expanded the appeal to narrative, using it to address questions in other areas of theological enquiry as well. Perhaps the most widespread of these extended applications turn to narrative in order to consider methodological and epistemological issues. Such an approach resembles Frei's anti-apologetic stance, in that it resists the subordination of the Christian narrative to external sources. More specifically, it is suggested that foundationalism is an inappropriate conception of epistemic justification for Christian theology, because it accords privileged status to certain categories lying outside the Christian tradition, such as experience or natural reason.[10] Instead, relying heavily on the work of Quine, narrative conceptions of theological method defend a version of epistemological holism or coherentism.[11] In this view, epistemic justification does not consist in an appeal to external sources but is rather a function of that which is "internal to the Christian framework."[12] That is, narrative epistemology sees justification in terms of the interrelationship of coherence among the system of beliefs that constitute the Christian faith.[13] Although its view of narrative is less exclusively restricted to the Bible, it is nevertheless closely

related to Frei's account of the integrity of the text. In both cases, the stress is on the internal logic of the narrative itself.

It might be objected, however, that one of the more significant moves beyond Frei by those seeking to develop a narrative epistemology is to place greater emphasis on the role of the church. For example, Ronald Thiemann argues that the primary context for the meaning of theological concepts is supplied by their "use in Christian community."[14] At the same time, though, he puts so much emphasis on the internal logic of the "web of interrelated *beliefs*"[15] that the church seems to be merely a vehicle for the transmission of a narrative whose justification is somehow independent of the church's actual practices. Perhaps a more significant account of the church's role in the context of narrative epistemology is provided by Lindbeck's "cultural-linguistic" theory, which stresses the primacy of the church as the communal context in which Christian theology gains its intelligibility.[16] However, it has recently been argued that even Lindbeck significantly undervalues the role of the church.[17] Gerard Loughlin suggests that Lindbeck distinguishes between doctrinal form and content in a way that presupposes "an unstatable proposition which underwrites the equivalency of formulations"[18] and that suggests "creed and Scripture, rule and text" (narrative and ecclesiological practice) are ultimately not as mutually constitutive as Lindbeck often seems to claim.[19] Similarly, it might be said that Lindbeck tries to derive a conception of church *from* Scripture in a way that suggests not only the priority but also the finality of the narrative such that the church merely proceeds from the story of Christ rather than being co-inherent with the story itself.[20] Thus, it appears that the primary significance of narrative epistemology consists in an appeal to the integrity of the story as an entity unto itself.

Finally, some have appealed to narrative in order to develop an account of personal identity. According to a narrative interpretation of identity, persons are not atomistic individuals made up of a series of isolated actions or events. Rather, personal identity is itself structured as a narrative unity. That is, one's identity consists in the larger narrative that tells the story of one's life. For example, a person's identity is "constituted (not simply illustrated) by that intention which he carries into an action," the sequence of which is best captured by narrative.[21] Similarly, action and identity are intelligible only in the context of a "web of interlocking patterns" which in turn

must be displayed in the larger context of a narrative account of a life as a whole.[22] The contention is that a narrative interpretation of identity can preserve concrete individuality without reducing it to mere subjective experience. Again we must raise the question of communal context, and in particular the role of the church. Among those who have looked to narrative in developing accounts of identity, such questions of concrete social location are perhaps most clearly associated with the work of Hauerwas. However, while he has come to place greater emphasis on embodiment in concrete relationships such as friendship or ecclesiology, this occurs at the same time that narrative has seen a more diminished role in his theology. Nevertheless, within the larger movement of narrative theology, such identity-constituting stories appear to stand on their own, in abstraction from concrete ecclesial instantiation.

Mennonites and narrative theology

Although many of these same emphases are apparent in contemporary Mennonite discussions of narrative theology, they nevertheless take on a somewhat different shape as a result of the need to stress such traditional Anabaptist themes as discipleship, pacifism, and the nature of the church. Mennonite discussions of narrative theology are deeply rooted in the narrative of Jesus as the normative story for the Christian faith.[23] This does not imply that the more mainstream accounts of narrative theology pay no attention to the story of Jesus.[24] Nevertheless, the normativity of that story seems central in the Mennonite appeal to narrative theology in a way that it is not within the wider discussion. In a related manner, Mennonite discussions of narrative theology tend to put more emphasis on response to the story, in particular by reference to the traditional Anabaptist notion of discipleship. For example, whereas Thiemann emphasizes that "the structure, content, and fulfillment of a promise depend *solely* on the initiative of the promiser,"[25] J. Denny Weaver stresses the ethical implications of the Jesus story, claiming that the "narrative identifies Jesus in a way which makes discipleship an inherent dimension of identifying with Jesus."[26]

We must also consider the status of particular doctrines with narrative theology. From the perspective of Mennonite theology, narrative theology

tends to neglect such characteristic Anabaptist themes as a christologically-rooted pacifism and an account of apocalyptic eschatology which stresses an important distinction between church and world. Rather, those who defend a narrative understanding of doctrine seem to tend more towards the mainstream than a Mennonite theology should be comfortable with. For example, while Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theology might seem compatible with an apocalyptic distinction between church and world at some level, his discussion is nevertheless haunted by a persistent concern not to "ghettoize" theology, which he avoids by stressing that the kind of "linguistic competence" he defends is to be "sought in the mainstream."[27]

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the Mennonite appeal to narrative theology, however, concerns the issue of particularity. On the basis of the traditional Anabaptist understanding of the eschatological distinction between church and world, Mennonite discussions of narrative theology have stressed the particularity of the church as informed by a narrative fundamentally different from that of the world.[28] Although this bears some affinity to Frei's anti-apologetic stance, Mennonite accounts of narrative theology are typically more attentive to the concrete ecclesiological implications of such narrative particularity. For example, Harry Huebner has recently suggested that the narrative of Jesus constitutes an "alternative story," the ecclesiological implications of which are such that the "key task of the church *vis-à-vis* the nation is to speak its own language, re-narrate its own story, re-member its own savior and re-embody its own ontology of peace and justice."[29]

But while particularity makes narrative theology attractive for some contemporary Mennonite theologians, it is also the primary source of objections to the Mennonite appeal to narrative theology. As noted above, the standard Mennonite objection is that such particularity renders narrative theology dangerously sectarian and insular.[30] It is suggested that narrative theology is so concerned with protecting its own story that it results in the oppressive exclusion of others. For example, Scott Holland says that "it is not enough for the theologian to master the stories of her religion's canon; she must be attentive to the plots and narrative turns in the other's story even as she attempts to write her community's evolving story."[31] Narrative theology, on this view, has reinforced a tendency to privilege the church in a theologically problematic way. Implicit in such objections is the claim that

the traditional Anabaptist distinction between church and world is not to be regarded in the particularistic sense that those influenced by narrative theology take it to be. Instead of stressing the particularity of the church as an entity distinct from the world, the standard objection argues for a more "public theology," which sees the church as one body among others.[32] Arguing for this position, Duane Friesen claims it is not enough to "simply repeat the Christian narrative and urge the practice of virtues that follow from that narrative."[33] Rather, he maintains that "if Christians are not to be sectarian, they must enter the arena of rational discourse with persons of other viewpoints, employing the analysis of whatever academic or practical discipline is appropriate in speaking to the issues confronted in the *polis*."[34]

Thus, the issue of theological and ecclesiological particularity is a prominent one within contemporary Mennonite theological circles, underlying the arguments both for and against the appeal to narrative theology. Although the resolution of much of this debate turns on the historical question of the traditional Anabaptist understanding of the eschatological distinction between church and world, the next section tries to shed some light on the matter by comparing narrative theology with the account of Mennonite theology provided by John Howard Yoder.

The theology of John Howard Yoder

We should begin by noting Yoder's various explicit references to the terminology of "narrative" or "story," since one might appeal to these uses in order to characterize Yoder as a representative of narrative theology. In what may be his strongest endorsement of the category of narrative, Yoder says that the character of the church's self-understanding is to be seen as narrative rather than deductive.[35] As he puts it, "the narrative quality of the church's doing ethics provides both that the decision shall always be in the situation and that the moment of decision shall never be isolated but rather finds itself oriented and, in fact, driven along by the momentum of the memories of the communal story."[36] Similarly, Yoder uses the terminology of narrative to stress the retrospective character of ecclesial rationality, claiming that the church's "procedures of evaluation come after, not before, assent. They operate within the community's story, not from Athens or 'from nowhere'."[37]

At the same time, however, he often uses the terminology of narrative in a much more cautious and ambiguous sense. For example, after noting the contingent and historical sense of the Evangel, or "Good News," he recognizes that "it is often narrative too," but quickly cautions that "to make much of that as a special additional issue in our contemporary discussion would be a red herring."[38]

Finally, Yoder raises explicit objections to narrative. It is wrong to claim that "less liberal words" (such as "narrative," "virtue," and "community") are "safer from abuse" than such "worldly" terms as "egalitarianism" or "freedom" that he uses on certain occasions.[39] Similarly, he objects to the sense in which the category of narrative tends to become a "new kind of universal" whereby it is claimed that there are "narrative forms, lying deeper than the ordinary events and sufficient to explain them."[40] Thus, although Yoder exhibits a pragmatic willingness to use the terminology in certain cases, he nevertheless resists appealing to the general category of narrative and according it primacy in a way characteristic of the general movement of narrative theology. In order to more properly explain Yoder's relationship to narrative theology, however, we must move beyond his explicit references to narrative terminology to a more extensive consideration of his theology as a whole.

Possibly the most persistent aspect of Yoder's theology has been his depiction and critique of "Constantinianism." Yoder argues that the history of Christianity must be read in light of a deep and lasting shift which took place with respect to the relationship between church and world, and which he claims is best associated with the reign of Constantine.[41] Whereas pre-Constantinian Christianity was that of a minority church existing in a world hostile towards it, Yoder claims that the Constantinian shift resulted in an alignment of the church with the ruling political regime of the day.[42] Constantinianism represents a fusion of church and state, clergy and emperor, Bible and sword, God and civil authorities, or the general continuity of Christianity with the "wider world." The structure of Constantinianism is rooted in the "basic axiom" that "the true meaning of history, the true locus of salvation, is in the cosmos and not in the church. What God is really doing is being done primarily through the framework of society as a whole and not in the Christian community."[43] Thus, the Constantinian temptation can exist even in a supposedly post-Constantinian context, in which the church is

officially separate from the state. Short of the actual institutional alignment of church and state, Yoder claims that Constantinianism continues where there is merely either a formal identification of the church with the prevailing political establishment (as in American public discourse), an appeal to the church in order to foster a program of desecularization (as in the "People's Democracies" of Eastern Europe), or the construal of eschatological hope in terms of the triumph of some future regime (as in certain Latin American neo-Marxist revolutionaries).[44] All these strategies compromise the Lordship of Christ by identifying God's cause with the powers of the political establishment in one way or another.[45] Accordingly, Yoder calls for the church to remain faithful, to resist such a Constantinian temptation by re-embodying the counter-establishment character and corresponding critical stance called for by the "politics of Jesus." Only by embodying such an alternative community can the church truly serve as a witness to the world.[46]

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. But the tendency to neglect this aspect of his work risks giving rise to a significant misunderstanding of his theology as a whole. Indeed, Yoder would resist the very distinction between the political and the methodological, attributing it to just the kind of establishment stance that relativizes the concrete significance of Jesus.[47] He suggests that such methodological dualisms are the product of the Constantinian privileging of the "wider wisdom." Along with the rise of such distinctions as that between the visible and invisible church, Yoder claims that the Constantinian shift also lies behind such characteristic dualisms as nature and grace, internal and external, collective and individual, and public and private.[48] But given the profoundly counter-establishment stance of the church, he maintains that a non-Constantinian approach must challenge the very terms of the debate which set the stage for discussions within mainline theology.[49] In particular, he calls for a rejection of systematic theology, or what he has more recently called "methodologism," according to which theology consists in a theoretical or meta-level discussion concerned primarily with the question of the proper elucidation and interrelationship between an allegedly agreed-upon collection of central concepts or loci, and which can in principle be justified to anyone on the basis of the internal logic of the system itself.[50] In contrast Yoder claims that

the concrete body of the church precedes any methodology or epistemology, since there is no non-neutral or non-particular place from which to produce a general method or system: "the life of the community is prior to all possible methodological distillations."[51] Raising the stakes even higher, he claims that meta-level appeals to method or system always run the risk of a particular form of idolatry, which restricts the recognition of God to a particular terminology.[52]

Although his rejection of methodologism has obvious affinities with the recent movement in moral philosophy known as "antitheory,"[53] it is more appropriate to see Yoder as rejecting the options of both theory and anti-theory. Against the theorists, he refuses to detach ethical concepts from concrete social practices. But he denies that such an emphasis on the priority of ethical practices entails the rejection of higher order reflection on practices altogether, as anti-theorists typically conclude. This is most clearly seen in his claim that theology is located first of all within the concrete practices of the church community. It does not take the form of a system and does not presuppose a prior method, but is rather an *ad hoc* or fragmentary enterprise always "on the way," addressing individual problems as they arise.[54] Insofar as methodological reflection is useful at all, it must be rooted in specific practices of the church and be constrained by whether those practices faithfully embody the politics of Jesus: "methodological analysis is helpful to illuminate problems of structure, but it is not the prerequisite for the community's right or capacity to reason morally."[55] To emphasize the prior significance of methodology would be to compromise the church's primary task of being the body of Christ.

So far, Yoder's account of the church has remained largely in the background. But to fully appreciate his non-Constantinian theology, we must examine his ecclesiology more specifically. Perhaps the key aspect of his view for our purposes is his claim that the church is a sociological, cultural, and political entity in its own right.[56] In contrast to what he identifies as the logic underlying H. Richard Niebuhr's typology in *Christ and Culture*, Yoder claims that the distinction between church and world does not imply that the church is somehow to be contrasted with culture, or that one is political and the other is not. Rather, the church constitutes a "new cultural option," a different kind of politics.[57] Too often, it seems, the political character of the church is compromised in the name of an eschatology which postpones the

concrete instantiation of the Body of Christ, awaiting the promise of some future fulfilment. But Yoder's apocalyptic eschatology of church and world heightens rather than lessens the church's political and embodied character. Pointing to the missionary function of the church, he suggests that it is to be a "model" or "foretaste" of God's plan for all of creation, such that the Christian eschatological vision consists in the character of the faithful Christian community.[58] Yoder argues that "the church is called to be now what the world is called to be ultimately."[59] Accordingly, he claims the church is called to embody specific practices which together define its character as a particular kind of political community. As one example, Yoder notes that breaking bread together is an "act of economic ethics."[60] It is not merely a symbolic or memorial act, but rather a central practice of the Christian body by which its members are banded together in a form of economic solidarity which transcends individualism and the notion of private property.[61] Such an economic ethics is not derived *from* the eucharist. Rather, "bread eaten together *is* economic sharing."[62] The Christian community is a sharing community precisely because it is defined in part by the practice of breaking bread together.

Another important ecclesial practice which Yoder takes to define the character of the church is that of reading Scripture. Although he often emphasizes that his conception of the church is rooted in Scripture, he nevertheless denies that the biblical text is an autonomous entity which somehow stands alone.[63] Similarly, he denies that ecclesiology can simply be derived or abstracted *from* Scripture, as though it were somehow just there, waiting to be recognized by any unidentified reader. Rather, he claims that the Bible is ecclesiologically mediated, such that it can only be said to have meaning, let alone exist in the first place, within the context of the church.[64] In particular, he develops the notion of the church as a "hermeneutic community," according to which the Bible is to be read and appropriated by the gathered community.[65] In a manner reminiscent of the version of reader-response criticism recently made popular by Stanley Fish, Yoder states that

> to speak of the Bible apart from people reading it and apart from the specific questions those people reading need to answer is to do violence to the very purpose for which we have been given the Holy Scriptures. There is no such thing

> as an isolated word of the Bible carrying meaning in itself. It has meaning only when it is read by someone and then only when that reader and the society in which he or she lives can understand the issue to which it speaks.[66]

Yoder argues that the interpretation of Scripture is a communal exercise which is properly located in the context of the church. He denies that the enterprise of reading Scripture can be undertaken by just anyone in any particular context. Rather, it is a disciplined activity, according to which readers must have been properly initiated by receiving prior training in the particular practices of the church, such as binding and loosing, or breaking bread as discussed above. As Yoder puts it, "only one who is committed to the direction of obedience can read the truth so as to interpret it in line with the direction of God's purposes."[67] But if it is misleading to say that Yoder derives his conception of the church *from* Scripture, it is equally problematic to claim that he moves from the church as a hermeneutic community *to* the Bible. There is no such causal relationship running in either direction according to which one of them may be identified as primary to, and productive of, the other. Rather, Yoder takes church and Scripture to be fundamentally interrelated. Whereas the faithful community may be said to be rooted in Scripture, it is equally the case that Scripture has no existence apart from the church which contextualizes and continues to embody it. They are not two distinct entities, each with its own autonomous ontological status. On the contrary, they are interparticipatory or mutually constitutive.

Closely related to Yoder's account of the interrelationship between church and Scripture is his understanding of Christian discipleship. Building on his rejection of the claim that the Bible can simply be read as though somehow intelligible in and of itself, Yoder argues that the understanding of Scripture consists in its performance or dramatic enactment. Quoting from the early Anabaptist writing of Hans Denck, he claims that "no man can know Christ unless he follows after him in life."[68] It is erroneous to separate the understanding of Christ from the life of discipleship itself. Further, Scripture is inseparable from the collective performance of "sacramental" or "liturgical" practices undertaken by the members of the Christian community.[69] The church provides the stage on which the Biblical story comes to completion by informing the lives of its members. Again, Yoder's

understanding of discipleship is not to be rendered in casual terms; there is no deep gap existing between Christ and his followers that must be bridged with some kind of causal explanation. To be a disciple is not to live a life which is patterned after, or which merely corresponds to, the *example* of Christ. Rather, discipleship consists in a kind of sacramental or liturgical participation in the very body of Christ itself. Similarly, Yoder claims there is no deeper category such as "humanity" to which patterns of discipleship are somehow added. On the contrary, for Christians, discipleship is itself ontologically basic.[70] There is no collection of abstract principles which might be derived from the example of Christ and consequently applied to the lives of individual Christians. Rather, discipleship is the concretely and corporately embodied participation in the very particular shape of God's plan as revealed in the incarnation of God in Christ.

In spite of his emphasis on particularity and the otherness of the church, however, Yoder insists that his account of a non-Constantinian theology is not sectarian. Indeed, he has argued that the category of "sectarian" is itself the product of "the standard epistemological context of establishment."[71] Yoder claims that defenders of the sectarian objection, such as James Gustafson, endorse a methodological framework which forces a zero-sum choice between sectarian authenticity and public intelligibility.[72] Such a methodology presupposes the existence of a unitary, publicly accessible system of evaluative criteria or, at the very least, a single public arena for debate.[73] Against such an assumption, Yoder maintains that the very idea of the "public" is itself a particular standpoint, representing a "view from somewhere" and thus laden with its own distinctive presuppositions. "There is no 'public' that is not just another particular province."[74] Yet his critique of establishment epistemology tends to be obscured by those advancing the sectarian objection, which focuses instead on his view of "political" non-Constantinianism in abstraction from the "methodological" non-Constantinianism discussed above. Accordingly, those who charge Yoder with sectarianism end up simply begging the question, criticizing him by reproducing the very standpoint that he explicitly rejects. Unless it meets his account of "methodological" non-Constantinianism head-on, such an objection remains ultimately beside the point.

But even if the sectarian objection did not beg this question, it is still significantly flawed, since his theology does not "exclude the other." First,

Yoder has consistently stressed the missiological sense in which the church is "for the world."[75] Second, he argues that it is one of the marks of the Constantinian shift that the outsider is no longer privileged as "the test of whether one loves one's neighbor."[76] That is, Yoder defends the radicality of Christian love over against Constantinianism, claiming that Jesus redefines the very notion of "neighbor" to include enemies and outsiders. Not only does Constantinianism dissolve the outsider by turning to the sword in order to make the church into "everyone,"[77] but public theology appears to betray a Constantinian temptation by stipulating and policing the terms of "public" debate under the guise of "neutrality." With his understanding of the concrete and embodied character of the Christian community, however, Yoder does not have to provide guarantees that all will necessarily speak a common language.[78] Indeed, there are no such guarantees, and there may be times when meaningful communication is impossible. But that is to be expected, if language is indeed value-laden and community-dependent as sociologists and linguists have been reminding us. Thus, it is Yoder, rather than those who defend a "non-sectarian" account of public theology, who holds a deeper respect for the "otherness" of "the other." In stark contrast to Yoder's emphasis on concreteness and embodied specificity, the defenders of public theology continually appeal to the general category of otherness and the abstract terminology of alterity in such a way that obscures who in particular is being named as "other." Although Yoder may be more forthcoming and honest about exactly where he is located, his theology does not preclude dialogue with the other. Rather, it gives the other a name and recognizes the other's particularity in a way that is the first mark of genuine conversation.

Reconsidering Yoder's relationship to narrative theology

Here we must highlight some of the main points raised by the preceding juxtaposition of the respective positions. While they may seem to share a common opponent, namely the "apologetic" nature of much modern theology which seeks to authenticate itself by means of an appeal to external, non-theological sources, nevertheless significant differences appear between them. First, whereas narrative theologians such as Frei appeal to narrative in order to defend the integrity of the text, Yoder is critical of such versions of textual absolutism, arguing instead for the mutual constitution of church and

Scripture. In contrast to a narrative conception of biblical hermeneutics, in which Scripture might be said to stand alone, Yoder denies the possibility of abstracting the Bible from the church. Further, his view of discipleship draws attention to the importance of dramatic enactment or the performative aspect of biblical hermeneutics which is lacking in narrative theology. Whereas narrative theology stresses the intelligibility of the biblical narrative in and of itself, Yoder's understanding of the hermeneutic community requires active participation by the members of the Body of Christ, such that the story of Christ cannot be separated from those "actors" who participate in and in fact partially constitute his very Body. Accordingly, Yoder would be equally critical of the narrative interpretation of personal identity. For him, identity does not consist merely in the story of one's life but rather involves a concrete rootedness in embodied community. His view of the nature of the church suggests that identity is itself partly constituted by participation in ecclesiological practices and the relationships with others that such practices both require and sustain.

Further, those who move narrative theology beyond its origins in the context of biblical hermeneutics emphasize the internal logic of the story itself. This focus is rather abstract in comparison with Yoder's understanding of theology as situated within the context of the church. While Yoder might share with narrative theology the rejection of epistemological foundationalism, his account of non-Constantinian theology is not merely anti-foundationalist but rather rejects the enterprise of epistemology altogether. He is equally critical of the appeal to coherent systems or webs of interrelated beliefs that narrative theologians defend as of the axiomatic and deductive hierarchies of foundationalism. Thus, from his perspective, narrative theology simply reproduces the "methodologist" stance of systematic theology, defending the narrative structure of the Christian story in abstraction from the concrete practices of the embodied church. The problem with narrative theology is not that it is too particular, but that it is insufficiently particular, standing above, or perhaps beside, but in any case not adequately rooted in the church.

Finally, given Yoder's view of the apocalyptic distinction between church and world, we should question the sense in which narrative theology might remain too close to the mainstream. "Methodologically" speaking, narrative theology seems closely wedded to establishment epistemology, since

coherentism or some other form of holism is currently one of the more preferred positions among card-carrying members of the professional epistemological guild. A more explicit, and hence more troubling, instance of the establishment stance of narrative theology, however, is Lindbeck's appeal to the mainstream as a way of avoiding the ghettoization of theology. From a more "political" perspective, however, it is difficult to tell where narrative theology is to be situated with respect to the establishment culture, primarily because it has remained rather silent on such matters. But that fact in itself likely counts as a significant reason against it. For as Yoder has convincingly argued, one of the characteristic features of mainline theology is its tendency to prescind from political matters. Accordingly, with its emphasis on methodological questions and its silence about politics, narrative theology seems to continue to endorse just the kind of sharp distinction between method and politics that Yoder denies. Thus, unless and until it comes clean on such matters, it is fair to consider narrative theology as having capitulated to the "wider wisdom" of the mainstream.

Although I have stressed the discontinuity of Yoder and narrative theology, it is important to distinguish between stronger and weaker versions of that position. The strong version states that there is an essential incompatibility between Yoder and narrative theology, or that the category of narrative is problematic in and of itself. The weaker version maintains that there are significant tensions between their respective positions, but does not claim that Yoder's theology necessarily rules out the category of narrative altogether. It is the weaker version which most adequately characterizes the relationship between Yoder and narrative theology, for the following reasons. First, Yoder's rejection of methodologism includes an objection against those forms of categorical or terminological essentialism which identify a particular term or concept as acceptable or problematic for Christian theology as such. Second, the weaker version affords a better explanation of Yoder's own use of the terminology of narrative. As we saw above, Yoder appeals to narrative in certain cases while at the same time objecting to the sense in which a conception of theology might be built upon it. He refuses to accord narrative the primary status that it has for those who defend a version of *narrative* theology. Thus, while recognizing Yoder's use of the terminology of narrative or story, this essay has sought to stress the important points of divergence or discontinuity between Yoder and the movement of narrative theology. To

construct a theology around any such concept or category would be to compromise the concrete social and political character of the church as the Body of Christ.

Conclusion

What are the implications of our discussion for the much-debated question of a specifically Mennonite theology? Contrary to the assumptions of many contemporary Mennonite theologians, narrative theology is problematic from the standpoint of Mennonite theology as Yoder sees it. Although this does not suggest that the category of narrative is somehow problematic in and of itself, we must grasp the differences between Yoder and narrative theology in order to counter the tendency within Mennonite theological circles to interpret Yoder as a narrative theologian. Accordingly, those who draw on Yoder's work in order to address the issue of a specifically Mennonite theology should be more careful than they characteristically have been about appealing to narrative theology. Instead of supplementing Yoder's theology, the appeal to narrative theology might actually undermine some of his most significant points. But such a warning applies even to those who question the value of Yoder for Mennonite theology, since they equally tend to associate him with the movement of narrative theology. If this essay prevents or at least complicates such assumptions, then it will have achieved its main purpose.

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Notes

[1] Published as Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 18 (1944): 67-88.

[2] See, e.g., J. Denny Weaver, "Narrative Theology in an Anabaptist-Mennonite Context," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 12:2 (1994): 171-88; and Scott Holland, "How Do Stories Save Us? Two Contemporary Theological Responses," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 12:2 (1994):

131-53. See also Duane K. Friesen, "A Critical Analysis of Narrative Ethics," in *The Church as Theological Community*, ed. Harry Huebner (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications, 1990), 223-46.

[3] A note on Hauerwas is in order, since it is primarily by means of an appeal to his work that Yoder has been regarded as a proponent of narrative theology. First, Hauerwas refers neither to himself nor to Yoder as a narrative theologian or ethicist. That identification is made or implied by the various Mennonite theologians mentioned above (n. 2), presumably on the combined basis of Hauerwas's appeal to the category of narrative in certain cases and his heavy reliance on Yoder. But it is problematic to refer to Hauerwas as a narrative theologian for precisely the same reasons I will outline below with respect to Yoder. Even if it were appropriate to count Hauerwas as a narrative theologian, it does not follow that this, together with his appeal to Yoder, justifies the conclusion that Yoder is a narrative theologian. Compare with the obviously false yet formally identical statement: "Jones is a baseball player and Jones attributes his skill at baseball to Mozart, thus Mozart is a baseball player." Of course, appeals to Yoder's work might be helpful in constructing a Mennonite account of narrative theology, and Hauerwas could be used as an instructive example. But that is a different matter than identifying Yoder with the narrative theology movement.

[4] It is appropriate to add a note on the familiar distinction between the "Yale" and "Chicago" schools of narrative theology, especially since this typology has been introduced into the Mennonite discussion by Scott Holland (see n. 2). While people associated with both Yale and Chicago emphasize the category of narrative, most notably Hans Frei and Paul Ricoeur, the differences between Yale and Chicago are perhaps more significant than the apparent similarities that might justify a typology which interprets them both as versions of narrative theology. What is problematic about the Yale vs. Chicago typology is that there is no larger, more generic category called narrative theology (without qualification) of which Yale and Chicago constitute two distinct species. Further, whereas those associated with Yale make narrative the primary category, narrative apparently has a secondary role at Chicago, in so far as it is understood in terms of imaginative constructions rooted in human subjectivity. Thus, perhaps the Chicago school is not really a version of *narrative* theology at all, but rather a version of liberal humanism that emphasizes the category of narrative for certain purposes. In the context of the Mennonite discussion, note that Holland's defence of the Chicago school seems to rely less on the category of narrative and more on "universal human needs" (Holland, "How Do Stories Save Us?," 140), "deepened self-consciousness" (141), ways of "being-in-the-world" (143), the "more primordial" experience of mysticism (144), and the general category of "otherness" (147-48). Although Holland does stress narrative, its status remains subservient to a more general category of something like collective human experience. Thus, it remains unclear whether he has really offered the account of how stories save us that he claims to have provided. For it often sounds like it is not so much stories which save us but rather that we save ourselves. The account of narrative theology in the following discussion is broadly of the Yale variety. A better approach, however, is to avoid such terminology and to question the value of the typology. The selection of narrative theologians in this paper has less to do with their belonging to a particular school than with it being constructive to compare them with Mennonite theology in general and the work of Yoder in particular.

[5] This objection has been stated most pointedly by Holland. However, in light of the problems identified in his appropriation of the Yale vs. Chicago typology (see n. 4), it is more accurate to see his defence of "public theology" as an alternative to narrative theology. For an argument which more explicitly defends public theology as an alternative to narrative theology, see Friesen, "A Critical Analysis of Narrative Ethics"; and Alain Epp Weaver, "Options in Postmodern Mennonite Theology," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 11:1 (1993): 63-76.

[6] Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 1-3, 130. On the gap between narrative and reality, see *ibid*., 4-5.

[7] For Frei's own account of his relationship to New Criticism, see Frei, "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?," in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 140-43.

[8] See, e.g., Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church, and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 82-86.

[9] Frei, "The 'Literal Reading'," 147. It is primarily to this essay that defenders of Frei point as signalling a shift towards a greater role for the church in his account of biblical hermeneutics.

[10] See William C. Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 24-38, 123-37; and Ronald Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 43-46. Experience and natural reason are also the options that provide the negative foil for Lindbeck, although he does not put it in precisely those terms. See George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 16-19, 32-41, 63-69.

[11]Narrative theologians tend to focus on W. V. O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From a Logical Point of View: Logico-Philosophical Essays*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 20-46; and Quine and J. S. Ullian, *The Web of Belief* (New York: Random House, 1970).

[12] Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*, 74.

[13] *Ibid*., 75-76. See also Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 64

[14] Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*, 75.

[15] See, e.g., *ibid*., 75 (emphasis added).

[16] See, e.g., Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 33: "Like a culture or language, [religion] is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities."

[17] See Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, 36, n. 21.

[18] *Ibid*., 49.

[19] *Ibid*., 49-51.

[20] *Ibid*., 84-86. Loughlin is referring here to George Lindbeck, "The Story-Shaped Church: Critical Exegesis and Theological Interpretation," in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*, ed. Garrett Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 161-78.

[21] Hans Frei, "Theological Reflections on the Accounts of Jesus' Death and Resurrection," in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 63.

[22] Michael Root, "The Narrative Structure of Soteriology," in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 270-71. See also David F. Ford, "System, Story, Performance: A Proposal About the Role of Narrative in Christian Systematic Theology," in the same volumes, 191-215, esp. 193-94. See also Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, "From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics," in *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 27-34. Frei has also drawn attention to the intimate connection between narrative and identity in terms of the identity of Jesus. See Frei, "Theological Reflections on the Accounts of Jesus' Death and Resurrection," 45-93.

[23] See, e.g., J. Denny Weaver, "Narrative Theology in an Anabaptist-Mennonite Context," 172-73.

[24] Again, note that Frei's account of narrative is intimately related to his work on the identity of Jesus. See, e.g., Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); and "Theological Reflections on the Accounts of Jesus' Death and Resurrection."

[25] Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*, 110 (emphasis added).

[26] J. Denny Weaver, "Narrative Theology in an Anabaptist-Mennonite Context," 176.

[27] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 100. For some of Lindbeck's scattered references to "ghettoization," see, e.g., *ibid*., 25, 77, 128-29. This is not to suggest that Mennonite theology is appropriately situated in the ghetto. Rather, what I am pointing to here is Lindbeck's strategy of appealing to the mainstream in order to avoid ghettoization.

[28] See, e.g., Friesen, "A Critical Analysis of Narrative Ethics," 244-46; and Weaver, "Narrative Theology in an Anabaptist-Mennonite Context," 174-75.

[29] Harry Huebner, "The Church Made Strange for the Nations, or Singing A New Song in A Strange Land," unpublished paper presented at the MCC Peace Committee Meetings (Akron, PA, April 11, 1997), 11, 13.

[30] Such charges of sectarianism against narrative theology are by no means restricted to Mennonite theology. When objections are advanced by Mennonites, it is the charge of sectarianism that they characteristically raise. The standard Mennonite objection that I am describing relies heavily on the work of James Gustafson. See, e.g., his "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, The Church, and the University," *Catholic Theology Society of America Proceedings*, 40 (1985): 83-94. Indebtedness to Gustafson is explicitly

acknowledged by Holland, "The Problems and Prospects of a 'Sectarian Ethic': A Critique of the Hauerwas Reading of the Jesus Story," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 10:2 (1992): 162.

[31] Holland, "How Do Stories Save Us?," 149.

[32] See, e.g., Alain Epp Weaver's approving depiction of Gordon Kaufman's conception of the church as "part of a public community consisting of many particular groups in conversation on equal terms about how to evaluate and reconstruct their respective traditions" (Alain Epp Weaver, "Options in Postmodern Mennonite Theology," 76). Also telling is Epp Weaver's appeal to Kaufman's view of religious language: "although religious language might once have found its proper home in the context of the church, today the meaning of religious terms is to be found in their usage in the common discourse of Western languages" (*ibid*., 74).

[33] Friesen, "A Critical Analysis of Narrative Ethics," 239.

[34] *Ibid*. Note that Friesen equates "rational discourse" with "public discourse." See also Holland, who claims that narrative theology signals a "retreat from the public square into the world of the text" which must be countered with a more public "dialogue with the radically other," in Holland, "How Do Stories Save Us? Two Theological Responses," 151 and 152, respectively.

[35] John Howard Yoder, "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics: Gospel Ethics Versus the Wider Wisdom," in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 110.

[36] *Ibid*., 122. See also John Howard Yoder, "Armaments and Eschatology," *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 1:1 (1988): 51: "the believing community today participates imaginatively, narratively, in the past history as her own history, thanks to her historians, but also thanks to her poets and prophets."

[37] John Howard Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation," *Faith and Philosophy* 9:3 (1992): 297. In a somewhat different context, he describes the church's "alternative consciousness" in terms of an "alternative narrative": Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 94-95. Yoder makes this last point in the context of suggesting that "another view of what the world is like is kept alive by narration and celebration which fly in the face of the 'apparent' lessons of 'realism'" (*ibid*., 94). The reference to "realism" here is to Niebuhrian "political" realism, and not the epistemological or metaphysical realism more commonly discussed by the "narrative theologians."

[38] Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel," 290.

[39] Yoder, "Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture," in *The Royal Priesthood, 370.* Though not specifically in those terms, this same point also underlies the argument in Yoder, "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 Press, 1994), 77-90.

[40] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 36.

[41] Yoder consistently emphasizes that his account of Constantinianism is not so much concerned with Constantine the man. Neither does he suggest that the so-called Constantinian shift was an instantaneous, once and for all reversal. Rather, he uses "the name Constantine merely as a label for this transformation, which began before A.D. 200 and took over 200 years," nevertheless claiming that the "medieval legend which made of Constantine the symbol of an epochal shift was realistic." See Yoder, "The Otherness of the Church," in *The Royal Priesthood*, 57; and *The Priestly Kingdom*, 135, respectively.

[42] See, e.g., *The Priestly Kingdom*, 135-136.

[43] Yoder, "Christ, the Hope of the World," in *The Royal Priesthood*, 198.

[44] For Yoder's own account of the varieties of Constantinianism, old and new, see Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 141-44; and "Christ the Hope of the World," 195-97. For a helpful summary of Yoder's position, see Michael G. Cartwright, "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity: John Howard Yoder's Vision of the Faithful Church," introduction to *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 10-12.

[45] See, e.g., Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 88, 143; "Christ, the Hope of the World," 200. See also Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 85: "let us name as definitional for beginning our characterization of the radical Protestant reformation the very notion of challenging establishment; i.e., of rejecting, or at least doubting fundamentally, the appropriateness of letting the Christian faith be the official ideology of a society, especially of the elite within a society."

[46] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 92.

[47] On the connection between Constantinianism and the relativization of Jesus, see Yoder, "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics," 114. See also Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 54, 88.

[48] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 24, 36, 43, 46, 108, 136, 141; "The Otherness of the Church," 57; "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel," 295; and "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics," 108-109. See also Cartwright, "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity," 6-7.Yoder does not reject all dualisms as such. This is most clearly suggested by the prominence of the distinction between church - world in his work. He rejects those dualisms which provide the framework for establishment epistemology. See Yoder, "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics," 108-109.

[49] See, e.g., Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 115: "It seems self-evident from the majority perspective that this kind of [Anabaptist conception of] moral discernment must lead to a principled withdrawal from the exercise of certain social functions or from the 'use of power.' It is obvious that the systematic analysis of the advocates of the majority position would make this assumption, so that the choice must appear to be between involvement (which cannot be ultimately critical) and noninvolvement. Then the mainstream tradition chooses involvement. The radical reformation perspective, however, refuses to stand that choice on its head and withdraw, but rather challenges the prior logical analysis." See also

Yoder's rejection of the "epistemology of establishment" in "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel," 288-95.

[50] Yoder, "Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism," 77-90, esp. 88. See also Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 114.

[51] Yoder, "Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism," 82. See also *The Priestly Kingdom*, 7-8, 37, 113-116; "Sacrament as Social Process," 369; and "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel," 289.

[52] Yoder, "Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism," 89. See also *The Priestly Kingdom*, 114.

[53] Antitheory is most commonly associated with the work of Bernard Williams. See his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985). Much of the most relevant literature on ethical anti-theory is collected in *Anti-Theory in Ethics and Moral Conservatism*, ed. Stanley G. Clarke and Evan Simpson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). For a helpful secondary account of the antitheory movement within contemporary moral philosophy, see Dwight Furrow, *Against Theory: Continental and Analytic Challenges in Moral Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

[54] Yoder, "Why Ecclesiology Is Social Ethics," 121. See also his account of the necessity of "perpetual reform" in *The Priestly Kingdom*, 69-70.

[55] Yoder, "Sacrament as Social Process," 372.

[56] Yoder, "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of *Christ and Culture*," in *The Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, ed. Glen H. Stassen (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 75. See also Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before Watching the World* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992), ix.

[57] Yoder, "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned," 75. See also Yoder, *Body Politics*, ix; and "Sacrament as Social Process," 369.

[58] For Yoder's use of the terminology of "modelling" and "foretastes," see, e.g., Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 94; "Sacrament as Social Process," 373; and "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics," 106. See also Yoder, *Body Politics*, ix-x.

[59] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 92. See also Yoder, *Body Politics*, ix.

[60] Yoder, "Sacrament as Social Process," 364. See also Yoder, *Body Politics*, 20-21.

[61] Yoder, "Sacrament as Social Process," 365-66; *Body Politics*, 20.

[62] Yoder, "Sacrament as Social Process," 365; *Body Politics*, 20 (emphasis Yoder's).

[63] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 117.

[64] *Ibid*.

[65] John Howard Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation: Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspectives*, Text-Reader Series, ed. Willard

Swartley, vol. 1 (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1984), 11-28, esp. 21, 27-28. See also Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 117-118.

[66] Yoder, "Binding and Loosing," in *The Royal Priesthood*, 353. See also Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 117: "the free-church alternative ... recognizes the inadequacies of the text of Scripture standing alone uninterpreted, and appropriates the promise of the guidance of the Spirit throughout the ages, but locates the fulfillment of that promise in the assembly of those who gather around Scripture in the face of a given real moral challenge." For a more extended treatment of the similarities between Yoder and Fish, see Mark Thiessen Nation, "Theology as Witness: Reflections on Yoder, Fish, and Interpretive Communities," *Faith and Freedom* 5:1-2 (1996): 42-47.

[67] Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," 27.

[68] Quoted in Yoder, *ibid*., 27.

[69] Yoder, "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics," 102-126, esp. 110, 115, 120; "Sacrament as Social Process," 359-73.

[70] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 36: "the way of discipleship is the way for which we are made; there is no other 'nature' to which grace is a *superadditum*."

[71] Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel," 288.

[72] Yoder is referring to Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, The Church, and the University," which, as noted in note 30 above, tends to lie behind the Mennonite account of the sectarian objection as well.

[73] Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel," 288-89.

[74] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 40. See also Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel," 289: "there is no non-particular place to stand."

[75] This point is most fully developed in Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). See also Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 55; and Cartwright, "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity," 35.

[76] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 75. See also *ibid*., 138. To the best of my knowledge, none of the sectarian objections against Yoder acknowledges his emphasis and discussion of this point.

[77] *Ibid*., 139.

[78] Yoder, "Meaning After Babble: With Jeffrey Stout Beyond Relativism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24:1 (1996): 132.

Toward a Theology of Culture: A Dialogue with John H. Yoder and Gordon Kaufman[1]

Duane K. Friesen

Introduction

First, I want to reflect generally about a "believers' church" model of a theology of culture. Secondly, I will examine some of the central theological issues in developing a theology of culture through a dialogue with the two most important and influential Mennonite theologians of this century, John H. Yoder and Gordon Kaufman. Both Yoder and Kaufman have been my teachers, and I have been deeply influenced by both.[2] This essay reflects my personal effort to explore commonalities and tensions between them, in order to work through my own point of view.

Central for a theology of culture is a model or vision of the church. I believe the church in twentieth-century North American society is in a situation analogous to that of the Jewish exiles in Babylon who were advised by Jeremiah "to seek the shalom of the city where they dwell." Jeremiah's phrase captures the dynamic or tension involved in being the church: a people who are called by God to embody an alternative cultural vision to the dominant culture of North America, and at the same time, a people whose purpose is not to withdraw into safe sectarian enclaves but rather to be a "presence" in the dominant culture by "seeking the shalom of the city" wherever the church exists.

In a more complete analysis I would say more about what I mean by "exile." Obviously, the North American church does not live in the hostile situation of the Jews in Babylon. Nevertheless, there is an important sense in

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which the church must see itself as in "exile," not "at home" in North America. As Douglas John Hall puts it: "Intentional disengagement from the dominant culture, with which the older Protestant denominations of this continent have been bound up in the past, is the necessary precondition for a meaningful engagement of that same dominant culture."[3]

My model is shaped by an Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, part of the larger believers' church tradition. This stream in church history has developed an alternative to a view of culture based on a "Christendom" model which assumes that the church is, and should be, integrally linked with the dominant institutions of society. A Christendom model assumes the church is in a position to shape the entire social order by virtue of these linkages. With the break-up of Christendom, the church now faces the reality of secularization and minority status in a world of religious pluralism. Many Christians within all denominational traditions are also realizing that to be a follower of Christ places one at odds with many of the dominant values of our culture (i.e., rampant consumerism, violence, ecological destruction, radical disparities between rich and poor). In this time, therefore, "believers' church" models have become increasingly relevant for the church as a whole.

A theology of culture, however, should be broadly ecumenical. I am also attracted to the strengths of other Christian traditions (especially the Roman Catholic and the Reformed traditions) which have more experience in relating to the larger culture. My own Mennonite heritage traditionally has too one-sidedly emphasized a theology of the church that supports "withdrawal" from the dominant culture (reinforced by ethnicity). And especially in the last several decades, when Mennonites have left these ethnic enclaves, they have tended uncritically to accommodate themselves to the dominant culture, especially the culture of consumer capitalism. Mennonites have not developed an adequate theology of culture that balances an emphasis on the church as an alternative cultural vision with Jeremiah's advice to "seek the shalom of the city where you dwell." The agenda for Mennonites is how to "be" the church, and at the same time how to engage the larger culture in a creative and discriminating way.

I must also say something about where my work fits within Christian social ethics, a discipline in which Ernst Troeltsch and H. Richard Niebuhr have profoundly shaped our thinking about the relationship of the church

and culture. I am referring to Troeltsch's famous church/sect/mystic typology developed in his classic work, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, and Niebuhr's five types developed in his classic work, *Christ and Culture*.

From the first time I read Troeltsch and Niebuhr I have felt there is something wrong with how they set up the problem, and with how their typologies work descriptively. Niebuhr defines Christ in terms of ideal virtues (i.e., love, hope, humility) oriented toward a God "beyond" the world of culture. According to Charles Scriven's analysis of Niebuhr, "'Christ' in the phrase 'Christ and Culture' is thus the one who points us away from finite values to the Maker of all things."[4] Niebuhr (like Troeltsch before him,[5]) defines Christ in such a way that if one were to have a "pure" relationship to this Christ, one would by definition stand in opposition to culture. Secondly, by treating culture as a monolithic entity to which Christ is related, Niebuhr makes a dichotomy between Christ and culture. Thus he defines the problem as a tension between Christ *and* culture, as if the problem were an opposition between two monolithic entities separate from each other. This definition then determines the structure of the rest of his book. As in the case of Troeltsch's sect type, those who most faithfully seek to follow Christ are against culture by definition. Such an opposition is, of course, impossible, for to be human means to belong to culture. And so this type (represented by *I John*, Tertullian, Tolstoy, and the Mennonites) is frequently critiqued in his book for not being consistent. The "Christ of culture" type is even more problematic for Niebuhr, because it represents those who accommodate completely to culture. For him the only viable options are the remaining three types (all of which assume a Christendom model). These types are better because they seek to relate both poles, Christ and culture. Niebuhr ends with his fifth type, Christ the transformer of culture–the one he prefers and the only one he does not critique. Routinely the reader of *Christ and Culture* identifies most with this fifth type. Paul Ramsey reports using this text in his college classes:

> It is difficult to speak with sobriety about 'Christ transforming culture' and converting the works of men. Thus I have learned from attempting these last several years to teach H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* to my

> students; they can never quite understand why Augustine and Calvin belong under the type 'Christ transforming culture.' That this is not simply a function of their lack of information or their immaturity, or their teacher's lack of aptitude, seems to me to be indicated by the fact that when Richard Niebuhr's book first appeared almost everyone in American Christendom rushed to locate himself among the 'transformists': naturalists, process theologians, personalists, idealists, Lutherans and Anglicans who were sometimes Thomists, as well as those you would have expected. It was as if the 'typology' or clustering of Christian approaches to man's work in culture and history had suddenly collapsed in 1951, so universal was the conviction that, of course, the Christian always joins in the transformation of the world whenever this is proposed.[6]

Christ and Culture, contrary to the way most persons read it, is not just a descriptive history of types but a theological/ethical argument.

The problem is with definition. Instead of beginning with a definition of "Christ" as an ideal in opposition to culture, I believe we must begin with a definition of an "embodied" christology, one which places Christ in the context of his Jewish culture of first-century Palestine. Rather than beginning with a Christ abstracted from his time and place, defined in terms of a religious idea (Troeltsch's language), as an ideal of agape love (Reinhold Niebuhr's language), or virtues or excellences (H.R. Niebuhr's language), we must begin with a view of Christ as the concrete presence of God *in the world of culture*.[7] Christ, therefore, rather than being defined against culture, represents a cultural vision.

An adequate theology of culture is one that has an embodied christology. We need a christology that can provide a vivid picture of a Christ who is not disembodied from cultural formation, but rather is concrete enough to provide leverage for assessing how we should engage the particularities of culture. The christology of many Christians conveniently relegates Jesus to a "separate" sphere of life (the spiritual) or to the afterlife, as an answer to their special concern about eternal life. Jesus is disconnected from culture,

from living life responsibly before God in the world. When Christ is defined in terms of abstract ideals, relegated to the "spiritual," or salvation is defined primarily in terms of life beyond the grave, Christians then tend uncritically to legitimate the dominant political and economic system. Jesus either is defined as "acultural" and is therefore irrelevant to culture, or is defined so abstractly that we establish the meaning of Christ for us, rather than Christ challenging us to a more faithful way of living.

The tension is, then, not between Christ and culture but between different cultural visions. There is no form or "essence" of Christianity "outside" of or against culture. Rather, we see in the New Testament the way in which different cultural visions come into conflict with each other. The significance of the fact that Jesus Christ is *sarx* (flesh, body) provides a norm for a discriminating ethic *within* culture. That means culture is not to be viewed as a monolithic entity but is to be related to in a discriminating way. So, instead of monolithic responses to culture (i.e., against or in affirmation), the church's position as the "embodiment" of Christ in the world will vary–sometimes in sharp conflict with the dominant culture, sometimes in harmony with it, other times simply neutral, sometimes seeking to transform it. When we read Paul's letters, for example, we can observe how the early church sought to define its cultural vision in concrete and specific ways (on sexuality, marriage, the role of women, ecstatic utterance, food offered to idols, circumcision) in relationship to the cultures (Jewish, Greco-Roman) around it. We see how Paul approached his own Jewish cultural context in a discriminating way, not making monolithic responses to culture as a whole, but through a complex process of reasoning that both affirms his kinship with his Jewish roots (as in Romans 9) and also "relativizes" the rules of circumcision for Gentiles (as in Galatians).

A believers' church model must wrestle with the tension between "being" the church and "engaging" the larger culture. On the one hand, the church is called to be the church, to develop an alternative cultural vision faithful to Christ. On the other hand, it is to "seek the shalom of the city where it dwells." I have labeled a book I am working on to address these issues, "Artists, Citizens, Philosophers: Singing God's Song in a Foreign Land." The terms "artist," "citizen," and "philosopher" are bridge images or concepts that serve to link the alternative cultural vision of the church with

the wider culture. As artists, Christians are called to seek the beauty or aesthetic excellence of the city where they dwell, as citizens to seek the public good, and as philosophers or lovers of wisdom to embrace the wisdom of the culture wherever it is found (whether in the world of science or in dialogue with other religious traditions).

I will illustrate briefly my method by showing how I proceed with the bridge concept of "citizen." A Christian understanding of the citizen is founded on two principles. It is based on (1) a vision or model of the good society which grows out of a view of the church, and (2) a commitment to a process of analogical thinking that entails drawing from that vision norms for how other societies beyond the church might work and be structured. Such analogical thinking requires both faithfulness to the vision of the church and imaginative thinking in translating that vision into other languages that will link us with other human beings as we seek the shalom of the city where we dwell. My position has some affinities with that of Karl Barth, who believes that Christians should relate to political institutions by means of analogy with the kingdom of God. I would apply the concept of analogy much more broadly, however, and not restrict it to the Christian's relationship to the state. Barth says that since Christ is Lord over the entire world, the church

> desires that the shape and reality of the State in this fleeting world should point towards the Kingdom of God, not away from it. Its desire is not that human politics should cross the politics of God, but that they should proceed, however distantly, on parallel lines . . . . It sets in motion the historical process whose aim and content are the molding of the state into the likeness of the Kingdom of God and hence the fulfillment of the State's own righteous purposes.[8]

The church is, in a modest way, a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. Though it is not the Kingdom of God on earth, it seeks to "body" that Kingdom in a distinctive way. The church's experience of that vision of the Kingdom then becomes the basis for the process of analogical thinking as it relates to the larger society. A Christian understanding of justice will draw analogically from a corporate vision of church where the well-being of the whole body

requires that human needs be met by mutual aid. Since membership in the church is based on respect for the dignity of each individual who has made a voluntary commitment to be a member, by analogy the church will work in the larger society for the respect and safeguarding of religious liberty. Based on the experience of the discerning process of respectful dialogue, by analogy the church will support democratic structures of participation and decision-making in the larger society. Based on its vision of a nonviolent process of confronting an erring brother or sister (Matt. 18:15-18), the church by analogy will search for and model nonviolent methods for confronting evil in the larger society.

Yoder's and Kaufman's positions

Both Yoder's and Kaufman's theologies have been shaped fundamentally by their Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition. I am intrigued that both see themselves in continuity with their Anabaptist/Mennonite roots. Both have had a very important influence in the wider church and university: Yoder's *Politics of Jesus* is one of the most widely-read books in social ethics; Kaufman is a leading theological thinker who was president of the American Academy of Religion in 1982. Probably the most important differences between them are a consequence of whom they have engaged in conversation as they have developed their theology. Yoder's work has been developed in the context of ecumenical dialogue, and out of commitment to an evangelical and biblical tradition of theology. Kaufman, located more within the university and more in dialogue with other religions, has developed his theology within a post-Enlightenment and liberal tradition. Most people would probably see these two men's approaches as incompatible. Yet I resonate with dimensions of both of them, and believe that both their approaches must be taken into account for developing an adequate theology of culture.

Yoder

We see a fundamental unity and continuity in Yoder's work, beginning with his first major book in 1964, *The Christian Witness to the State*, to his two most recent books, one co-authored with Glen Stassen and Diane Yeager,

Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture, and *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical*, which came out just before his death. Four motifs or themes have shaped Yoder's scholarly career.

a. The starting point for Yoder is Jesus Christ as a political/social model of radical nonconformity. Jesus models an alternative politics of nonviolent servanthood made vivid in the cross. He calls his followers to a way of life that is an alternative to a politics of historical management, a mode of consequentialist ethical reasoning that requires humans to "do evil that good may come about." Jesus Christ is not simply an example to be followed but is eschatologically the Lord of history, the Slain Lamb, whose way will ultimately be victorious over the principalities and powers. Followers of Jesus are thus called both to a radical faith or trust in the God of Jesus Christ who accomplishes God's purposes in history through nonviolent love and to radical obedience to the paradigm of the cross. This is the basis for Yoder's commitment to Christian pacifism and his critique of just war theory. Though he has written extensively on these issues, I do not treat them as a separate theme here, because he grounds his thinking on war and peace in his christology and in his theology of the church.

b. Equally central is a model of the church. Yoder, who was trained in historical theology and whose dissertation at Basel examined the dialogues between the Anabaptist radicals and Reformers in Switzerland, is committed to a "free church" or believers' church vision. He argues that with Constantine the church took a fundamentally wrong turn. Many theologians today concur with him in his view of "Constantinianism." His critique, however, tends to be more radical in that he sees remnants of "Constantinian" assumptions in the way many continue to do theology and ethics. For example, the meaning of history for Yoder lies in the people of God called to be an alternative community in the world, not in the general flow of history where theologians often claim to be able to "read" where God is working (i.e., through this or that liberation movement, or through the orders of creation).

However, Yoder is not "sectarian" in Troeltsch's sense (the church as withdrawing from society) or like H.R. Niebuhr's type, "Christ against Culture." For Yoder the church is to embody, based on the model of Christ,

an alternative cultural vision, which then becomes a basis for its mission and involvement in the cultural setting, wherever it is, as a creative pioneering community. His writings are full of suggestions of how the church is culturally creative in contributing to the "shalom of the city where it dwells"–through alternative models of nonviolent conflict resolution, the development of hospitals and schools, alternative models of restorative justice, by learning models of decision-making in the context of the church (and thus contributing to the development and growth of religious liberty and democracy which predate the Enlightenment).[9] We do not have space here to describe the considerable thinking Yoder has done, based especially on his careful exegesis of biblical texts, in describing the concrete and doable (not utopian) practices that mark such a model of the church from its decision-making processes to its practices of the Lord's Supper and baptism.

c. A third theme is the ecumenical character of Yoder's work. Yoder believes in dialogue and conversation, which he has been deeply involved in throughout his career (at an official level in the World Council of Churches, in his writings where he has engaged theologians like Karl Barth and the Niebuhr brothers, and on the lecture circuit that has taken him to several continents). Again, Yoder is not sectarian. He views his project as a model that can be normative for the church as a whole, not just for those in the historic peace churches or Mennonites (whom he often critiques for failing to carry out their own historic vision). In these conversations, Yoder's distinctive contribution has been to ask whether there is still a place for the category of "heresy" and schism. While open to learning from many different traditions and models of the church, he is critical of the automatic assumption that all models somehow contribute to the larger truth or whole. He challenges the church to ask which visions are more or less faithful to the New Testament vision of the church.

d. A fourth theme is Yoder's interest in a theology of mission, which flows logically from a believers' church model. Yoder begins with the acceptance of the "particularity" of the Christian faith and the need to share the good news of the gospel with others. He rejects the attempt to find a general universalizable foundation (whether in natural law or in an

Enlightenment view of universal reason) that can unite all human beings. Yoder could be described as a postmodern before postmodernism was in vogue, in his acceptance of relativity and that all human beings are shaped by their own historical particularity from which they cannot escape. In a recent article in the *Journal of Religious Ethics* (Spring 1996), he responds to Jeffrey Stout's *Ethics After Babel* by distinguishing between "babel" (radical historical particularity and the relativity of all human perspectives), which he accepts, and "babble" (the inability of persons to communicate across cultural linguistic barriers).

Yoder believes in the possibility of imaginatively communicating the good news of the gospel across cultural boundaries, a model he traces back to the sixth-century Hebrew prophets, "the transformative telling of good news by one particular people to another." In this sense he moves beyond relativism (the problem with postmodernism) and also avoids various forms of foundationalism which seek to find some universal ground for ethical or truth claims. Of course, though Yoder starts with a confessional stance (here one notes the influence of Barth, whom he studied under in Basel), the confession that "Jesus Christ is Lord" is anything but a relative claim. By definition Christ is Lord of all history, of all peoples and cultures.

Kaufman (after An Essay on Theological Method*, 1975)*

Though there are a number of continuities in Gordon Kaufman's career as a theologian, beginning with *Relativism, Knowledge and Faith* (1960) and culminating in his recent systematic theology, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (1993), in contrast to the continuity in Yoder's thought, Kaufman made a major shift in direction with his book, *An Essay in Theological Method* (1975). In the preface to *In Face of Mystery* Kaufman says of that essay:

> I argued that theology is, and always has been, an activity of 'imaginative construction' by persons attempting to put together as comprehensive and coherent a picture as they could of humanity in the world under God. This view contrasts rather sharply with more conventional conceptions

> according to which the work of theologians is understood to consist largely in exposition of religious doctrine or dogma (derived from the Bible and other authoritative sources).

Thus my description of Kaufman's position is based on motifs or themes we find in his work since 1975.

Whereas Yoder has written essays to fit a particular occasion or to respond to a specific problem or issue, Kaufman has always worked toward more systematic reflection. His major work, *In Face of Mystery*, is organized around the conceptual scheme of God, humans, the world, and Christ. He puts Christ at the center of his conceptual scheme because he is writing as a Christian theologian. Christ is not simply a fourth category beside the other three, but functions as the orienting center for interpreting God, the human, and the world. But that does not mean we can begin with God or christology in explaining Kaufman's position. Whereas Yoder's work has been focused on christology and a particular view of the church which follows from it, Kaufman has been preoccupied with how humans can conceive of God in the light of modern conceptions of the human and the cosmos within which humans live. It would be misleading to describe Kaufman's view of God first (or his view of Christ as the orienting center for his theology), because Kaufman believes we can only "construct" a concept of God, since God is the ultimate reference point for all reality, in relationship to how we interpret the universe and the place of humans in it. In ordering our thinking, therefore, he begins with an understanding of the place of human beings within the bio-historical process.[10]

Let me now attempt to describe Kaufman's approach to theology with five points.

a. Human beings are fundamentally social animals with distinctive symbolic/linguistic capacities that make it possible to create "culture," humanly created worlds of meaning. Human beings are both shaped by and create symbolic systems or world pictures that orient their lives in the universe. This is the most distinctive feature of human reality, one that has emerged out of the long bio-historical evolutionary process. World history shows that humans have created a plurality of world pictures, each developed in

relationship to different historical and cultural conditions. The monotheistic world picture developed by the Hebrew prophets which oriented the life of Israel and later the religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is one of these world pictures (dramatically different from the world pictures reflected in Eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism).

Language makes it possible for humans to transcend themselves and reflect self-consciously upon the world picture they have created. They are not simply determined by tradition but are free to modify their world picture or even to create entirely new worldviews. However, because they are finite creatures bounded by time and space, deeply rooted in particular histories and cultural traditions, the humanly created worlds are relative and particular. There is no mid-air position, an objective, neutral, absolute, framework "outside" of historical particularity from which one could judge the truth of a particular worldview. Those who take the biblical worldview as *the true* revelation of God on the basis of authority do so from a particular finite human standpoint, and the fact that they *claim* that their world picture is absolute does not establish its absolute truth.

b. Kaufman's passion is theology, talk about God. "God" is that symbol in terms of which "everything" is to be interpreted and understood. If there were something beside God, then God would not be God. One would have created an idol, an object of worship and devotion that is not really God. The central task of the theologian is to aid the human community in distinguishing between God and the idols, penultimate realities not worthy of our devotion and worship. So how does one talk about God, given the relativity of our human standpoint? In order to proceed, Kaufman identifies the primary functions of the symbol "God."

The God symbol serves to relativize all human concepts, projects, plans, ideas, and ideologies. To worship God is to view all human projects as penultimate, not ultimate, objects of devotion and loyalty. Kaufman critiques theologies which make dogma, the creeds, the Bible, or the church as the primary focus or the final authority of a theology. "Serving the church, for example, is undoubtedly of importance to Christian theologians. But this must never become theology's driving motivation: that would be putting an idol in the place where only God can rightfully be."[11] The term "mystery" in

Kaufman's theology refers to the "bafflement of mind" that humans experience when they try to "wrap their minds around" the symbol, God. All talk about God is a "construal" of reality, and Kaufman warns us when we do theology to "take special care, beware of what is being said; the speaker may be misleading you; you may be misleading yourself."[12]

Secondly, the concept of God serves to "humanize." It provides an orientation for humans about how to live their lives. In the Bible's monotheistic world picture humans are called again and again to "be like God." This is dramatically stated in the Sermon on the Mount, where we are urged to be indiscriminate in our love (even to love enemies) because God is like that, making the sun to shine and rain to come on both the just and unjust (Matt. 5:43-48). The problem is that the Bible's world picture (a God who created the world, is sovereign Lord over history, and is acting in history to save the world) has produced both very creative and destructive consequences in history. Kaufman argues that we have to both deconstruct and reconstruct this picture in order to develop a view of God that genuinely humanizes rather than oppresses or leads to violence. For the Christian the normative standpoint by which to evaluate a notion of God is by reference to Christ, and the way in which Christ's way of reconciliation and freedom is lived out by persons and communities.

c. Because of human finitude, in developing a plausible concept of God faith is necessary. We do not live within the limits of reason alone. But instead of an irrational Kierkegardian leap of faith, Kaufman calls for a series of "small steps of faith" as we seek to construe the nature of the human and the world, in relationship to which, then, we can relate the symbol "God." The concepts of "the human" and "the world" are also human constructions, which we try to interpret plausibly in the light of what we know. However, we are confronted by a plurality of views at each step. We do not have objective, universally accepted understandings. So Kaufman argues for the plausibility of a metaphysical rather than a strictly phenomenalistic account of humanity and the world, and that requires a step of faith. He also argues for the world as cosmic evolution rather than an eternal structure (another step of faith); and he sees the presence of serendipitous creativity in the bio-historical process, and that too requires a step of faith. By serendipitous

creativity Kaufman means we live in a universe that is open to the future, that in the course of evolution new events produce consequences (both good and evil) which are quite surprising and quite unpredictable. Kaufman contends that as we look back at the cumulative evolutionary and historical development, we can see a series of creative advances of directionality in this cosmic process that, from our viewpoint as humans who emerge out of it, is "good." Though we have no "objective" scientific basis to view the process as more than a chance or random occurrence, we can choose to take a step of faith to see in it a tendency toward purposeful development.

> The trajectory eventuating in the creation of human historical existence could be seen . . . as a significant expression of the serendipitous creativity manifest in the cosmos as a whole; and thus the appearance of human modes of being in the world would be properly regarded not as a metaphysical surd but rather as grounded in the ultimate nature of things, in the ultimate mystery.[13]

d. Kaufman can now deliberately construct a concept of God. He says that we come to an important fork in the road. We could view God, as in the Bible and tradition, as analogous to a human purposive agent, a personal being who relates to the world like human beings do to each other. Or, we could imagine God not as a being or agent separate from the universe but in terms of the bio-historical process as a whole. Kaufman proposes a non-dualistic reconstruction of theology in which God functions as the ultimate point of reference within a universe viewed holistically. He believes that the inherited biblical/theological picture of God's relationship to the world is problematic for two main reasons. He is critical of the traditional God/world dualism, which pictures God as a self-subsistent being who exists independent of the world. Such a notion is difficult to hold, given our modern view of the universe as a self-contained, interdependent whole. What does it mean to hold to an "other" reality independent of the universe? How is such an idea intelligible?

Secondly, Kaufman believes that God as an agent independent of the universe has often been interpreted in very tyrannical, authoritarian, and

destructive ways. He does, however, want to preserve the essential functions of a "transcendent" God–the leverage we need to challenge all human idols and to challenge the human tendency to create gods to suit our own needs and interest. So while opting for a non-dualistic view, Kaufman believes it is critical to preserve the Godness of God.

e. A specifically Christian theology turns to Christ as a paradigm for God and the human. The central Christian claim is that at a particular point in history, in connection with the man Jesus, we were given a paradigm for understanding both what God is and what the human is. However, we should not view God as simply in the man, Jesus, but must develop a "wider christology" which includes Jesus and the events surrounding him. When Paul says, for example, that "God was in Christ reconciling the whole world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19), by "Christ" he does not mean simply the man, Jesus of Nazareth, but the whole relationship of the cosmos to God which was changed in and through the events surrounding Jesus Christ. Passages like this, Kaufman says,

> [S]ignify the new order of relationships among humans and between humans and God which began to come into being in connection with Jesus and developed further after his death and resurrection . . . . To say God is incarnate in Christ, then, is not to say simply and directly that God is incarnate in Jesus; rather, God is incarnate in the larger, more complex human reality, surrounding and including and following upon the man Jesus: the new Christian community, with its spirit of love and freedom, of mutual sharing and forgiveness of one another. It is in this new order of interpersonal relationships that the incarnation of God is to be found.[14]

For Kaufman, therefore, wherever the spirit of love and freedom symbolized by Christ is present within the cosmic process, God is present.

Comparative analysis

Both Yoder and Kaufman recognize and emphasize the particularity and relativity of all human standpoints. Both are critics of "foundationalism," the assumption that humans can establish an objective, universal framework from which to judge the "truth" or validity of a point of view. I think both have been influenced in this direction by their awareness as Mennonites of holding to a minority point of view not widely shared by the larger culture. Yoder repeatedly makes this point as an Anabaptist theologian who critiques Constantinianism. And Kaufman says:

> My Mennonite background has also been responsible in some respects for my long-standing interest and attention to issues connected with historical and cultural relativism. The sectarian religious stance into which I was early initiated led me to be suspicious of certain practices and beliefs taken for granted by most Americans, as well as of some of the major claims made by mainstream Christianity (combined as these latter were, especially during the war [WW II], with what I took to be serious evasions of the moral demands of Christian discipleship).[15]

Both writers, however, refuse to take the radical subjectivist postmodernist route which rejects any claim to establish norms by which to test truth or ethical claims. Yoder is a biblical realist who employs historical reason to interpret biblical texts in cultural context to distinguish between more faithful and less faithful readings of those texts. He also believes in the possibility of translating the "good news" of the gospel into a variety of cultures, and in the role of analogical imagination in finding faithful ways to model the good news within the wider culture. Kaufman uses reason in a different way, primarily to determine the kind of language about God that can "make sense" of how we understand the world. He is committed to dialogue or conversation with others (in fact, he characterizes theology as conversation). He has been a participant in dialogue with Buddhists, because he believes that understanding and learning is possible despite the relativity

of standpoints. Further, though Kaufman does not appeal to the authority of texts rightly understood and argues against relating to other religions based on appeals to the truth claims of different worldviews, he says we can employ reason to ask about the pragmatic or ethical consequences entailed in our particular views of the world, humans, or God.

Beyond this general agreement, however, Yoder and Kaufman have responded to historical particularity and relativity quite differently. Yoder offers little indication that the awareness of relativity has penetrated him existentially as an experiential reality as it has Kaufman. Over the years Yoder has confidently proclaimed the Lordship of Christ over the world, an absolute claim on all peoples and cultures. There is not a hint of doubt, of struggle, of uncertainty, or that we are bodies who experience passion and pain.[16] There is surprisingly little reflection on the nature of the faith commitment involved in making such a radical confession. True, Yoder repeats frequently that such a commitment requires a voluntary decision by the believer (symbolized by believer's baptism), yet he never places himself in the existential situation of the person who is, in the context of religious pluralism, challenged to make a decision, aware of the other possible commitments that are available.[17] That is, Yoder reflects from inside the circle of faith, assuming a commitment to the Lordship of Christ.

Kaufman's awareness of relativity penetrates much more deeply. In his autobiographical statement in *The Religious Studies Review* Kaufman says that his studies at Northwestern University in sociology and later his theological studies with H.R. Niebuhr and Liston Pope at Yale impressed on him the relativity of all human standpoints, including his own. Theologically he speaks of this under the category of human finitude and sin, the propensity of humans to absolutize their own standpoint. "When then, our fellow humans disagree with us, especially on profound moral and religious issues," he says, "we should not immediately reject their positions but should sympathetically attempt to understand and appreciate the insights with which their significantly different viewpoints have provided them."[18]

If Yoder writes theology from within the circle of the church, Kaufman works more at the boundary between two circles–the modern human predicament *and* the church shaped by Christ as its orienting center. Kaufman is much more conscious of the predicament of those who must make a faith

commitment in a world of relativity and uncertainty. His *In Face of Mystery* thus attempts to respond to historical consciousness, our awareness of how all our worldviews reflect human standpoints (including the worldview of the Bible). Kaufman struggles to develop an understanding of Christian commitment as a series of steps of faith seeking to make sense of the modern situation. From an Anabaptist perspective, Yoder's theology addresses the Christian who has already been baptized and committed herself to become a follower of Christ, whereas Kaufman addresses more the person who is not yet baptized and committed, who wants to know what is entailed in making a commitment to make Jesus Christ as the orienting center of faith and life. The very style of their writings is therefore different. Kaufman makes himself personally vulnerable in his writings. Even when they are not autobiographical, which they usually are not, the reader is drawn into a struggle, a quest. Yoder's writings do not reflect bafflement, mystery, uncertainty, doubt, or struggle. They confidently answer every possible objection or resistance, from within the circle of faith, as to why Christ's call to discipleship should not be evaded or substituted with something else.

This difference in orientation is also reflected in their conception of the Christian life. Yoder frequently uses the metaphors of command and obedience. Repeatedly he appeals to the authority of the Slain Lamb. We are simply called to obey this way of life; free consent, based on attraction to the way of Christ, is not emphasized. Yet it seems it should be central, if commitment to Christ is indeed a voluntary decision of faith. I resonate both with Kaufman's positive affirmation and critique in his review of Yoder's *The Priestly Kingdom*:

> What is important in Yoder's program, in my opinion, is not so much that Jesus be taken as an 'authority' who is to be 'obeyed' but rather that the story of Jesus be taken as the fundamental 'paradigm'. . . on the basis of which the moral norms ordering human life are developed. From the very beginning the human moral imagination has been powerfully attracted by Jesus' story . . . . His insight . . . is correct. Seeing Jesus is the important consideration for founding a radical Christian ethic, for this figure can powerfully affect

> the human moral sensibility. It is unfortunate, therefore, that Yoder confuses this point by so frequently moving from an ethic basically grounded in this appeal to our freedom and our moral imagination, to the heavy-handed metaphors of heteronomy–of human obedience to divine lordship–and that he doesn't seem to realize that these involve quite different understandings of human existence, well-being, and fulfillment. It need not be the case that it is 'The Rule of God' [which] is the basic category. . . and that Christian morality must be understood primarily in terms of the sovereign 'lordship' of Christ (a metaphor that appears repeatedly throughout the book). The important thing, rather, is that we 'see Jesus' and thus are enabled in our freedom to turn toward a mode of human existence and action which is truly redemptive in and for this world. Choosing to follow this Jesus need not be heteronomous obedience to (more or less arbitrary) divine authority; it may be a rational and free human choice of what seems truly to be the good.[19]

Both Yoder and Kaufman believe that christology is the controlling or orienting center for Christian theology and discipleship. Both develop christologies which are linked to ethics and to discipleship, a central emphasis in the Anabaptist tradition, and both are critical of christologies which disconnect the cross from ethics (i.e., substitutionary atonement). Both stress the centrality of the love of enemies and servant love in describing Jesus' ethic. Both are critical of how, in the history of the church, God language has been used to justify oppression and violence. Kaufman argues that the problem is the God language of the Bible itself which needs to be deconstructed and constructed in new ways, whereas for Yoder the problem is that the church after Constantine substituted other authorities for Christ, or found ways to dismiss Christ as relevant for social ethics.

The style or mode of theological reflection in both writers is strikingly different and reflects their different gifts and training. Yoder employs the methods of historical reason. He makes his claims through numerous references to historical examples and through the use of carefully constructed

exegetical arguments that are conversant with biblical scholarship. Kaufman, trained as a philosophical theologian, attends more toward broad overarching conceptual analysis that can provide intellectual coherence for the position he is describing, as well as for dealing with alternative positions.

Evaluation

I have argued that both Yoder and Kaufman are postmodern in that both acknowledge the particularity and relativity of all human standpoints. Both of them are anti-foundationalists; they believe there is no secure rational and universal foundation upon which theology can be built. At the same time, both reject the destructive implications of an anarchic relativism by addressing normative ethical questions faced by the larger human community.

I need to draw on both Yoder and Kaufman in the development of a theology of culture–both the breadth of Kaufman's analysis, which can connect one with the intellectual currents of the culture at large (i.e., science and philosophy), and the historically more concrete biblically-oriented vision of Yoder, grounded in an embodied christology and a vision of the church. I do prefer Kaufman's understanding of the breadth of the theologian's vocation and of imaginative construction in the light of the symbol God to the more limited role Yoder gives to the Christian ethicist. In Yoder's 1988 address as president of the Society of Christian Ethics he says:

> Our guild's vocation is vigilance against the abuse of the words or of the logic of the discerning community. We are neither the umpires nor the examiners, the bishops nor the catechists, the evangelists nor the moderators. We are the immune system of the language flow that keeps the body going. Or we are the scribes, agents of communal memory, selecting from a too-full treasury what just happens to fit the next question. Or we are the ecumenical runners, carrying from one world to another the word of what has been suffered, learned, celebrated, confessed elsewhere.[20]

Though I am much taken with Yoder's images and can accept his definition of the role of the Christian ethicist as one who serves the church, I value

Kaufman's broad cultural analysis, particularly his query into what it means to confess faith in God in our time. Yoder simply uses God language as if it were not problematic, while Kaufman considers the serious intellectual and ethical questions surrounding the use of that language. I appreciate the category of "mystery" and Kaufman's insistence that we be aware that our God talk may be misleading or idolatrous.

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss and evaluate Kaufman's view of God, the central concern of his theology. I think his project of "imaginative construction"–to make sense of God talk for moderns who no longer think in dualistic categories–is an appropriate job of the theologian and a task the missionary has always done. It may be odd to view Kaufman as a missionary, but perhaps his theology could be seen in the Schleiermacherian sense as an effort to communicate the faith to "its cultured despisers." The question, then, is not whether the faith should be "translated" into modern categories, but how that is to be done. In this regard, I like Kaufman's use of the word "imagination."

Yoder and Kaufman are not as far apart as some might claim, as Yoder too emphasizes the missionary role of the church. As noted above, he believes it is possible in a postmodern world to translate the good news of the gospel into the great variety of cultural languages. Yoder's contribution has been to translate the story of Jesus imaginatively through political language, such that we might "see Jesus" and be challenged to live faithfully by that vision. Kaufman, in a different way, is also a translator of the good news–what it means today, in a world where dualistic categories do not make sense, to confess faith in God, in a God who "in Christ" is bringing reconciliation and is trusting humans with the ministry of reconciliation.

I am much more in tune with Kaufman's stance on the boundary. As members of an alternative community, the church, Christians also belong to other cultural identities (family, nation, Western culture, etc.). While I argued above for the development of an alternative cultural vision grounded in an embodied christology (cf. Yoder), we must also fully acknowledge that our stance as an alternative human community does not privilege us from the vulnerabilities (both finitude and sin) that we share with other humans. As stated earlier, I miss in Yoder's writing an acknowledgment of human vulnerability and uncertainty in the face of the plurality of worldviews competing for our commitment. While Yoder presupposes believer's baptism,

he does not reflect theologically in the light of the difficult decision of becoming a Christian in a world where other options compete for our allegiance. Baptism is the rite of passage marking the movement from one identity to another; it signals the individual's desire to participate in a new identity, the new humanity that has been formed by Jesus Christ. This desire does not simply arise from an individual's own self, similar to the desire to join a club or community organization. I do not presuppose the modernist assumption that we can "decide" to become Christians as if we are autonomous agents. The desire for baptism arises out of the power of the gospel, the good news of God's way in the world, made vivid in Jesus Christ.

A right understanding of baptism requires us to balance the paradoxical relationship between grace, the story that has moved the individual to desire, and free consent, the personal response of faith. We cannot decide without coming to know God's gracious power, yet grace must be responded to freely in faith. This paradoxical relationship is expressed beautifully by the Anabaptist Hans Denck: "No one can truly know Christ unless one follows Him in life. And no one can follow Him except inasmuch as one has already known him."[21] The decision to become a Christian is a response to the gift of God's grace, the good news. But this good news competes with other paradigms. Kaufman's theology addresses these other options and seeks to make a case for why a Christian vision can make sense and be a free consent based on faith. This emphasis on free consent to the attractiveness of Jesus is the basis for his critique of Yoder's stress on the metaphors of Lordship and obedience. Kaufman's broader framework can make room for Yoder's creative vision for the church grounded in a political Christ, whereas Yoder's appeal to the authority of Christ does not address sufficiently the human struggle, the dialectic of faith and doubt, and the necessity of consent.

On the other hand, I appreciate the vividness and concreteness of Yoder's christology. I have critiqued Kaufman elsewhere for the abstractness of his christology, for not sufficiently describing the historical embodied Christ who is radically *sarx* within his Jewish cultural and historical context.[22] When Kaufman seeks to connect the Christian faith to the modern human predicament, some see him as an unrepentant Kantian (that was the problem with the christology of his teacher, H. R. Niebuhr). Some argue he attempts to make sense of faith in the light of universal ethical principles of reason–

what modern persons shaped by the Enlightenment can make sense of.[23] As an alternative to appeals to authority in theology (creed, dogma, the Bible), Kaufman substitutes a pragmatic theory of truth–i.e., what kind of ethical consequences flow from holding to a particular view of God, humans, and the world. At times, instead of an ethic shaped by an embodied christology, Kaufman's understanding of Christ seems shaped by abstract ethical principles derived on rational (Kantian?) grounds. Thus I find the much more embodied and historically concrete christology of Yoder more adequate, though he overemphasizes command/obedience.

I am also not satisfied with Kaufman's primary use of the abstract language of philosophy for his imaginative construction of theology. I find myself turning to more poetic images, the type of theological thinking in Sallie McFague's *Models of God*. Sharing much in common with Kaufman with regard to theology's imaginative and constructive role, McFague explores the rich world of metaphor to develop new constructions of the symbol "God." We can appropriate, for example, metaphors from the hymn texts of Brian Wren: "Joyful is the dark, holy hidden God, rolling cloud of night beyond all naming, majesty in darkness, energy of love, Word in flesh, the mystery proclaiming." The poet Jean Janzen is another example of one who uses metaphor to enlarge our image of God by appropriating from Julian of Norwich feminine metaphors: "Mothering God, you gave me birth in the bright morning of this world. Creator, Source of every breath, you are my rain, my wind, my sun."

Metaphor and story connect theology with ordinary people in the pew, who are not moved by abstract philosophical categories. It is absolutely essential that we who do theology serve the people of God if our theology is going to make a difference in the world. Futhermore, metaphor and story also bring out a holistic view of life, the connection of soul and body, of mind and spirit. A theology of culture must develop a rich language of metaphor to connect "God talk" with the wondrous bustling, confusing, creative pluralism of human culture.

I am grateful for the gifts of John Howard Yoder and Gordon Kaufman, who have contributed to the ongoing process of theological thinking. I appreciate the emphasis in both of them that the aim of theological work is to contribute to our devotion to God and a life of ethical responsibility in the

world. Both of them encourage us not to accept their word as authoritative, but in our own way to think and act faithfully in the presence of the One in whom we live and move and have our being, the One who is present to us most vividly and concretely in Jesus Christ, the fundamental paradigm for our own humanity.

Notes

[1] This paper was originally presented as a lecture for the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre at the Toronto School of Theology on Nov. 5, 1997, and discussed with Conrad Grebel College faculty on Nov. 14, 1997.

[2] I took several classes from Yoder while a student at Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana, in 1962-65. His book, *The Politics of Jesus*, was foundational for my understanding of Christian peacemaking developed in my book, *Christian Peacemaking and International Conflict: A Realist Pacifist Perspective* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1986). For more on his impact on me see my article (along with those of others who reflected on "What I learned from John H. Yoder") in *Mennonite Life* (Spring 1998). Gordon Kaufman was on my dissertation committee at Harvard Divinity School, 1966-70. My spouse and I came to know the Kaufmans through the Boston Mennonite Fellowship. In fall 1996 I organized a symposium at Bethel College to consider his book, *In Face of Mystery* (Harvard University Press, 1993). See also my essay, "Toward a Theology of Culture: A Dialogue with Gordon Kaufman," in *Mennonite Theology in Face of Modernity: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Kaufman*, ed. Alain Epp Weaver (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1996).

[3] Douglas John Hall, "Ecclesia Crucis: The Theologic of Christian Awkwardness," in *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North American Culture*, ed. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

[4] For a much more complete recent analysis of Niebuhr, see the chapter by Yoder, "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of Christ and Culture," in *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, jointly authored by Glen Stassen, John H. Yoder and D.M. Yeager (Knoxville: Abingdon Press, 1996). The quotation is from Charles Scriven, *The Transformation of Culture* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), 41.

[5] In the chapter on the early church in *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, Troeltsch describes Christ in terms of the purity of his religious idea oriented totally on God and away from the world. We find this same language in Niebuhr. "As the Son of God he *points away* from the many values of man's social life to the One who alone is good" (*Christ and Culture*, 28).

[6] Quoted by Yoder in *Authentic Transformation*, 53.

[7] A more complete analysis would show how this duality in Troeltsch and H.R Niebuhr arises

out of the influence of Kant, who made a sharp distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal world. This duality, which then places religion in the arena of the noumenal and other reality in the phenomenal world, has had an enormous influence on theology. Everyone from Kierkegaard (leap of faith) and neo-orthodox theologians like Barth (with his distinction between "historie" and "Geschichte), liberal theologians like Schleiermacher (who grounds theology in feeling) and Albrecht Ritschl (where theology is grounded in ethics) are influenced by this Kantian duality. In all these cases theology seeks a foundation in some kind of reality that is more secure than the phenomenal realm of history. This contributes to a tendency toward a Gnostic Christ, abstracted from his actual, historical, cultural, pheonemenal world. This has also had negative implications for relationships between Christians and Jews. The rediscovery of the Jewishness of Jesus in more recent biblical scholarship is another implication of an attempt to overcome this Kantian residue.

[8] Karl Barth, "Christian Community and Civil Community," *Community, State, and Church*, (New York: Doubleday, 1960) 168-71. The implications of this approach are developed by Philip LeMasters in a paper presented at the meetings of the Society of Christian Ethics, Jan. 8-10, 1993, in Savannah, Georgia.

[9] It is a mistake to equate Yoder's position with Stanley Hauerwas's views. This is often done because Hauerwas attributes such importance to Yoder in shaping his ideas. Yoder is much more ready to see connections between what the church stands for and movements in the culture at large. In some of his recent writings, for example, he has distinguished his approach from Hauerwas's. In a footnote to "Meaning After Babel: With Jeffrey Stout Beyond Relativism," Yoder says: "A soft pluralism, when consistent, provides the most livable cultural space for Jews and Anabaptists, as well as for Jehovah's Witnesses and followers of Rev. Moon. As a civil arrangement, pluralism is better than any of the hitherto known alternatives. As an ecclesiastical arrangement, it is better than the monarchical episcopate. As a marketplace of ideas, it is better than a politically correct campus or a media empire homogenized by salesmanship. For such reasons, Stanley Hauerwas's characterization of English-speaking justice as a set of 'bad ideas' (*After Christendom*, 1991) strikes me as too simple."–*Journal of Religious Ethics* (Spring 1996): 135.

[10] The "human" and the "world" are also constructions that reflect the theologian's particular standpoint. Though Kaufman argues for why his own interpretations are plausible, we should not assume that these are universal categories grounded in a universal rationality.

[11] Kaufman, *God, Mystery, Diversity*, 8.

[12] Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 61.

[13] *Ibid*., 284.

[14] *Ibid*., 383.

[15] Kaufman, *Religious Studies Review* 20. 3 (July 1994): 177.

[16] I would like to explore the insights that are coming, especially from feminist theologians,

who are asking about the relevance for theology that we are "spirited bodies" that experience life through and in our bodies. Whereas Yoder has developed images of the politically embodied Jewish Christ and the embodied church which developed concrete practices to deal with conflict around concrete bodily practices like eating and circumcision, Yoder himself as a "bodied" person is not "in" his theological reflection. He reflects as a person "detached" from pain, passion, bodily exhaustion, and suffering. Would it be unfair to characterize Yoder's theology, once one accepts his premises, as the triumph of rationality over everything else, ultimately a protection against vulnerability?

[17] The sociological framework of commitment in a postmodern world is radically different from that of sixteenth-century Anabaptism. A Conrad Grebel or a Michael Sattler chose to become baptized as adults within the relatively homogeneous "sacred canopy" of Christendom. Earlier generations of Mennonites in North America, who grew up in relatively closed ethnic enclaves, would have had a similar experience of a sacred canopy. Today commitment to the Christian faith is in the context of radical pluralism. We existentially experience in our world a multitude of possibilities of belief and action. What does it mean to respond to God's gracious gift and be "discipled" in an alternative community in a radically pluralistic world?

[18] Kaufman, *Religious Studies Review*, 177.

[19] Kaufman, *The Conrad Grebel Review* 4.1 (1986): 77-80.

[20] "To Serve Our God and Rule the World," in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). I highly recommend Cartwright's introductory essay interpreting Yoder's work.

[21] Hans Denck, "Whether God is the Cause of Evil" (1526). This quotation is from the first page of Clarence Bauman, *The Spiritual Legacy of Hans Denck*, (New York: E.J. Brill, 1991).

[22] See my essay in the festschrift "Toward a Theology of Culture: A Dialogue with Gordon Kaufman" in *Mennonite Theology in Face of Modernity*.

[23] I have discussed with Harry Huebner his view of Kaufman in his essay in the festschrift (see note 22), "Imagination/Tradition: Conjunction or Disjunction." Huebner reads Kaufman as fundamentally Kantian. I do not think Huebner takes sufficiently into account Kaufman's historically situated social view of the self which is the grounds for the latter's position on the relativity of all our worldviews. Kaufman's "imaginative construction" does not arise primarily out of Kantian skepticism about what can be known about the phenomenal world. It is rather a response to the recognition of the social/cultural/historical/linguistic relativity of all worldviews.

He Came Preaching Peace:
The Ecumenical Peace Witness of John H. Yoder

Mark Thiessen Nation

> More than any other person, Yoder has labored to bring the Peace Church witness against violence into the mainstream of theological discussion. *–Walter Wink*[1]
>
> John Yoder inspired a whole generation of Christians to follow the way of Jesus into social action and peacemaking. *–Jim Wallis*[2]
>
> [Yoder's] influence on my generation of Catholic moral theologians has been profound. His witness as a theologian in the peace-church tradition is highly esteemed, and the seriousness with which he has carried out his role as a friendly critic of just-war thinking has without doubt contributed to sharpening its formulation and application in the American Catholic setting. *–Drew Christiansen, S.J.*[3]
>
> At the major ecumenical gatherings, Yoder taught us to be open to brothers and sisters and opened our eyes to the unbelievably diverse forms of peace church existence. *–Wilfried Warneck,* Church and Peace[4]

Introduction

Sometimes I am startled by statements that suggest that John Howard Yoder was sectarian. Most of my theological reading and contact over the years has been from non-Mennonite sources. So, I long ago grew accustomed to hearing and reading characterizations of Yoder which labeled him as sectarian, meaning both that he did not adequately engage the larger social world or the larger ecumenical church. If I had grown accustomed to such accusations, why have I been startled? Because, over the last several years, I

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have increasingly heard or read such accusations from Mennonites. I get the sense from some Mennonite academics that they believe we have outgrown Yoder. I will not name names, partly because I am not at this point interested in debating the details of the positions of others. I also want to avoid a posture of defensiveness. However, I am interested in making it difficult for others–Mennonite or otherwise–to caricature Yoder.

For years Yoder spoke of his peace witness work as a hobby, a sideline. His real work, he claimed, was as a teacher of historical theology and other theological courses as assigned. However, I believe that by the end of his life he realized that too much of it had been given to speaking about peace for such articulation to be perceived by him or anyone else as a hobby. Throughout Yoder's life, articulation of a peace witness consumed far more of his time than any other single activity.

However, it is surely true that Yoder was from beginning to end a theologian. He tirelessly spoke on behalf of peace in a multitude of contexts. And just as faithfully he sought to work out the theology that undergirded a Christian commitment to peacemaking. Of course, anyone who knows Yoder's writings knows that he wrote on many topics.[5] But since peace preoccupied him more than any single topic and was integrated into his theological approach, and since this essay is to be brief, I will focus on Yoder's witness to peace. I will not attempt to set forth his theology of peace.[6] Rather, by focusing on his witness for peace, I want to argue that Yoder was broadly ecumenical, engaged the larger culture, and was committed to a broadly-defined orthodox theology that could hardly be defined as narrow.

Ecumenical engagement

Yoder's ecumenical engagement began when he was young and continued until the day he died.[7] As a child he went to Fellowship of Reconciliation meetings with his parents in Wooster, Ohio.[8] When he was in high school in Wooster he was conscious that he was the only Mennonite in his class, and that his principal was a Presbyterian (ex-Mennonite) pacifist. He debated the issue of pacifism on the high school debating team. In the summer of 1948 Yoder traveled from eastern Iowa to western Pennsylvania on a "peace team," speaking about peacemaking in Mennonite churches and camps. This

gave him experience in speaking about peace and exposure to a broader range of Mennonites.

On 1 April 1949 Yoder arrived in France to begin a Mennonite Central Committee assignment, initially overseeing a network of children's homes. By 1952 he was involved in conferences about pacifism in Europe. Albert J. Meyer highlights the significance of these encounters: "the Puidoux theological conferences of the fifties and sixties were the first extended theological conversations in over four hundred years between the Historic Peace Churches . . . and the official churches of Central Europe."[9] Yoder played a central role in these events, delivering significant lectures at most of them.[10] During his last three years in Europe he was a member of the ecumenical committee of the *Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag* and the Europe Council of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. He also wrote his first of many essays on ecumenism while in Europe.[11]

While in Europe Yoder also pursued graduate studies, receiving a Dr. Theol. from the University of Basel. He studied with a number of the luminaries there, including Walter Eichrodt and Walter Baumgartner in Old Testament, Oscar Cullman in New Testament, Karl Jaspers in philosophy, and Karl Barth in dogmatics. Under the supervision of Ernst Staehelin he wrote his doctoral thesis (and a subsequent volume) on the disputations between the magisterial Reformers and the Anabaptists in early sixteenth-century Switzerland.[12] He finished those studies in 1957 and returned to the United States, where from 1959 to 1965 he worked full-time as an administrative assistant at the Mennonite Board of Missions. From the beginning of his tenure there he initiated contacts with Evangelical leaders, the National Association of Evangelicals, and the National Council of Churches. For nine years, beginning in 1960, he had several official roles with the NCC and for more than twenty years, beginning in 1963, he worked in various capacities with the World Council of Churches. Not all these responsibilities had to do with peace, but we can be relatively certain that when Yoder was speaking of evangelism or missions within these contexts, matters related to peace arose and were often central. Recall that this was a time when he would have been hard pressed to get much Mennonite support for what he was doing ecumenically.

Yoder was a part-time instructor for Mennonite Biblical Seminary from 1960 to 1965. Beginning in 1965 he became an associate consultant with the

Mission Board (1965-1970) and a full-time professor with Goshen Biblical Seminary (1965-1977). Beginning with the autumn of 1977 he became a full-time professor at the University of Notre Dame, with Goshen Biblical Seminary buying a quarter of his time from Notre Dame until the spring of 1984.[13] In 1973 Yoder was already chair of the program in nonviolence at Notre Dame as well as (starting in 1986) a Fellow of the Joan Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. As a Fellow of the Peace Institute he gave lectures and wrote occasional papers.[14] While at Notre Dame he regularly taught two undergraduate courses on issues related to war and peace. He also regularly taught two graduate-level courses related to peacemaking. Eleven times he was the team coordinator for an interdisciplinary course on "The Legality and Morality of War." In addition, he coordinated a multi-departmental course that was offered twice on the Catholic Bishops' Pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace*.[15]

Over the years Yoder conducted lecture tours in some twenty countries in Latin America, Asia, and Western Europe, as well as in South Africa, Poland, and Australia. Of course, this is to say nothing of the many speaking engagements he gladly accepted in the U.S.–from conservative Evangelical audiences to liberal Protestant, from mainstream Catholic to fringe, radical Catholic, from religious and non-religious, and from pacifist and non-pacifist. It appears that Yoder's only criteria for accepting invitations were his availability and whether he believed he might have something to contribute to a conversation.

Cultural engagement

What would it mean to say that Yoder was sectarian or against engaging the larger culture? In 1943, when he was a high school sophomore, he already knew he did not want to go to Goshen College, his parents' college. After the relative diversity of Wooster High School he thought that the ethnic Mennonite world at Goshen would be too confining. He had secured acceptance and scholarships in special programs at the University of Chicago and St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland–programs that would allow him to begin study after only two years of high school. However, he respected his parents and submitted to their strong desires, determining to stay at Goshen

only two years. Because of his great intellectual abilities and through creative means he managed to graduate in two years, in 1947.

If you were a Mennonite in 1947 and wanted to engage the culture and gain cross-cultural experience, one of the more obvious ways to do that was to work overseas. That was exactly what Yoder did. First he helped escort a shipload of horses to Poland that summer. Then in April of 1949 he arrived in France to work for the Mennonite Central Committee. For the next five years he oversaw the transformation of the relief program there from being one of primarily feeding people to having a network of children's homes, based "on the notion that stranded children are the people most in need of being fed and the best way to feed them is also to house them."[16]

While a full-time student at the University of Basel (1954-1957), Yoder oversaw the Mennonite Board of Missions relief program that had begun in Algeria in response to the earthquake there in 1954. He wrote a series of five articles about his experiences in Algeria, reflecting on Islam, the war, and the relief efforts.[17] Additionally, during this same period, he was engaged in ecumenical dialogues about peace.

Much has been written about the "Concern" group that grew out of the gathering of some Mennonites who were doing graduate studies in Europe.[18] This group began a pamphlet series in 1954, produced, as its editorial note stated, "for a strengthening of prophetic Christian faith and conduct."[19] Yoder contributed significantly more to the journal than any other single person. The pamphlet series may appear rather insular now; 1998 is not 1954. Anyone reading through Yoder's many contributions to *Concern* between 1954 and 1971 would see that he was attempting to call Mennonites to take their own Anabaptist heritage seriously in order to better engage the larger religious and secular worlds.

Additionally, it was during his time in Europe that he was, as an academic, articulating what it meant to engage the larger world in relation to peace. He wrote essays about Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr, two of the major theological voices of the day who had addressed the question of violence.[20] He also made his first efforts at formulating a theological rationale for why Christians should be actively involved in the world, something he would continue to write about for the rest of his life.[21]

After he returned to the U. S. in the late 1950s, Yoder first worked as administrative assistant for Mennonite Board of Missions. However, for most

of the rest of his life he was an academic. He had early in his career taught a variety of courses, including New Testament Greek, Systematic Theology, and Modern Theology. However, partly because he was so good at articulating the grounds and implications of pacifism and partly because of the wide influence of *The Politics of Jesus*, first published in 1972, he became the chief spokesman for Christian pacifism in the world. Henceforward, more of his time was given to this issue than anything else.

"John Yoder inspired a whole generation"

What would it mean to accuse Yoder of not being ecumenical enough? Most would grant, surely, that in the Mennonite world of the 1950s and 1960s Yoder's pro-active engagement with virtually any Christians willing to dialogue was progressive. And I think many would also grant that his continuous, extensive ecumenical dialogue until he died is, on some levels, admirable. So, why would some accuse him of not being ecumenical enough? Three things are often meant by this accusation: (1) that he didn't engage in enough inter-faith dialogue; (2) that his style of ecumenical engagement was wrong; (3) that his theology was inadequately ecumenical.

(1) On inter-faith dialogue: In the 1990s, for some, it is not enough to cast as wide a net as possible within the Christian world; one is only truly broad enough if one is engaged in inter-faith or faith-nonfaith dialogue. I offer three points in response. First, what Mennonite has influenced or engaged a broader range of Christians than John Yoder? Second, Yoder, on a theoretical level, was open to inter-faith dialogue.[22] In fact, he was engaged in a serious dialogue with Judaism over a significant period of time.[23] That he did not engage more fully with other faiths was, I imagine, more because of a lack of invitations rather than unwillingness. Third, to deal adequately with this issue, consider his writings on the subject he gave the most attention to, namely violence. Here he quite deliberately framed arguments that would appeal to generally religious people as well as Christians, and non-religious people as well as religious.[24] How is this a refusal to engage in inter-faith dialogue? Yoder was not a systematician. So, he did not write about doctrine. His inter-faith dialogue focused on the topic about which he wrote most often in general, the ethics of using violence.

(2) On his style of ecumenical engagement: Yoder could be quite generous, ecumenically.[25] However, because of his deep convictions (combined with his peculiar personality), he could sometimes be overbearing. But, aside from his own personal style, his theory about ecumenical relations, developed very early, had great wisdom. First, he believed that it was the responsibility of Christians to call other Christians to faithfulness.[26] Second, he believed that all Christians need to realize that "we," whoever that we is, have "something to learn [from others] just as surely as we have something to teach."[27] And, third, he believed that Christians should not break off fellowship. "If there is to be a breach in fellowship between us, that breach in fellowship cannot be at our initiative. If the fellow Christian with whom we discuss is willing to 'return the compliment,' and to lay upon us, according to his convictions, the claims which Christ lays upon His disciples, we must converse with him."[28] Yoder demonstrated, through his often thankless ecumenical engagement that he did, for more than forty years, exercise considerable "ecumenical patience."

(3) On his theology as inadequately ecumenical: Of course, some critics simply don't like Yoder's theology. That is their prerogative. However, we must be clear about several things. Yoder attempted quite carefully to craft *The Politics of Jesus* so that it would reach a large audience. The book's wide influence would suggest both that his goal was achieved and that the book was fairly broadly ecumenical.[29] Yoder could write such a volume partly because his own thought was, in the main, orthodox. I would argue that such orthodoxy is more broadly ecumenical (and catholic and evangelical) than many alternatives some find more attractive. But Yoder did not dismiss out of hand alternative ways of construing theology. However much he might have disagreed about this or that position, he was often quite generous in his assessments of the positions of others.

Why would some accuse Yoder of being sectarian? Again, three issues: (1) his refusal to justify the use of violence; (2) his theology, especially in relation to church and world distinctions, is construed by many to be inherently sectarian; (3) he did not wrestle enough with the ambiguities of situations. Agonizing was not a significant part of his approach to dealing with complicated situations of violence and injustice. In response, I suggest the following points:

(1) I hope Yoder's refusal to justify the use of violence is not a reason why Mennonites sometimes think he is sectarian. However, note that Yoder, through a large volume of writings, made it very clear that he could distinguish between varying degrees of violence and injustice. In his own way of contributing to the conversation, he wanted to witness that there would be less violence rather than more and less injustice rather than more.

(2) I cannot deal adequately here with the critique of Yoder's views on church and world. The proof, as they say, is in the pudding. Yoder's writings do not lend themselves to the caricaturing of his position that is frequent in this regard. Yes, he believed that it was biblical and had theological integrity to posit the church as central in what God is about in the world. But that did not, for him, preclude a variety of responsible actions in the world on the part of Christians.[30]

(3) At least as revealed to others, Yoder certainly did not agonize much over issues.[31] That is who he was. We each have different gifts. One of Yoder's gifts to the church was, without question, an incredible ability to bring intellectual concentration and analytical power to issues. However, he did, in his own intellectual way, wrestle with the ambiguities of situations.[32] Perhaps some would only be assured of the genuineness of his agonizing if he abandoned his theology or his commitment to nonviolence. But that is hardly fair. His lack of intellectual agonizing does not mean that he never felt the agony of others.

Though many may be unaware of it, Yoder did sometimes feel the pain suffered by others. In early May of this year I received a copy of an e-mail containing his daughter Becky's reflections on the brutal murder of Monsignor Juan Gerardi, who headed the Guatemalan Catholic Human Rights project. Becky was in Guatemala at the time of the murder. She wrote: "When I first heard of this death I felt a real twinge of missing Daddy. I knew that if he had been there I could have e-mailed him and he would have known of Gerardi, understood the situation, and felt pain–I have never seen him as moved as when he has talked about the witness and deaths of persons in situations like these. When I ran out the door to the procession I grabbed the only candle we have. But when I got there I realized that it was wonderful to have that candle, because it was the candle from Daddy's funeral. So he walked with us too."[33] Strange reflections, these, from the daughter of a sectarian. But then I cannot imagine that Becky Yoder Neufeld would think

of her father as a sectarian, nor that she would think that her desire to be in Guatemala or care about the murder of human rights activists is unrelated to who her father was, what he wrote, or what he cared about.

I imagine Yoder would not have allowed himself to speak with pride of his daughter Becky. At the same time, I can well imagine that if Becky had e-mailed him he would have been moved and would have shared her description of the witness of Juan Gerardi with his many friends around the world. Because he cared and because "he came preaching peace."

The title of this essay was inspired by the title of one of Yoder's books, which in turn was inspired by a verse from Ephesians.[34] The verse reads: "So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near" (Eph. 2.17, NRSV). It is important to remember that Yoder was not only concerned about proclaiming peace "to you who were far off," he was also proclaiming peace "to those who were near," to other Mennonites. For fifty years he labored among us. As Jim Wallis has said, "John Yoder inspired a whole generation of Christians to follow the way of Jesus into social action and peacemaking."[35] That "generation" includes Mennonites, some of us converts to the Mennonite tradition largely because of him. Thank God for this inspiration. We still need to heed Stanley Hauerwas's words, uttered twenty-five years ago:

> An attempt to treat pacifism in a serious and disciplined way is particularly important today when many people are emotionally predisposed to make vague commitments to the cause of peace. If emotional decisions are not refined by intellectual expression, they can be too easily transferred to the next good cause, which may entail violence for its success. Further, if this kind of pacifism is to be saved from the perversities of innocence that too often invite aggression or acquiescence to evil, it will need to be based on a more substantive ground than it now possesses. There is no better school to go to for such training than the pacifism of John Yoder.[36]

I believe the above statement is at least as true today as when first written. It would be both a tragedy–and a profound mistake–to ignore the ongoing powerful witness of John Howard Yoder to what it means to be Christian, to what it means to be Mennonite. And it would be a tragedy to ignore his voluminous attempts to make Christian pacifism as intelligible to as many different groups of people (especially, though not exclusively, to Christian groups) as possible. Yoder calls us to be followers of Jesus, to engage in "the politics of Jesus," so that, as "the priestly kingdom" we may witness to the Gospel and work for justice and for the lessening of violence wherever and whenever it may appear.

Notes

[1]Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 204.

[2]Jim Wallis, "Lives of Peacemaking," *Sojourners* 27 (March-April 1998): 8.

[3]Drew Christiansen, S. J., "A Roman Catholic Response," in John Howard Yoder, ed., *When War Is Unjust*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 102.

[4]Wilfried Warneck, "John Howard Yoder and the Peace Church Movement in Europe," *Church and Peace*, a publication of a European ecumenical network of peace churches and peace church-oriented congregations, communities, and service agencies, (Spring/Summer 1998): 30.

[5]For a list of writings on other topics see Mark Thiessen Nation, *A Comprehensive Bibliography of the Writings of John Howard Yoder* (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Historical Society, 1997) and "A Supplement to 'A Comprehensive Bibliography,'" in Stanley Hauerwas, Harry Huebner, and Mark Thiessen Nation, eds., *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

[6]For two older essays that still provide good overviews of Yoder's peace theology see Stanley Hauerwas, "Messianic Pacifism: Non-resistance as a Defense of a Good and Just Social Order," *Worldview* 16 (June 1973): 29-33; Stanley Hauerwas, "The Nonresistant Church: The Theological Ethics of John Howard Yoder," a chapter in *Vision and Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 197-221.

[7]For the biographical information that follows I am chiefly indebted to two CVs for John Yoder (one compiled by me, with Yoder's assistance; the other by Yoder); an untitled transcript of a 1980 autobiographical tape made by Yoder for James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and Karen Lebacqz; a June 12, 1991 interview with Yoder by the author; and a July 14, 1991,

supplement to that interview, given to the author by Yoder.

[8]The Fellowship of Reconciliation is an international, broad-based, religious pacifist organization with local chapters.

[9]Albert J. Meyer, "Mennonites," in *On Earth Peace: Discussions on War/Peace Issues Between Friends, Mennonites, Brethren and European Churches, 1935-1975*, ed. Donald F. Durnbaugh (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1978), 14.

[10]See the appropriate sections of Durnbaugh, *On Earth Peace*.

[11]This became the booklet *The Ecumenical Movement and the Faithful Church* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1958).

[12]See Yoder Bibliography, 20, 24.

[13]He had taught an occasional course at Notre Dame since the fall of 1967.

[14]See Yoder Bibliography, especially unpublished listings 1990-1996.

[15]National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1983).

[16]Yoder, "1980 Autobiography," 11.

[17]See Bibliography.

[18]See *The Conrad Grebel Review* 8 (Spring 1990).

[19]*Concern* 1 (June 1954), inside front cover.

[20]John Howard Yoder, "Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 29 (April 1955): 101-117 (original pamphlet, 1954); John Howard Yoder, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1970), greatly expanded from a 1954 essay.

[21]John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), reprint of Faith and Life Press 1964/1977 book; re-working of lectures from the mid-1950s.

[22]See John Howard Yoder, "The Disavowal of Constantine: An Alternative Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue," in *The Royal Priesthood*, Michael G. Cartwright, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 242-61.

[23]Yoder carried on a long-time correspondence with Rabbi and Professor Steven S. Schwarzschild (and probably other Jewish scholars I am unaware of). See Yoder, "The Nonviolence of Rabbinic Judaism," in his *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (Elkhart, IN: Co-op Bookstore, 1983–now available, photocopied, from Cokesbury Bookstore, Duke University); Yoder, "The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited: A Bundle of Old Essays" (Shalom Desktop Publication, 1996).

[24]I think many have not fully appreciated the ecumenical and, even, inter-faith dimensions of

Yoder's *Nevertheless.* He is clearly able to appreciate various arguments for pacifism. See *Nevertheless*, rev. ed. (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992). Also see his *When War Is Unjust*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), including his list of most of his other published writings on the just war tradition, 167-168.

[25]Again one could point to *Nevertheless.*

[26]Of course this begs the question of what faithfulness is. But each dialogue partner has some notion of what it is, and it is to that faithfulness that they call others.

[27]Yoder, "The Ecumenical Movement and the Faithful Church," 37.

[28]*Ibid.*, 36.

[29]The first edition of *The Politics of Jesus* sold over 75,000 copies. It has been (and continues to be) adopted as a textbook in a wide variety of classes representing a range of seminaries. In a recent chapter on "Formative Christian Moral Thinkers" of the twentieth century, Philip Wogaman entitles one section, "John Howard Yoder and the 'Politics of Jesus.'" See J. Philip Wogaman, *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 233-35.

[30]See, e.g., Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* and *For the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

[31]Some of Yoder's friends who basically embrace his theology do agonize. The best known is Stanley Hauerwas. Many who think Yoder *may* be sectarian are *sure* Hauerwas is. The best demonstration that Hauerwas is not sectarian is Arne Rasmusson's *The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994). Some of Hauerwas's (apparent) inconsistencies and overblown rhetoric are precisely because of his active engagement with the culture and his great agonizing over what it means to be faithful Christians in a quite complicated world. What is not fair is to criticize Yoder for not agonizing (and being ruthlessly, passionlessly logical) and simultaneously to criticize Hauerwas for, more or less, the opposite. They have jointly demonstrated that it is quite possible to hold their theology while having either style of engagement, either type of personality and intellectual mode.

[32]Among other things see Yoder, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War*; "'Patience' as Method in Moral Reasoning: Is an Ethic of Discipleship 'Absolute'?" in *The Wisdom of the Cross*; and "Exceptio Probat: Emergency, Loopholes, Distress, Courage" (Shalom Desktop Publication, 1995).

[33]E-mail to me from Glen H. Stassen, May 6, 1998, containing an English translation of a speech by Monsignor Juan Gerardi and Becky Yoder Neufeld's reflections on the murder of Gerardi, 2-3.

[34]John H.Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985).

[35]Wallis, "Lives of Peacemaking," 8.

[36]Stanley Hauerwas, "Messianic Pacifism," *Worldview* 16 (June 1973): 29.

John Howard Yoder and the Ecumenical Church

William Klassen

Ever since I received my first letter from John Howard Yoder in the mid-1950s while studying at Princeton, I have been grateful to God for giving this great gift to the church during my time. To be sure, that letter–my first from him–contained a sharp rebuke. But it also invited me to write up my ideas and convictions for the "Concern" journal series and thus to join the debate about where Anabaptists were or should be heading. Yoder's sudden death leaves us without a partner in dialogue–one that is sorely missed.

John and Annie lived next door to us for several years, and we worked on the Mennonite Biblical Seminary faculty together. We had our differences and expressed them with the freedom of speech the Spirit gives us. We rebuked each other freely and frankly, accepting that fully as part of our relationship to each other in Christ. But we also saw each other as partners, and I thoroughly enjoyed our joint teaching assignments and our work on the Dean's Seminar. In those contexts I saw Yoder's brokenness, his ability to apologize to students and colleagues. Although I cannot say I was ever close to him, I thanked God always, even now, for the gift of his life and witness.

In all the tributes given to John Howard Yoder since his death, there is one that has been overlooked and needs to be mentioned. He opened up the world of the Anabaptists, especially their hermeneutics, to the ecumenical church.

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One of Yoder's abiding convictions, which he wrote about and labored for, was the need for Mennonites to be in dialogue with the larger church. It was assumed by most of us who had studied theology that this involved membership in the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches and the National Association of Evangelicals. The leadership of the church at the time rejected that then, as it does still today.

It was typical of Yoder that he could find a way around that impasse. It was the dialogue that was important for him, not the membership, important as that might be. He found his way around it in part by beginning summer sessions of dialogue between Evangelicals and World Council of Churches leaders. For a number of summers during the sixties these meetings took place, largely at Yoder's initiative. During them we would discuss issues which were troublesome to either party. There would be a strong component of Bible study, formally prepared papers were distributed and discussed, and there was much time for us to get to know each other and above all to share our convictions with each other. At times we might discuss a particularly difficult issue faced by both sides and learn to bear each others' burdens.

These meetings were held under the strictest rules of confidentiality. No mention that they took place was ever allowed, and never were those who attended identified. The papers were presented with the understanding that they should not be quoted until they were published, and that no position taken in them was considered to be final. (They were, as I now reflect on it, the highest point of my early ecumenical experience. That is true even though I have had the privilege of attending the Uppsala and Vancouver Assemblies, Faith and Work assemblies, and specially convened workshops.) These meetings were possible primarily because Yoder enjoyed the trust of both sides, and also because we came together to pray and talk about the mission of the church and to discuss how it was to be carried out inside and outside of structures which seemed to draw such devoted commitments. It was for me a powerful incentive to remain in the Mennonite church; for with all its weaknesses I affirmed its fundamental message and commitment to community, and rejoiced that our message was being heard by others.

One meeting was devoted to a topic which has remained on the church's missionary agenda: universalism, the belief that eventually God's love will triumph over all resistance. Our study determined that there were very

conservative biblical believers–as there were liberals in the history of the church–who were universalists. Either side had its difficulties in remaining true to God's word. At another year's meeting we discussed apostasy, the practice of defecting from or turning one's back on the Christian faith. Again, this is an issue wherever church membership is taken seriously.

In the late sixties after the series of assassinations which rocked the United States, Father Ted Hesburgh, at the time president of Notre Dame University, obtained a large feasibility study grant from the Gulf Oil corporation. Among other things, he convened a workshop at Notre Dame to discuss how higher education might be able to create a national climate in which violence would be lessened. Both Yoder and I participated in that day-long workshop. The discussions of that day became part of the foundations of the Joan Kroc Peace Institute at Notre Dame, of which John was a fellow when he died. Eventually the Interfaith Peace Academy at Tantur, near Jerusalem, also arose from that day. It was only natural that Yoder would eventually join the Notre Dame faculty and have such a rich period of service there. He always found a way to bring differing Christians together, and he sheltered them when they were afraid to be seen publically discoursing on the issues of conflict and violence.

It is in this kind of initiative that we see most clearly Yoder's deep commitment to the church. He did not leave when he thought the church was unfaithful–nor did he leave when he was unfaithful. For he believed, more deeply perhaps than some of his associates, that God could work miracles through the body of Christ in the world. Never supinely obedient to the church or its ruling structures, he nevertheless found ways to exercise his gifts within it.

Not many people, in retrospect, can imagine how difficult it was for him to feel wanted and appreciated by his own church. When in 1961-62 our family was in Topeka, Kansas on a special leave and the Yoder family was in Europe, our correspondence repeatedly returned to the topic of our return to Goshen-Elkhart. While Yoder had two offers, one from Goshen College and one from Goshen Seminary, the situation was unclear in November 1961 because of Harold Bender's resignation as Dean "if a replacement can be found." Under those conditions President Paul Mininger apparently told Yoder that "the situation is so fuzzy that he couldn't take either formal invitation

seriously"(Yoder's letter to me of November 26, 1961). I had urged Yoder to accept a long-term invitation to the MBS faculty which Erland Waltner had extended to him. But Yoder's response was that although he found my reporting of the Elkhart situation "more helpful than anything else I had though I've asked several for help," it had never seemed to him to make sense "in the church political scene for [him] to be more than marginal there. A 'shift' from the [Old Mennonite] to the [General Conference] Menn[onite] base would be misinterpreted. Furthermore since the GCMenns are more pastoral already than the OM's"(letter of same date). The deeper questions beyond the ambiguity of the offers to return to Goshen-Elkhart were: (1) Would anybody, even the right person, be able in the present framework to do what is needed? (2) Is what Goshen is trying to do worth doing? These questions and the fuzziness about his call to Goshen disappeared with the serious health problems and resignation of Harold Bender. With Bender's death the door was open for Yoder to enter.

Our topics of rebuke and admonition were often concentrated on the family. I had expressed my concerns to him about his neglect of his family (as he had to me about mine) and he responded: "What you say is obviously true about childrens' needs. . . . I'm theologically unable to justify a preoccupation with one's own family over against other needs and other people's worse-off children; but in my present running I'm not doing the others much good either" (letter of November 26, 1961). When all the letters we wrote to each other on that subject and the face-to-face discussions, before and after my divorce, before and after John's failure became public, are reviewed, it may be possible to analyze to what extent theology–even a false theology–affected us. Or perhaps it was simply personal failure and sin at its most rudimentary level. It is, however, incontrovertible that an Anabaptist reading of New Testament texts on family life makes it extremely difficult to give the necessary attention to nurturing family life for the aspiring Mennonite theologian or churchman-woman. What the aspiring insurance salesman sacrifices by way of family is universally condemned; what the church servant does by way of neglect of family is considered a necessary price for Kingdom work. It is easy to rationalize that the Kingdom work must come first. For that reason, no doubt, whoever wrote the pastoral epistles warned that one who neglects his own family is "worse than an infidel" (1 Tim 5:8), a text

either not often cited in church circles or interpreted so broadly its meaning is missed.

In retrospect, I am grateful to John Howard Yoder for his courage in continuing the dialogue with both sides of the ecumenical spectrum, as I am for many other things. He lived deeply in the book of Revelation, never to escape from the here-and-now but rather to learn from it what it means to be a member of the community which follows the slain Lamb. May his influence continue in helping us to accommodate to the weaknesses of the church, but also to find ways for the mission of the church to move forward in spite of obstacles which we as bureaucrats may seek to raise up. God's cause can prevail despite our weaknesses, and we can love each other without pretense despite our failures and moments of unfaithfulness.

In the Footsteps of Marcion: Notes Toward an Understanding of John Yoder's Theology

John W. Miller

I

In the process of learning from and coming to terms with John Yoder's vibrant, complex theological legacy, I have found it helpful to pay attention to what he has to say about Marcion, the second century Christian leader, in his *Preface to Theology, Christology, and Theological Method*.[1] This was, I believe, Yoder's only published work in systematic theology and thus affords us a unique window into the substructures of his thought. Yoder's comments here are especially illuminating because of Marcion's critical role in the formation of the church's scriptures. To begin, I will give a brief sketch of the more traditional views of this historic figure, since Yoder's comments about him diverge from these in ways that are significant and illuminating.

Through his reading of Paul's letters, especially the letter to the Galatians, Marcion came to the startling conclusion that the punitive, law-giving creator God of the Jewish scriptures (his perception) was not the same God as the non-judgmental, non-violent God of love who had revealed himself in and through Jesus Christ.[2] To be faithful to this revelation, Marcion concluded, the churches must divest themselves of the Jewish scriptures (still in use in the churches) and replace them with a canon-codex made up of only authentic texts that faithfully represented this new revelation.[3] His specific recommendations were that this new codex should consist of Luke's Gospel

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and ten letters of Paul, edited to eliminate the Jewish accretions. In preparation for such a momentous undertaking, Marcion wrote a treatise entitled *Antitheses* in which he systematically identified the differences between Israel's God and scriptures and the God who had revealed himself in Christ. Following the abrupt rejection of his proposals by the elders of the church of Rome to whom he had carefully presented them, Marcion turned elsewhere and began propagating them throughout other regions of the church–and with such success that, for a time during the second half of the second century, historians believe "in numbers alone the Marcionites may have nearly surpassed non-Marcionites."[4]

In the midst of this volatile situation people alarmed by these developments wrote major, watershed treatises opposing Marcion and others of similar persuasion (Irenaeus's *Against Heresies* and Tertullian's *Against Marcion* are among them). Marcion's position, they pointed out, was a novelty. Nothing like this had ever been thought or promulgated before by any of the church's apostolic leaders. What an honest, open-minded reading of the church's apostolic scriptures will reveal is that the God whom Jesus called Father is not a new God, but "one and the same" as the God of Israel known through Israel's scriptures (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4, 32.2). Believing this to be so, church leaders opposing Marcion's ideas produced and published a new canon-codex, one that included four Gospels, the book of Acts, several general letters, additional letters of Paul, and the book of Revelation, *plus* a full collection of Israel's scriptures (the very ones that Marcion had wanted rejected), making this by far the largest single-volume codex (or book) ever produced.[5] As it turned out, this proved to be the church's most effective "instrument" (Tertullian's term) in its life-and-death struggle with Marcion's ideas and with others of similar persuasions.[6]

II

I will turn now to what Yoder says about Marcion in his *Preface to Theology*. There Marcion is introduced as the man who developed the first canon, but not for the reasons generally attributed to him.[7] While Marcion did want "to distinguish clearly between Paul and the rest of the contemporary writings and between the Old Testament and the New," Yoder states, this was not because he was "against the Old Testament" or that he was "anti-Jewish."

True, Marcion "wanted to contrast the God of the Old Testament with the God of the New." True, "he wanted to get all the Jewish traces out of the New Testament as well." But Marcion's chief concern was "to get some solid footing amidst the growing pluralism." Where "it started" with Marcion, Yoder continues,

> was simply that in this vast mass of literature which was developing, he wanted to know where the court of appeal was. What is the criterion which can show us the truth in this pluralistic mess of many kinds of literature, saying many kinds of things, even contradictory things? How is the church to find its way? Well, Marcion says, let us do it by distinguishing between the authoritative literature–mostly the writings of Paul–and the rest.[8]

This is a radically different picture of Marcion's thought and motives than the one usually painted. What we know about Marcion is almost entirely derived from the writings of those who opposed him, and they, as noted, express alarm over his stark bifurcation of the church's God and the church's scriptures from Israel's God and scriptures, and over his rejection of those scriptures. So, in attributing other motives to Marcion, Yoder appears to be shaping a picture of these developments that is expressive of his own theology. This seems evident as well in how he characterizes the church's response to Marcion. The "so-called orthodox church" which rejected Marcion's proposals, he states, "still had to respond to him in the same language. This meant drawing up their list, which in addition to Paul had the other epistles and the Gospels."[9] Yoder does not mention that "their list" also included all the very scriptures of Israel that Marcion had wanted excluded, nor that the church opposing Marcion went on to publish an alternative canon-codex in which books later called the New Testament were added to this full edition of these older Israelite scriptures. All this is simply passed over.

Instead, in his further discussion of these developments, Yoder emphasizes that the church's canonical list continues to be fluid, and states that such was the case until the sixteenth century. Until then, he says, "there were variations [in canonical lists], and there still are between Protestants and Catholics." In fact there never was "a ruling on the Old Testament. We

have no Christian statement on the Old Testament Canon except by taking over Jewish traditions. It was never decided by any church."[10] So, "the Canon is a very human, very historical thing," he concludes, "never decided by any church." These latter statements are especially noteworthy. For Yoder the status of the Old Testament part of the Bible was, is, and remains undecided. That the church of the second and third centuries produced a Bible with these scriptures in it and that this Bible was subsequently accepted by churches worldwide does not count for him as a "ruling" or "decision."

Yoder's concluding references to Marcion occur a few pages later where he addresses the need "in this vast mass of literature" for a line of interpretation by which to differentiate orthodoxy from heresy. Here the initial point made is that we *do in fact need* such a line of interpretation "which would represent the norm" and by which "every group" which "wiggles and wanders and gets more or less unfaithful" can be called to faithfulness.[11] "Then," Yoder explains, "there would be points at which that erring position is called back to the norm"–and adds: "Back to the norm means restitution, renewal." At this point he states again his belief that this is what Marcion was trying to do. "He said, 'our church is getting confused, it is getting paganized, it is getting mixed up with several concepts of God, so we will have to go back to the norm which is the preaching of the apostles, and slough off, or pare off, everything that is not a part of that.'" Yoder continues:

> When the second and third century churches said, "No, Marcion, your Canon is too small, we have the right Canon," they were still doing the same thing. They were getting back to the norm, to the standard, from which the deviations were to be judged.[12]

So here again Yoder thinks of Marcion as someone who is simply calling the church to be faithful. Indeed, his statement suggests that Marcion was a pioneer in the quest for a norm of faithfulness, not the heretic he has been made out to be. Yoder concludes his discussion on this note. Throughout church history, he says, there have been times of wandering and times of renewal. He rejects the notion that all streams of interpretation are right: "It is not simply a matter of a line going on and being right or all the lines going on and being right together." Yoder was opposed to "ecumenical pluralism,

where you say 'we need all these lines.'" Rather, in his view, "the church is either unfaithful or restored to faithfulness"–and "there is one thing God is continually doing and that is calling the church back to faithfulness."[13]

After making this point Yoder identifies those who have been instruments of such renewal and return to faithfulness. "If what God does is continually to restore the church to faithfulness–it happens in the Reformation, it happens in the Anabaptists, it happens in John Wesley, it happens in Marcion, it happens in between in Francis of Assisi–then that pattern of reaching back to the norm is a fundamental element of our church history, of our theologizing." Thus Marcion was not the heretic Irenaeus and Tertullian made him out to be–far from it. He was the first in a long line of church reformers whom God has raised up to call the church to faithfulness.

III

Yoder's words about Marcion seem descriptive of how he viewed himself and his own calling. He too felt called to summon the church back to a norm of faithfulness as this had come to expression in the Anabaptists, in Wesley, in Francis, in Marcion. Yoder of course did not speak out against the Old Testament as Marcion did. However, he did believe that the church had never declared itself with respect to the canonical status of this part of the Bible and viewed "the story of Jesus" as a "canon within the Christian canon" that stands in judgment over later decisions of the church as to what should or should not be included in its Bible.[14] He also shared Marcion's conviction that the revelation of God in Christ superseded all others. In Yoder's theology, as in Marcion's, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the subsequent mission of those disciples who were truly loyal to his mission, marks the beginning of a wholly *new* aeon in human history.

The rationale for this theological perspective is set forth and emphasized in Yoder's *Preface to Theology,* the subtitle of which is *Christology and Theological Method*. Theology begins with Christology, the author points out there, since this is what was central to Christ's first disciples.[15] What they were supremely concerned about was the revelation that broke into their lives through Jesus Christ. This superseded everything else, as can be seen from John 1, Hebrews 1, Colossians 1.[16] There we learn that Jesus Christ is over and above everything. This too is what the Apostle's

Creed is about, rightly understood–its opening statement about "God the Father, almighty creator of heaven and earth" is "really not much more than a prologue to the statements about the Son." It was this second article about the Son which was "the nucleus around which the rest of the creed gradually developed."[17] There is "no independent doctrine of the Father, or of the Spirit . . . . The earliest creeds of the church were simple statements about Jesus,"[18] and what these assert is that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ supersedes and transcends all other revelations.

Yoder specifies that this is even true with respect to the God of Israel. What proved so offensive to the Jewish people about the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, he believes, was this very issue. They were not prepared to accept these messianic claims of total authority over everything else. For the Jews, he explains, their creator God was supreme. "'No,' the apostles say, 'Christ has fulfilled the expectation of the old monotheism which says there is only one God, and he has revealed in His own person the working of God in our time.'" "Thus," Yoder declares, "in addition to a doctrine of pre-existence to place Christ above pagan worship of creation, we must also have a doctrine of fulfillment to place Christ above the Old Testament story."[19] It is on this foundation of the solitary absoluteness of the revelation of God through Christ that Yoder erects his theological, social, and political vision and ethic.

What is it that God has revealed through Jesus Christ, according to Yoder? This unprecedented revelation has to do with one thing primarily: the incarnation of how God deals with evil. "The cross," writes Yoder in one of his many essays on this theme, "is the extreme demonstration that *agape* seeks neither effectiveness nor justice and is willing to suffer any loss or seeming defeat for the sake of obedience." Then he adds: "But the cross is not defeat. Christ's obedience unto death was crowned by the miracle of the resurrection and the exaltation at the right hand of God."[20] Furthermore, "The same life of the new aeon that was revealed in Christ is also the possession of the church, since Pentecost answered the Old Testament's longings for a 'pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh'."[21] With the coming of Christ, with his call to non-violent love as *the* way of confronting evil, with his demonstration of that way through the cross, with the vindication of that way in the resurrection and its empowerment through the Holy Spirit, a new aeon has begun in the life of the world in which non-violent love is the norm, and

growing numbers of people are enlisting in this way in the midst of the old aeon now passing away.

Seen in this light, nations which enforce laws in the old vengeful pre-Christian manner epitomize the old aeon that is passing. Paradoxically, Yoder recognizes the need for such states but sees them as part of a fallen structure which Christ as Lord is "harnessing" for the sake of the church. "Vengeance is not thereby redeemed or made good," he writes; "it is nonetheless rendered subservient to God's purposes, as an anticipation of the promised ultimate defeat of sin."[22]

There are ambiguities in Yoder's thinking at this point. On the one hand, with the New Testament Yoder affirms "the necessity of orders and organization based on power in social relations"[23] and can say that "when God's will is communicated to man or men in their rebellion, neither God nor His ultimate will changes, but His current demands take into account the nonbelief of the addressee . . . and therefore stay within other limits of possibility."[24] This would suggest not only that the state with its use of force to order society is needed, but that God's will is manifest in the actions of this institution. But more typically Yoder writes that the ordering of society through the state "is the result not first of God's having willed that it be so, but only of human sin."[25] Seen in the light of God's revelation in Christ, "any use of the sword to enforce justice is intrinsically self-glorifying and a part of human fallenness."[26] Thus, "we cannot say that God has any 'proper' pattern in mind to which unbelief should conform . . . ."[27] Christian thinking about the state will not therefore "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." This is not, Yoder explains, "because definite and knowable understandings of God's will do not exist, but because such insights are known only in Christ and their application is therefore possible only mediately."[28] Yoder believes that the church can think about and speak to the state only on the basis of "middle axioms" drawn from the teachings and actions of the non-violent Christ. However, "this does not mean that if the criticisms were heard and the suggestions put into practice, the Christian would be satisfied; rather a new and more demanding set of criticisms and suggestions would then follow." Yoder's conclusion is that "there is no level of attainment to which a state could rise, beyond which

the Christian critique would have nothing more to ask; such an ideal level would be none other than the kingdom of God."[29]

IV

I have found many of Yoder's ideas about the nature and form of the Christian mission to be stimulating and helpful. As one who does not share his beliefs about the Old Testament, I will close with a few thoughts in critique of his theology specifically in this regard. Marcion believed that the God revealed in Christ was pure compassionate non-violent love. Yoder's beliefs were similar: through Jesus Christ a new understanding of God's compassionate non-violent way for overcoming evil was revealed to humanity. In both cases these convictions resulted in supersessionist beliefs and attitudes toward Israel's story, Israel's scriptures, and Israel's God. The point at which this supersessionism on Yoder's part becomes most evident is in his teachings about God's will for the nations. As we have seen, his views regarding nation-states are fraught with ambiguity and negativity. While acknowledging "the necessity [in this fallen world] of orders and organizations based on power in social relations," Yoder's christology (which might be described as a monotheism of the Son) prevents him from according the state a positive role in God's redemptive concern for and dealings with humanity. As just noted, Yoder rejects even trying to imagine what an ideal state would be like. An ideal or 'proper' society is impossible by definition.

The contrast is stark between a statement like this and the witness to God's will for the nation-states of the world in Israel's scriptures. There, Israel's teachers articulate a very different vision and understanding of God's will for the nations. One notable example is the account of God's decrees for the nations in Genesis 9:1-6. There God is portrayed as "blessing" Noah and his descendents and instructing them to draw a distinction between killing an animal and killing a human being made in his image. The life of human beings must be accorded the utmost protection. *Whoever sheds the blood of a human by a human shall that person's blood be shed, for in his own image God made humankind* (Gen. 9:6). Israel viewed its own history with God (Gen. 12-Neh. 13) as beginning in the midst of existing nations (Genesis 10) to whom a decree like this had been issued centuries earlier. The forceful restraint of violence in the world's nation-states was thus viewed positively

as evidence that a decree of their God was in effect in a world he had determined to care for and sustain despite the evil still lurking in the human heart even after the great flood (Gen. 8:21).[30] It was in fact, in their eyes, only when the peoples of the world had begun to implement such decrees that human civilization became possible. Only now could the prior anarchy that had brought the world to the brink of destruction be surmounted, and nations and civilizations arise and spread abroad over the face of the earth (Gen. 10f.).

This theological sketch of the wider world (Gen.1-11) was articulated in its present form in the era of the Persian Empire, during and following the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh. 8-10), when Israel's scriptures were compiled in the form we now have them in the Jewish Tanakh (Law, Prophets, and Writings).[31] Since at this time Israel's kingdom had not been restored, Israel understood its calling not as a nation destined to displace or conquer these nations but as a covenant people who through their walk with God would be blessed and bring "blessing" (Gen. 12:1-3) and a witness (Isa. 49:6) to these nations. When church leaders opposing Marcion added the newer Christian apostolic scriptures to these Israelite scriptures in a single canon-codex (as in our Christian Bible), they thereby codified the church's story as a continuation of Israel's story and calling. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the spiritual empowerment of his disciples, a missionary movement was born that understood itself *not* as a replacement for Israel's mission of blessing for the nations, but as its activation and extension (Acts 15:13-21). As Irenaeus among others discerned, there is a vast difference between a view of the Christian story that sees it in these terms and one like Marcion's that does not.

John Howard Yoder's theological legacy is compelling the church to reconsider these issues afresh. Indeed, his last published book of essays, *For the Nations*, indicates that right up to the end he himself was deeply engaged in exploring these very issues in new and creative ways.[32] My sense is that the substructure of his theology remained firm and unchanged throughout his long academic career, but he kept continuously building and elaborating in an attempt to clarify and highlight its relevance for church and world past, present, and future.

Notes

[1]John H. Yoder, *Preface to Theology, Christology, and Theological Method* (Elkhart, IN.: Goshen Biblical Seminary; distributed by Co-op Bookstore, 3003 Benham, Elkhart, IN 46517). This volume "brings together the bulk of the instructional content of a semester course offered . . . from the early 1960's through Spring of 1981"(1).

[2]Still the most authoritative account of Marcion's life and career is that of Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion, The Gospel of the Alien God* (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1990; original German edition, 1924). For a more recent analysis and assessment of Marcion's teachings, see Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers, Jews and Christians 70 - 170 CE* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 196-221. Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) is still the unsurpassed account of Marcion's role in the formation of the Christian canon; further to these issues, see also my *Reading Israel's Story, A Canon-history Approach to the Narrative and Message of the Christian Bible* (Kitchener, ON.: Blenheim Retreat and Study Centre, 1998).

[3]Edgar J. Goodspeed, *Christianity Goes to Press* (New York: Macmillan, 1940), believes that when putting his plan for a new canon for the church into effect, Marcion "probably . . . put forth the new scriptures . . . in a single codex" (80). On the invention and burgeoning use of codices (books) in the Christian churches at that time, see note 5 below.

[4]John J. Clabeausx, "Marcion," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, IV (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 515.

[5]On this important technological development and its impact on the theology and culture of the churches, see Goodspeed, *Christianity Goes to Press*; Colin H. Roberts and T.C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983); Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995). The oldest survivng exemplars of these first giant codices are Codex Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus. For evidence of the existence of such codices as a distinguishing feature of the Christian churches already in the third century, see my *Reading Israel's Story*, 76-78.

[6]In his *Prescriptions Against Heretics, 38* (written about 200 CE), Tertullian credits the church at Rome with having taken the initiative in this monumental endeavor, describing it as follows: "the Law and the Prophets she [the church at Rome] unites in one volume with the Evangelists and Apostles, from which she drinks in her faith."

[7]Yoder, *Preface to Theology,* 115.

[8]*Ibid*.

[9]*Ibid*.

[10]*Ibid*., 117.

[11]*Ibid*, 119.

[12]*Ibid*.

[13]*Ibid*.

[14]On this aspect of his thought, see John Howard Yoder, "The Authority of the Canon," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation, Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspectives*, Text-Reader Series, Vol. I, Willard M. Swartley, ed. (Elkhart, IN.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1984), 265-90 (especially 284f.).

[15]*Ibid*., 7.

[16]*Ibid*., 79.

[17]*Ibid*., 103.

[18]*Ibid*., 76.

[19]*Ibid*., 80.

[20]John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, Michael G. Cartwright, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 147.

[21]*Ibid*., 148.

[22]*Ibid*., 149.

[23]John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, Institute of Mennonite Studies, 3 (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1964), 31.

[24]*Ibid*., 32.

[25]*Ibid*., 31.

[26]*Ibid*., 38.

[27]*Ibid*., 32.

[28]*Ibid*.

[29]*Ibid*.

[30]On the role of these decrees in rabbinic thought, see 'Noachide Laws," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 12 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), 1189f.

[31]I have written about these developments in *The Origins of the Bible: Rethinking Canon History* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), and more recently in *Reading Israel's Story*, Part Two, "The Narrative and Message of the Tanakh," 17-38.

[32]John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997); see especially ch. 3, "'See How They Go With Their Face to the Sun,'" 51-78.

Tributes to John Howard Yoder (1927-1997)

Given at his memorial service, January 3, 1998, at Goshen College Mennonite Church, Goshen, IN

Tom Yoder Neufeld
A meditation given at the memorial service

We Have This Treasure in Clay Jars

> [1] *Since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. . . .* [5] *For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake.* [6] *For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* [7] *But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. . . .* [13] *But . . . we have the spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture–"I believed, and so I spoke" . . .* [14] *because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence.* (2 Cor. 4, excerpts)

At the centre of the words of Scripture we have just heard lies a phrase that is as evocative as any of Jesus' parables: "we have this treasure in clay jars." Like Jesus in his parables of the Kingdom of God, Paul allows two images to rub against each other: treasure and clay jars, treasure and earthen vessels–the one an image of worth and value, the other of humbleness and vulnerability. I invite you to fill Paul's parable with your own reflections about John Howard

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Tom Yoder Neufeld is married to Yoder's daughter, Rebecca, and teaches Religious Studies at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, ON.

Yoder as one of God's clay jars, but also about yourself as an earthen carrier of God's treasure. I am deeply conscious that the following comments are themselves very much "earthen."

Paul knew that this strange combination of power and weakness, treasure and clay, lies at the very core of the gospel. It is seen most profoundly in the cross as the ironic expression of God's power and might to make right. But it comes to expression also in God's entrusting of this treasure to his earthen creatures, to clay jars. The treasure? God's persistent and endlessly ingenious offer of new creation through reconciliation. The vessels? The suffering messiah, first and foremost, but also the vulnerable, broken, and mended members of his body, who already live in light of the resurrection even as they await the full restoration of their humanity.

This treasure comes to us in many jars, and no one jar can contain the whole of the treasure. One of God's earthen vessels was John Howard Yoder–husband, father, grandfather, brother, teacher, mentor, and friend–an earthen jar from which we have drunk deep draughts of God's good news and God's call to faithfulness.

I can't possibly do more here than point to a few ways in which John carried the treasure. And I do so as one who was and remains his student, and as a son-in-law.

One important dimension of the treasure that God has offered us in this earthen vessel was John's remarkable ability to "see Jesus" through the eyes of all the early witnesses, from Luke to Paul to John of Patmos, through eyes of countless faithful witnesses since too numerous to list, from Conrad Grebel to Leo Tolstoy, from Thomas Merton to Dorothy Day, and to hear through that rich diversity of faithful voices Jesus' singular call to the way of servanthood and cross.

He found a multitude of ways to hold that vision of sacrifice and discipleship before the church–not only his Mennonite church but also his ecumenical community of faith. That, too, is a treasure of inestimable value. On the one hand, John put before us who want so much to be different that it is unfaithful to be satisfied to be a holy huddle; on the other hand, he put before us who are very much at home in the world the clear call to be a church without spot or wrinkle, a fitting bride for the Lamb. And he put before all of us together the challenge to be a faithful embodiment of what God wants for the nations.

Just as John Yoder refused to remain within assigned confessional borders, so he refused to find a home in any one of our sundry academic workshops where we labor at our separate disciplines of history, biblical studies, theology, ethics, and peace studies. A unique dimension of the treasure he carried is that he entered each of our workshops and brought the treasure of the gospel for us to work on. He called himself a dilettante, all the while scaring the wits out of us experts.

To restate our text: "he believed and so he spoke; he believed and so he wrote." Our work at explicating the treasure of God's strange gospel and God's bracing call to radical faithfulness must not let up, however much we might be tempted in our day to relax its demands.

But the treasure John carried could be found most importantly beyond the halls and offices of the academy in the shelters, the homes, and even the prison cells of countless disciples around the world, many of them paying dearly for their efforts to make real the treasure they had discovered in this earthen vessel.

As his family we will continue to cherish the treasure he was for us. We are deeply conscious of the fact that our own sense of values and the importance of discipleship are in no small measure his legacy. Our family music will never be the same; we will miss John's strong tenor or profound bass, whatever was required; the many songs we sing here today are witness to the importance of this treasure to us as a family. And his grandchildren will miss his affection, expressed in his unique manner–affection they were themselves able to offer so freely at his seventieth birthday celebration the night before he died.

These are only hints of the treasure this earthen vessel named John Howard Yoder held. This treasure is without measure, in the end not, as our text reminds us, because of John Yoder, but because of the extraordinary power of God at work in him. We give thanks today that God had at his disposal this clay jar.

But clay jars are clay jars. They're often cracked and often leak. At the best of times they have rough and chipped edges. And at the worst of times they fall and break; and the sharp edges of the shards can cut and wound, and wound deeply.

"But God"–the two most important words in the Bible for all of us clay jars to hear–but God, rich in mercy, by his great love puts the pieces together, and continues to use the patched vessels, with all the cracks and seams still

showing, to offer the divine treasure of grace and reconciliation. That surely is the heart of the treasure. This is where treasure and earth meet. And there can be no more fitting a means to carry that treasure than a patched clay jar. May God give us all courage to offer our patched selves as vessels for God's treasure, even as today we give thanks to God for John Howard Yoder, and look forward to the time when we together with him will be raised with Jesus and brought into God's presence.

AMEN

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From a sister:
Mary Ellen Meyer

> And the Lord said, "It is not good for people to be alone, so I will set them in families, a mother and father and sisters and brothers; and they will care for each other, and support each other, they will respect and challenge and confront each other, but most of all, they will love each other to the end." And it was so, and the Lord saw that it was good.

John and I grew up in a family and extended family rooted deeply in the Wayne County Ohio community and the Oak Grove Mennonite Church. This community and congregation helped educate and nurture us, and gave us a broad perspective on the world. It was clear early in his life that John had special gifts in analytical and critical thinking, in writing and speaking with clarity and persuasiveness, and in music. While he didn't always see eye to eye with our parents, he was respectful of their wishes that he attend Goshen College rather than another college that was his choice.

Mary Ellen Meyer lives in Goshen, IN.

Since I was over five years his junior, I'm sure I was the bothersome little sister for many of our growing-up years. But I remember special good times such as evenings when our parents were gone, leaving him in charge, or Christmas Eve night when we slept in the same room and anticipated Christmas Day together. After Al and I married and we went to France for a three-year term of postwar relief service with the Mennonite Central Committee, John and Annie were already there and had moved forty miles away to Basel, Switzerland, just before we came to Valdoie. During those years I learned to know John in a new way, as adult with adult, and they were good years. Al and I would take a much anticipated break from a rather rigorous schedule in the Valdoie children's home and center, and drive to Allschwil for a pleasant visit with John and Annie, two-year-old Rebecca and baby Martha. We were always restored by Annie's good cooking and the relaxed schedule.

As we both returned to the States and the rest of our children were born, their Yoder peer cousins became very important. Our parents, Howard and Ethel Yoder, began week-long Lake Michigan vacations for the extended family, and these helped to seal the relationships with good times and memories. These vacations continue to this day and include forty to fifty family members. John always made time in his schedule for these gatherings, as he did for family Christmases, Thanksgivings, and other special events. He participated in his own unique way, but it was clear that it was important to him that these events take place and that he gave them his support.

Last Monday evening, when the family was gathered to celebrate John's seventieth birthday, the granddaughters performed an original musical tribute, and the visiting that went on around that as we caught up with each other was, as always, lively and stimulating. For many of you, John is known and recognized as a scholar, theologian, ethicist, writer, and lecturer. He was all of those. But for me, he will always be a respected and loved brother, and the one who, with Annie, gave us and the world a remarkable family we love dearly. As we gather, we will imagine him in his corner chair, and he will always be part of us.

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From a friend, former colleague, and fellow ethicist:
Stanley Hauerwas

The 1978 *Festival Quarterly* had a feature called "Winter Profile" that featured John–he had an uncanny knack for getting into the important magazines. The interviewer asked him if he enjoyed his significance. "Oh, time has passed me by," he responded. (We are told he said this "without feeling.") "I won't strategize making sure I get my monument. I got caught between the H.S. Bender generation and the Willard Swartley generation."

Obviously failing to get John to be introspective, the interviewer tried again by asking him if he was happy. "I haven't found it very useful to ask that question." We are then informed that Yoder is quite critical of the cult of happiness, seeing it as a form of cultural conformity. But yes, he is thankful and does not feel hurt or oppressed. He notes, "So far our children haven't hurt their parents much. I have tenure. And I don't think I'll run out of Anabaptist sources." We are told he said this with a tone of peace and just a pinch of resignation, noting "I'm not concerned with building an empire."

Quintessential John Yoder–which, of course, puts us who have come to praise him in a tough spot. As Christians we already know better than to try to insure we will not be forgotten–not because, as the Stoics knew, that is a fruitless task, but because it is the deepest sign of unfaithfulness. Any attempt to insure our memory in this world is the denial of that community that John now enjoys, that is, the communion of saints. Yet we also know that he would not like for us to say anything about him that seemed to make him more important than what he most cared about, that is, God's nonviolent kingdom. Michael Cartwright observed that John has certainly gone to extreme lengths to make sure he did not have to respond to the *Festschrift* some of us are in the process of preparing.

Yet, like it or not, John changed my life and I, at least, think he ought to be held accountable. Reading him made me a pacifist. It did so because John

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Stanley Hauerwas, a colleague of Yoder's at Notre Dame, now teaches at Duke University. He was instrumental in planning a forthcoming Festschrift *in honor of Yoder's work.*

taught me that nonviolence was not just another "moral issue" but constitutes the heart of our worship of a crucified messiah. Of course I know that John was never quite sure what to make of having so convinced me. At an evening arranged by Jim Burtchaell, John and I were giving short accounts of our life and work for new graduate students at Notre Dame. As usual, John described himself as a dilettante having no real field but having written for many years in defense of Christian nonviolence. He confessed that, as far as he knew, he had only convinced one other person, meaning me, and I could tell he felt a good deal of ambiguity about that "accomplishment."

In truth I know I was a burden for John. In speech and writing he was exacting. He had the kind of exactness only an analytic philosopher could love. He never said more or less than needed to be said. "I haven't found it very useful to ask that question." Notice, he did not say it is wrong to ask if one is happy; he said it is not useful. Such exactness can be quite exasperating. I, on the other hand, love exaggeration. Why say carefully what can be said offensively? John, committed as he was to the ministry of careful speech, I know found exasperating how I said what I thought I had learned from him. Yet he was patient with me–which is but an indication that he knew he even had to treat me nonviolently. I know at times it was not easy. I suspect that was particularly true, given my polemical style.

Among Mennonites John was certainly not "laid back"; but how he approached those "outside" as well as critics of his work was quite different. I kept getting into fights because of what I had learned from him, and he would then suggest it was my fault. In truth I think he was right about that. He knew how to be nonviolent because he had all those witnesses, those Anabaptist sources, to teach him how. So rather than showing the incoherence of this or that version of the just war theory, John would find a way to hold advocates of just war to their own best insights. He really lived and thought that God is to be found in those whom we think to be our deepest enemies. As one new to the practice of nonviolence, I know that is a skill I can at best only dimly imagine, much less desire to live as John lived it.

Which means we simply cannot with truth accept his claims to his own insignificance. For many of us, Mennonite and non-Mennonite, he changed our world through how he lived and what he wrote. In particular, I have been asked by Lisa Cahill, president of the Society of Christian Ethics, to say that

our coming meeting will not be the same with John missing. We will continue to expect to see that enigmatic figure in the back row taking notes but saying nothing, though it may be a session on a topic that he knows more about than anyone in the world. (And it goes without saying that most sessions of the SCE are about matters he knew more about than those writing the papers.)

So in a mode uncharacteristic of John's way of working, I think it best to end with some of his words. This beautiful and exacting passage, beautiful because of its exactness, comes close to the end of *The Politics of Jesus*. I believe what John said in it is not only the heart of his work, the heart of Christian theology, but also the heart of what it means to live as a disciple of Christ:

> The key to the obedience of God's people is not their effectiveness but their patience. The triumph of the right is assured not by the might that comes to the aid of the right, which is of course the justification of the use of violence and the other kinds of power in every human conflict; the triumph of the right, although it is assured, is sure because of the power of the resurrection and not because of any calculation of causes and effects, nor because of the inherently greater strength of the good guys. The relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection.

Therefore, it must be true, as John puts it, that "the people who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe." A life capable of such writing is not replaceable. But the very God that makes such a life possible we can be sure will send us new, and no doubt quite different, John Yoders. At this time, however, let us rejoice that God gave us this life, this bit of the grain of the universe.

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From a colleague at Notre Dame:
Father David B. Burrell

> *With justice He will rule the world,*
> *He will judge the peoples with His truth. (Ps. 96)*
>
> *Faith is the "original revolution."*
> (Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love*)

Yesterday was the feast of St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Basil. Recalling their studies together and friendship in Athens, Gregory says:

> The same hope inspired us: the pursuit of learning. This is an ambition especially subject to envy. Yet between us there was no envy. Our rivalry consisted, not in seeking the first place for oneself but in yielding it to the other, for we looked at each other's success as his own. Our great pursuit, the great name we wanted, was to be Christians, to be called "Christians."

My most recent optic on John has been to share a printer in our faculty office building, and so be privy to his unceasing networking: confirming, extending, re-confirming a community of inquirers seeking the faith and the hope needed to sustain one another to live justly in a world dominated by injustice.

> *With justice He will rule the world,*
> *He will judge the peoples with His truth.*
>
> *Faith is the "original revolution."*

Nothing short of faith can show us the way, and John spent a half-century working out the implications of that conviction–one which is more

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Father David Burrell is a long-time colleague and friend of Yoder's at the University of Notre Dame, and former chair of the Department of Theology.

readily accepted today than when he first began to expound it: faith in a free Creator whose eternal Word calls us forth from darkness, and whose Spirit constantly renews us. The inexhaustible treasures of a faith that emboldens us to probe the ineluctable implications of that liberating Word, the one whom that other John announced: "I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God" (John 1:34). John Howard's life has been that very testimony.

> *With justice He will rule the world,*
> *He will judge the peoples with His truth.*
>
> *Faith is the "original revolution."*

It should be obvious that neither justice nor God rules the world, and that no people is ready to be judged by His truth. Yet faith remains the "original revolution" against that obvious observation. God does rule, with a justice which we are enjoined to discern, as we encourage one another to make present there where each of us abides, a real presence made palpable through our unyielding quest to submit to the judgment of His truth. Stern stuff, demanding unceasing networking to form and reform communities of faithful inquirers, yet always humble before the person of that truth whom we seek, that one whose judgment we cannot fear so long as His word sustains us. In the wake of this man's death, let the words of yet another John, redolent of this holy season, sustain us:

> *Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be had not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed we will be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* (1 John 3:2)

Assured as we are that our brother John sees him as he is, let us follow the exhortation of that other John to "abide in him, so that [we] too may have confidence in his coming" (1 John 2:28).

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From a long-time friend and mission colleague:
David A. Shank

In our a cappella chorus, John Howard sang bass, right behind me, and so any hesitations I might have had were clearly covered by another voice–which was all for the good when he didn't make mistakes. Anyone who ever heard him sing Handel's "Why do the nations rage?" would never forget it, for it was not singing classical music, but the Word. His first-prize national peace oration of 1947 began: "Why do the nations rage, and the people imagine a vain thing against the Lord and against his anointed?" (This prize oration is not listed in his comprehensive bibliography.)

Most of us are too little aware of the "unknown years" of John Howard's European service and study. Beyond the deep personal debt which I owe to him, in the name of many others who are not here today, and without their authorization, I am taking the liberty to pay tribute to John for those fifteen extremely heavy years of very difficult work of grass-roots praxis which was the groundwork of his ongoing theological reflection and legacy.

First of all, I pay tribute in the name of the French Mennonites. In 1949, at age twenty-two, John Howard arrived among them mentored by two years at Goshen College–he earned his B.A. in that time–and identified (so well that he married one of their best daughters) with this small, scattered religious minority bound by ethnicity, a rural ethos, and inner-oriented piety, and was able to help them get in touch with the best of their spiritual roots. Despite the trauma of the war just under the surface, he listened, provoked, questioned, translated, organized, promoted social ministries, created bridges, wrote, published, challenged their elders, and inspired their youth. It is the judgment of their outgroup historian that except for Pierre Widmer, no one influenced more than he the postwar "new look" of French Mennonitism. He was there for five years.

Secondly, in the name of a larger European Mennonitism, I would like to pay tribute to John Howard for those years: Swiss, Dutch, German, Belgian,

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David A. Shank became a friend of Yoder's when both were students at Goshen College. They were both involved for many years in mission work abroad.

Spanish, Russian, English–all profited from his crisscrossing of political, linguistic, cultural, and theological borders through personal contacts and correspondence, through the European Mennonite Bible School, through Mennonite World Conference, and through inter-Mennonite meetings and conferences, where he was often speaker. But further, in conversation with other Mennonite scholars, he did his own very intensive historical spadework and analysis of that most crucial time in the history of Western Christianity, and all Mennonitism can profit as it learns from him of its weaknesses and its strengths for ecclesiastical conversation and dialogue.

Thirdly, I pay tribute in the name of war-scarred but peace-concerned Protestant theologians of postwar Europe, who met in the several "Puidoux" conferences starting in 1955. There they were challenged for the first time in 400 years by a Free Church ecclesiology and peace ethic, as articulated by a young theology student whose brashness permitted him to put into practice what he was learning from his study of the Free Church-Reformed conversations of the sixteenth century. In their name I pay tribute to John Howard for his vigorous participation, which would eventually produce *The Politics of Jesus*.

Fourthly, I should like to pay tribute to John Howard in the name of Algeria, torn by the leftovers of French colonialism and where French Mennonite youth were also engaged militarily. His vision of, and commitment to, a presence there of the peace of Christ never died, despite the terrible attrition of a war of liberation with its religious overtones. He was able to see that vision spelled out diversely through the Mennonite Board of Missions, PAX, Mennonite Central Committee, and, with André Trocmé, the EIRENE service of conscientious objectors not recognized by their countries. In West Africa two years ago, we met the French technician who oversaw the PAX boys' planting of 150 million trees in a strip a kilometer wide and a hundred kilometers long. Despite the ongoing Algerian crisis, he had just visited the site of the forest and asked a passing Algerian peasant what it was. "Christians did that," he replied.

Finally, I am authorized to pay tribute in the name of what came to be called the "Concern" group, which in 1952 met in Amsterdam for mutual sharing, reflection, and self-understanding. In the providence of God we were thrown into postwar contexts and situations that were often well beyond human

capacities and limits, with the resources our mentors had given–and our faith. At the end of that week's meeting, and unbeknownst to the others, John Howard, who was the youngest, wrote a paper entitled "The Cooking of the Anabaptist Goose" and sent it to Harold Bender–to the later chagrin of us others. (It too is not found in the comprehensive bibliography of his writings.) It was his own pungent personal perception and critique of the way in which the "Anabaptist Vision" could be used to justify denominational identity and worldly acculturation–as if the Anabaptist martyrs had died in vain. When, on his deathbed, Harold Bender was asked about his problems with "the young Turks," he is reported to have replied, "They all love the church." In the name of that group, I would like to pay tribute to John Howard, in that "the Anabaptist goose is not cooked."

John Howard's well-known written legacy was not done in a vacuum or in an ivory tower. It emerged from within the church, in the world, in response to the questions raised by the church's presence in the world. But John Howard did not follow the world's agenda; he followed another.

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From a neighbor and former colleague:
Erland Waltner

John Howard Yoder for many years was my esteemed colleague at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries (AMBS), my valued neighbor on Benham Avenue in Elkhart, Indiana, and a dear family friend.

Forty years ago, then Dean Harold S. Bender and then President Paul Mininger and I engaged in spirited discussion on whether or not to invite a thirty-year-old budding theologian to join the Associated Seminaries venture

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Erland Waltner was president of the Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Goshen, IN, for many years while Yoder was a faculty member. Waltner and his wife Winifred are neighbors and friends of John Howard and Annie Yoder.

in Elkhart. John had been an MCC relief worker and theological student in Europe, read and spoke several languages fluently, and could dialogue intelligently with theologians like Karl Barth. But John had also become critical of some aspects of Mennonite church life and leadership.

Today I am grateful that the outcome of those discussions was that John Howard Yoder moved from the family greenhouse business in Wooster, Ohio, where I discussed future possibilities with him, to Elkhart, Indiana. This proved an important step in a career that would bring his significant theological gifts not only to the attention of Mennonites but also to that of Protestants and Catholics in many countries. John was part-time on our AMBS faculty when we began in Elkhart in 1958, teaching Systematic Theology I and II, Contemporary Theology, and War, Peace, and Nonresistance (as that course was then called).

Remaining within the boat, John had a way of rocking it, especially with his unforgettable and uncomfortable lecture on "Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality," given on our campus. Our campus was also the setting, through the Institute of Mennonite Studies, for the writing of his seminal book, *The Politics of Jesus*.

Shortly after Andrew Kreider had put on the MennoLink a report of John's death, came an early response from Duane Shank, national organizer for *Sojourners*. Duane wrote, "John was, through his writings, especially *The Politics of Jesus*, a teacher and mentor to an entire generation of Christian activists both within and without the Mennonite Church." He added that this book was seminal to the development of the Sojourners movement and the magazine which many of us read.

Today I am grateful for John's razor-sharp analytical mind, his capacity for dialogue and debate, his profound biblical knowledge, but even more for his passionate commitment to the way of Jesus Christ in peace-making and other dimensions of Christian social ethics, especially in the public domain. I recall an occasion when Gordon Kaufman, another Mennonite theologian, during a lecture series on our campus, sat down with John on the same couch in our living room in Elkhart and the two were soon engaged in intense dialogue. I recall someone pulled out a quarter and John began making the point that, in addition to the two obvious sides, the quarter also had depth, that is, a third

dimension. I remember how often in those days John would talk about a "third way" in theological discussions.

Today I am grateful for the large legacy John has left both to the Mennonite church and to the larger church, not because he was always right (he wasn't) but because so often he was so tremendously helpful to thoughtful believers who sought diligently to understand what it means to follow Jesus Christ, especially in peace, justice, and reconciliation. Mark Thiessen Nation has fortunately compiled for us *A Comprehensive Bibliography of the Writings of John Howard Yoder*, both published and unpublished, from 1947 to 1997–fifty years of vigorous, probing, and constructive writing. I counted 645 items–but I would challenge John's grandchildren to correct my count since I have poor eyesight.

While I celebrate all of John's positive contributions, I am also sad today. I am sad that his productive life closed so abruptly so soon after he had reached the biblical three-score years and ten. I had personally deeply hoped for "another wave of productivity." I am sad that an auto accident, which put John on crutches for the rest of his life, made these last years so much more difficult and painful, though I never heard him complain. Clearly a victim in this situation, he became for me an embodiment of a "silent suffering servant." I am also sad that a necessary disciplinary reconciliation process in which he was involved over several years, while formally, officially, and constructively completed, still leaves us with some unfinished agenda.

John's work of teaching and writing, of repenting and seeking reconciliation, is now completed. He rests by grace in the hands of our righteous and loving God. Our challenge to faithfulness to the way of Jesus in peace, justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation, remains unfinished. The John Howard Yoder story remains for us an "Unfinished Symphony," not because he or anyone else wanted it that way, but because that's how it is.

> *Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord. Yes, says the Spirit, they shall rest from their labors. . . .* (Rev. 14:13b)

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Literary Refractions

It is fitting that the "points of mediation" that follow, "Flowers for Approaching the Fire," should appear in the context of this volume focusing on the life and work of John Howard Yoder. Novelist Rudy Wiebe first encountered John Howard Yoder by reading the theologian's early work. The two men didn't meet face to face until Wiebe, in the wake of the outrage he experienced among the Mennonite Brethren in Canada following the publication of his first novel, *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962), took a teaching position at Goshen College in 1963. Within a short time, in the mid-1960's, both Yoder and Wiebe, their wives, and several other people (perhaps twelve in all) became part of a discussion group that met monthly in Goshen for well over a year. The group included the theologian and the writer, and friends who represented other, diverse interests. The group's talk was wide-ranging, interdisciplinary. "John [Yoder] would lie on his back on the floor and stare up at the ceiling," Wiebe recalls, "and then come up with terrific questions or comments." Yoder was working on *Nevertheless* at the time, and on *The Politics of Jesus*, which appeared in print in 1971 and 1972, respectively. Wiebe, whose second novel, *First and Vital Candle*, would appear in 1966, was beginning to conceive *The Blue Mountains of China*, which would be published after his late-sixties return to Canada, in 1970.

Over the years Rudy Wiebe and John Howard Yoder continued their conversation in letters dealing mostly with theological matters. In the early 1980s Wiebe invited Yoder to give a seminar–a series of lectures–on non-resistance at Strawberry Creek, the Wiebes' retreat-centre south of Edmonton. Wiebe recalls that it was one of the most successful seminars ever to take place there.

Something of the substance of the on-going conversations between these two men found its way into Wiebe's fiction (*The Blue Mountains of China*, for example, is richly informed by Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*), and, in recent years, some scholars have begun to explore the relationships between their work. Most notable among these, perhaps, is the late Thomas William

(Bill) Smyth (1937-1997), who completed his Ph.D dissertation ("Rudy Wiebe as Novelist: Witness and Critic Without Apology")–a study focusing on the intellectual/creative exchange between Yoder and Wiebe–at the University of Toronto's Centre for the Study of Religion in spring 1997, just prior to Smyth's sudden death.[1] Bill Smyth's passionate interest in the intersections of Yoder's and Wiebe's work prompted him to travel to Indiana in 1995 to interview Yoder about the subject. In John Howard Yoder's last letter to Rudy Wiebe, dated June 11, 1995, Yoder makes explicit reference to Smyth's visit, remarking that "he seems to know quite a lot about your writing."

As for "Flowers For Approaching the Fire," it is not surprising that Rudy Wiebe, much of whose work has been concerned with telling the stories of people whose voices have been or would be silenced by those who control the discourse of particular times, should here express interest in and appreciation for the work of Thieleman van Braght, the compiler and writer of the "life stories and death accounts" of over 4000 men and women who died as Christian Martyrs from the time of Christ until the middle of the seventeenth century. Scholars interested in the texture of the theology that finds expression throughout Wiebe's work, and others, will indeed find in these "points of meditation," as Wiebe refers this piece, something, as he puts it, "to ponder."

Hildi Froese Tiessen, *Literary Editor*

[1] For an introduction to Smyth's exploration of some of the theological strands in Wiebe's work, see T.W. Smyth, "*My Lovely Enemy* Revisited," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 63 (Spring 1998).

Flowers for Approaching the Fire:
a meditation on
The Bloody Theatre, or Martyrs Mirror

Rudy Wiebe

Ladies and gentlemen, friends of the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers:

Last summer I was asked to introduce an exhibit called *The Mirror of the Martyrs* then opening at the Provincial Museum here in Edmonton. This exhibit of physical items, audio, pictures, and books–which had travelled to over forty different places in North America–recalled the political and religious conflict during the Reformation in Europe four hundred years ago; it presented "the drama of people, obedient to state and church, torturing and killing people who claimed a higher obedience."

Anyone who saw this exhibit was faced with questions:

– Why did supposedly good people imprison, torture, and kill their fellow citizens?

– Why did good and decent people resist state authorities to the point of enduring deaths reserved for the worst of criminals?

Rudy Wiebe is the author of *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962), *The Blue Mountains of China* (1970), *My Lovely Enemy* (1983), and five other novels, including *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973) and *A Discovery of Strangers* (1994)–both winners of the Governor General's Award for fiction. His most recent book, *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman* (1998), is a work of non-fiction co-authored with Yvonne Johnson.

A version of this meditation was first prepared for the opening of *The Mirror of the Martyrs* exhibit at the Provincial Museum in Edmonton, Alberta on July 20, 1997. He presented this version on March 28, 1998 at First Presbyterian Church in Edmonton, when the entire program was repeated as a benefit event for the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. On both occasions, Wiebe's talk was accompanied by choral and solo music by Edmonton composer Carol Dyck, including Dyck's "Songs for the Longest Night" and three song settings of poems by Winnipeg poet Sarah Klassen.

These are hard and complex questions, and I would like to briefly lead your thinking about them in a series of *Seven Notes*. These notes are not exhaustive; they are simply points of meditation, among many possible others, to ponder.

NOTE ONE: The exhibit at the Provincial Museum is gone, but the questions it raised certainly are not. In fact, they are the kinds of questions people concerned with the work the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers does continuously face. I know they are the kind of questions that many of you have experienced not only in your mind and imagination–as I have, thinking over the years about these matters–but also in your very flesh and bones. Because you know your relatives and friends, persons you love, have experienced pain and suffering; perhaps they are enduring them at this very moment. One of the most important purposes of the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, this organization we celebrate tonight, is to provide assistance and understanding to people who have been forced to live through such horrors in our twentieth-century world. Perhaps that is why the organizers of this benefit asked me to repeat some of the remarks I made last summer about the Mirror of the Martyrs: because we all know very well that the violence and the martydom goes on. In fact, statistics underscore what the media newscasts of the world tell us: this our century now drawing to a close, so "civilized," so alert to individual and even animal and environmental "rights," the twentieth century, has had more martyrs, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, political–you could all add groups to that list–more martyrs than any other century in history.

I will try to differentiate between suffering and martyrdom in a later note, but before I do that I must warn you that what I have to say tonight is no pleasant entertainment. These stories are brutal, they cannot help but be, and any touch of beauty in them only underscores their violent ugliness. But we know what life can be like, how side-by-side contradictions often exist, and this leads to:

NOTE TWO: The fact that the large and highly popular exhibit which immediately preceded *The Mirror of the Martyrs* at our provincial museum last summer was a bitterly ironic comment on our human situation: how we

long for beauty and gentleness and peace for ourselves, but how we are so powerfully attracted to the violence of past human history. The exhibit preceding was *Genghis Khan, Treasures of Inner Mongolia*, and I cannot think of two subjects that, shown one after the other, could demonstrate more vividly the farthest bounds of human experience and values.

Genghis Khan was the kind of man history gives us only too often: the ultimate incarnation of the terrifying, unstoppable warrior leader; Genghis Khan was a nomadic Mongolian herdsman driven, as it seems, by pitiless vengeance to try to conquer, by force, the entire world known in the thirteenth century. And he very nearly did so–when he died in 1227, his empire stretched from the Pacific Ocean to the Black Sea and his army was at the gates of Vienna. He was capable of doing this, as historian John Keegan puts it (*A History of Warfare*, 1993), because "he was untroubled by any of the monotheism of Buddhist or Christian concerns for mercy to strangers, or with personal perfection." Then, in contrast to the terror of Genghis Khan and his army, and the literally millions of human beings they destroyed, the Martyrs Mirror exhibit followed; it told us the stories of "the defenseless Christians" of the sixteenth century.

The merciless warrior who by mass killing becomes a world despot, the defenceless or non-resistant believer: both are human beings, yes, humanity is capable of both. They are opposite human extremes (and when you think about it, you might consider which it might be easier to be?), but these very extremes, Keegan notes, have shaped our civilization. They do so to this day. All you need do is think of the extremes of this century, as seen in men like Joseph Stalin–or–Martin Luther King; Adolf Hitler–or–Mahatma Gandhi; Idi Amin–or–Nelson Mandela.

You can make your own list, and as you do so, please notice what women come to your mind. Are there many? For example, with whom would you contrast Mother Teresa? Are the horrible extremes to be found only among *men*? If so, why is that?

NOTE THREE: The stories I want to talk to you about are in this immense book. It is still in print–just available in paperback!–but I have here both the hardcover fifteenth English edition, published in 1987, and this rare, leather-bound third English edition, the first full and complete English translation of it, published by the Mennonite Publishing Company in Elkhart, Indiana in 1886.

This old book consists of 1,093 large, double-column pages. It was first published in Dutch, in Holland in 1660 by Thieleman Jansz van Braght, and he compiled and wrote it from innumerable published and oral accounts. It contains the life stories and death accounts of over 4,000 individuals, beginning with Jesus himself and is, without a question, the greatest historical work and the most enduring monument of Mennonite writing. Listen carefully to the full *title*, as Joseph Sohm translated it in 1886:

THE
BLOODY THEATRE,
or
MARTYRS MIRROR
of the
DEFENSELESS CHRISTIANS
who baptized only upon Confession of Faith, and who suffered
and died for the testimony of Jesus, their Savior, from
the time of Christ to the year A. D. 1660

A long and complicated title. We need to take a few items in it apart to consider what this huge book really is.

First of all, it is called "The Bloody Theatre." Why?

Well, "bloody" is obvious enough. When a human limb or head is chopped off–as often happened–there is an enormous spout of blood. How many liters of blood does a human body contain? An unimaginably horrifying sight, a visual assault we sheltered Canadians really cannot conceive of. And many people saw it, because one major element of execution was that the public *must* see it: the events described in this book were not done in secret; these were not night arrests, disappearances that loved ones could search after for years and find no trace of–these were not the hidden killings that twentieth century tyrants love so much. This was bloody, public theatre.

The title in the original Dutch, "Tooneel," means "a stage, a place for display, for acting." In German it's "Schauplatz": a place where you see things that are exhibited; it also means the physical building where you stage plays. So this first section of the title makes it absolutely clear that, in the sixteenth century, martydom was an open, public act: a drama, complete with opening arrest, with imprisonments and often tortures to try to force people to change

their minds, with long trials and debates and counter-arguments–all happening before an observant public–with eventual conviction and then, the climax of the drama, the execution. The point is that people were supposed to see every detail of the drama, and in particular, be present at the execution.

The time and place of execution was announced by public crier throughout the town; the city square, where it often took place, would be packed with hundreds of spectators. The condemned persons were brought in carts guarded by soldiers to prevent any outbreak of support on their behalf. Sometimes they were led in chains–that is, if they could still walk after their torture–and, if they still had a tongue, they would preach or quote Scripture or, more usually, sing hymns of faith which often they had composed themselves. Thus they exhorted the public to stand fast, or to convert to the faith. Often they were gagged or tongue-screwed to prevent them from testifying, but they could still turn, smile, nod their beaten heads to the crowd, lift their chained hands to heaven.

And the spectators to this "bloody theatre" might very well include members of the condemneds' families, there to encourage them in their final witness for the faith. The crowd could respond as it pleased: in silence, or weeping, or shouting curses, or blessings and prayers. But the latter could be dangerous: you might be arrested on the spot, and you'd be next on trial. If you revealed too much, you could be dragged out of the audience and yourself become the leading actor in the next performance of this horrible drama.

Truly, a bloody theatre: the ultimate drama of life and death. This was no acting: it was literal life-on-the-line theatre. The fire really burned; the persons chained to stakes on the platforms (high, so all could see exactly how they reacted to the flames) were literally reduced to ashes. This takes a long time: a living human body contains many fluids and does not burn easily; and it takes even longer if you lay the fire far away from the post–which was sometimes done, as part of the sentence–to increase the pain of dying. The condemned roasts, slowly.

This was all done in public; a show. I suppose that if it were done today–as we hear some countries occasionally do–our equivalent of exhibiting might well be prime-time televison; I have no doubt that such a show would now have a world audience of billions. But in the sixteenth century, as Michel Foucault has pointed out, the theory of learning was that knowledge is constructed largely by analogy: you learn to know by recognizing the

resemblances between things. You learn by watching, by doing. As Foucault writes (*Discipline and Punish*, 1975, 1977): "Language justified itself, its manner of declaring its existence" by describing "the *theatre* of life or the *mirror* of nature."

Just to explain this a little: many people talk to me about the stories I write. They ask, "But are they true?" and what I think they mean by that is, "Did the events you describe happen exactly as you wrote them?" That is, "Do your words literally reflect the events that took place?" I of course respond by asking, "Reflect *whose* memory of the event?"–existentialist questions like that. But we can't go into those things here.

For van Braght, the compiler and writer of this book first published in Dutch in 1660, true language was exactly that: a mirror of nature, of what had actually taken place. He writes that the book "is a representation or exhibition of the blood, suffering and death of those who . . . for their conscience sake, shed their blood," and insists that his language literally reflects the life and death experiences of the martyrs: the text in this book mirrors an exact reflection of what was said and done. Hence this title: *The Bloody Theatre, or the Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians.* It is a long title for what is, for me, one of the world's most enduring and significant books.

NOTE FOUR: The word "martyr" needs some discussion. We must use language as precisely as possible; after all, we are not ad writers or politicians. "Martyr" and "martyrdom" are often used too vaguely to reveal the true power of what they mean.

Martyr comes from the same Greek word as the one meaning "witness"; its Aryan root simply means "to remember." As such, it is a word parallel to the Latin "confess" and, in the early Christian tradition, "martyr" is the word for those who "witness" or "confess" to their Christian faith to the point of death. Building from that, today the word carries the wider meaning of anyone who endures great suffering–even to the point of death–through steadfast devotion to a belief, a religious faith, an ideal, or a cause. The *martyr* is one who will not renounce a belief, who endures and witnesses to his or her belief to the limits of life, into death itself.

To keep this meaning clear, those who die in wars, in terrorist attacks, in racial purges, in "ethnic cleansing"–that grotesque phrase invented I think to make us feel easier about the horrible act of massacre–those who suffer this

"cleansing" due to their racial ethnicity: these people are not necessarily martyrs. I am in no way trying to deny the significance or pain of their suffering; I am merely trying to be accurate about the use of the word "martyr," which I take to be that *martyrdom* means it must be possible to *renounce* something in order to avoid the pain, the punishment your non-renunciation brings.

For example: two of my father's brothers, Peter and Heinrich Wiebe, were arrested, tortured, and eventually murdered in Orenburg, Russia, during the so-called Stalinist "purges" of 1937-1938. I would not call my uncles martyrs. Their deaths were prolonged and horrible, but they died for other reasons (Stalin's paranoia, secret police, politics?), not because they were professing Christians. Thousands of others who were not Christians died in the same way at that time; none of them could renounce anything to avoid their fate. In the same way, most of the millions who died in the Nazi holocaust were not martyrs either. They could not deny, renounce their Jewish or their Gypsy blood. They suffered *genocide*–another, and closely related horror the twentieth century is capable of–but not martyrdom in the sense we mean here.

Of course, these words can overlap: Martin Luther King was assassinated–but was he a martyr? He could not renounce his black ancestry, but perhaps he could have renounced his vision–so which was the reason for the lethal bullet? Obviously meanings do overlap, but let's try to be clear in our thinking when they do.

The over four thousand people whose life stories are recorded in *The Martyrs Mirror* died, not because of their race or their political convictions but because they steadfastly refused to change their religious beliefs. The Reformation in Europe transformed Christianity forever, yes, and eventually for the better, but for more than a century it was a time of grotesque killing in the name of "true" Christianity. There were particularly many "executions," so called, of believers in Holland because Holland was under the political control of Spain and the Spanish kings, both Charles V and Philip II, believed they ruled by divine right. They considered themselves to be God's representatives on earth and, since they were Roman Catholics, only such believers could live in their domains. They used their secular armies to enforce that religious concept: if you were suspected of "wrong belief," the army arrested you and then you were examined as in a trial by the church authorities–i.e., the Inquisition–to make you declare your "heresy."

Two key test questions were always asked of you: 1) Did you baptize your infant when it was born? 2) Do you believe that in holy communion the bread and wine turn into the literal flesh and blood of Jesus Christ? If you could not immediately and unequivocably answer "Yes" to both, you had proven yourself to be not of the true Roman Catholic faith; therefore, you either recanted or you died.

Philip II's policy towards Holland during his long reign (1556-1598) was "rather a desert than a land full of heretics." His instruments for this policy were Cardinal Grannvella of the Inquisition and the Duke of Alva with his army. Together they formed what was called "A Council of Blood" and killed over 18,000 people for their faith. They raged especially hard in Flanders (presently Belgium), from Antwerp to Amsterdam and The Hague. I cannot review here the horrors of what was done: much is recorded, with stomach-turning vividness, in this book. A good deal of it is given in dramatic form: the actual records of trials, the questions asked by the most learned theologians available and the responses given by ordinary working people, many of whom could not read or write but who had memorized entire books of the Bible. For example, in 1549 a man named Eelken was arrested in Leeuwarden who "boldly confessed his faith" before the lords.

> Eelken was then asked again, "What do you hold concerning the sacrament?"
> Answer: "I know nothing of your baked God."
> Question: "Friend, take care what you say; such words cost necks . . . . What do you hold concerning our holy Roman church?"
> Answer: "I know nothing of your holy church. I do not know it; I never in all my life was in a holy church."

The dialogue at the trials is usually not so cutting and ironic; but it is always deadly for the believer. Eelken is executed with the sword–a relatively merciful death, quick and without prolonged suffering, if you got a good swordsman.

Most of the stories are not so defiantly up-beat; the deaths are not so quick, and the believers are ordinary people, not heroes; they suffer the extremes of hope and despair. As many women as men suffered; let me here tell of one woman, Ursul van Essen who, together with her husband and two other

women, were arrested by the troops of the Duke of Alva in Maastrich in 1570. They all refused to renounce their faith, and Ursul was severely tortured. She was placed twice on the wheel of the rack and stretched, her body held in position by a ratchet, notch by notch. However, despite unimaginable pain she steadfastly refused to speak the names of any other believers, and it is recorded that a Jesuit advised that she be scourged:

> The executioner tied her hands together, and drew her up [on a hanging post], and as she was hanging there he cut open her chemise with a knife baring her back, and severely scourged her with rods; this was done twice in one day.

(Jan Luyken made an engraving of this scene for the 1685 edition of the *Martyrs Mirror.*)

Finally, enduring all pain, on January 9, 1570 she was led separately–so that she and her husband could not comfort each other–to the place of execution. She asked the lords,

> "And may I not sing a little, and say something now and then?" But this they would not permit her . . . . The executioner had a piece of wood, which he put in Ursel's mouth, and tied up her mouth with a cloth . . . . Thus Ursel . . . went to Vrijthof (the place where she was to be offered up), the people complaining greatly, because her mouth had been gagged so that she could not speak one word.
> When Ursel arrived at the scaffold which had been erected, she ascended it quietly as a lamb, and went directly into the [straw] hut, and the executioner immediately set fire to the same; and thus she was burned to ashes.

NOTE FIVE: Torture. We must, for a few moments, consider that frightening word. Let us be formal about it: here is a French encyclopedia definition quoted by Foucault: *torture* is "corporal punishment painful to a more or less horrible degree . . . . an inexplicable phenomenon that the extension of man's imagination creates out of the barbarous and cruel."

In the hands of the state, death-torture is a technique of maintaining life in pain by, as it were, subdividing life into a thousand, endless deaths each more painful than the last. As Foucault points out, there is a kind of legal code to pain, and the fact that the person groans, cries out in suffering, is part of the ceremonial ritual that is required in "proper, legal" torture. The legal point was that the kings and the bishops of the sixteenth century (and I think some of the rulers in the world to this day) held it was their absolute–nay, God-given–right to assert their power in the world over what people did and thought *because they* (the kings and bishops) *were acting on God's behalf by enforcing His Divine Law on earth*. (Does this sound familiar?) In that sense, the death of the person at the end of the formal judicial ritual takes on even greater intensity because the death, "hastened by pain . . . occurs exactly at the juncture between the judgement of men and the judgement of God." The judgement of men–the final burnings–are the earthly representations (for all to see and learn) of the eternal judgement of hell to which these heretics are now going. "The eternal game has already begun": the torture of the execution *anticipates, begins, and leads into* the punishments of the beyond–which will last for all eternity.

And herein lies the ultimate power of the martyrs' singing songs, testifying, waving happily to the throngs as they were taken to execution. They did not curse the emperor, or the church, who had such overwhelming power to hurt their bodies. They accepted the torch quietly, even gladly, not because they were fanatics, or out of their minds–no–they thereby gave the ultimate witness to their faith: they knew this judicial torture, this excruciating fire, represented nothing but the final act of what "carnal" men could inflict upon them. By their calm, by their very joy, they declared that this fire of wood and straw was earthly, momentary, and, though its leaping flames would certainly kill them physically, this was not for them the gateway into everlasting, burning hell. No. These flames were their bright entrance into the Eternal City of God.

NOTE SIX: Spain's enslavement of the Dutch could not last, and, after Spain's forcing a form of religion upon so many–brutalizing and killing them publically, expropriating their property, causing many of the most industrious citizens to flee the country, taking their skills and what property they could with them–military rebellion erupted. By 1581 the Dutch prince William of

Orange united North Holland against Spain, but war waged on in many vicious forms–in all, over eighty years of conflict–until the Dutch gained their ultimate freedom from Spain in 1648. By the late 1650s then, when van Braght began working on *The Martyrs Mirror*, there was very little inquisition or burning of heretics in Holland. So, why did he write it?

He believed times that are "quieter and more comfortable" can be very dangerous for those who would live "the true separated Christian life which is the outgrowth of faith," and he wanted to strengthen the believers' faith with these stories. They must be remembered, "the many beautiful examples of men, women, youths and maidens who faithfully followed their Savior Christ Jesus in the true faith . . . . well knowing that they [who would] live godly lives must suffer persecution."

And then van Braght goes on to write one of the finest declarations of freedom of conscience ever composed. I excerpt:

> Who would execute judgement of conscience upon a human being? Who can fathom a man's heart save He who sees all things . . . and penetrates the hearts and knows the thoughts of all men?
>
> God alone can judge us–the human examiners of faith can easily be blinded, deceived by lies and a hypocritical life . . . .
>
> It behooves a king to tolerate all sorts of doctrines, persuasion and heretics in his country [for if] in any country several princes, differing in religions should come to rule one after another [as was often the case in Europe, with England the best known to us] and each seeking to enforce his faith, they would pollute the land with the blood of its inhabitants, such a country would be nothing else than a hell . . . a lamentable misery, as ships on the turbulent ocean are rocked by storm and wind till at last they suddenly perish. [And] how can they so greatly hate and cast out any one for their faith, even though he should err? This is not the nature of the children of God, who do not suppress even the unrighteous, even as it is not the nature of sheep to devour wolves, but to flee from them, and suffer devouring.

Perhaps that is too strong for us, in our century: that we should, for our faith, willingly "suffer devouring." To put it another way: that the righteous subsume, within their very own bodies, the pain and suffering of others. Can we, who perhaps believe ourselves to be righteous believers, can we accept such a burden?

I do not know; I cannot speak for anyone. As van Braght illustrates so often in this formidable book, each person chooses for himself or herself; each must give personal account, even, he insists, the very king himself. What I do know is that the people whose stories he has gathered for us to read four centuries later took up this burden of suffering with fear and joy. For it is exactly at that moment of accepting pain, in joy, that the powerlessness of the martyr becomes the greatest possible power. At that moment of heaviest burden and overwhelming suffering, no power on earth can touch you.

NOTE SEVEN: I will simply conclude by reading from two amazing lives, as they are told by van Braght in all their poignant detail. The first, the story of Dirk Willems, is one of the most widely known; it also has a dramatic engraving by Jan Luyken.

> In the year 1569, a pious, faithful brother and follower of Jesus Christ, named Dirk Willems, was apprehended at Asperen, in Holland . . . . Concerning his apprehension, it is stated by trustworthy persons, that when he fled he was hotly pursued by a thief-catcher, and as there had been some frost, said Dirk Willems ran before over the ice, getting across with considerable peril. The thief-catcher following him broke through, when Dirk Willems, perceiving that the former was in danger of his life, quickly returned and aided him in getting out, and thus saved his life. The thief-catcher wanted to let him go, but the burgomaster, very sternly called him to consider his oath, and thus he was again seized . . . [and] after severe imprisonment and great trials . . . put to death by a lingering fire . . . .
>
> . . . the place where this offering occurred was without Asperen, on the side of Leerdam, and . . . a strong east wind blowing that day, the kindled fire was much driven away

> from the upper part of his body, as he stood at the stake; in consequence of which this good man suffered a lingering death, insomuch that in the town of Leerdam, towards which the wind was blowing, he was heard to exclaim over seventy times: "O my Lord; my God." . . . .

From the second and final story I want to read, I get the title for this talk: *Flowers for Approaching the Fire*.

When I was first working on this talk, my friend Mary Wright told me that she had a copy of this 1886 edition of *The Martyrs Mirror*; her family came to Didsbury, Alberta from Ontario early in this century, and the book had been passed on to her as a family heirloom. Then Mary's daughter, Megen Collins, told me a little story about the book–and I love these stories, they are the way books and lives intermingle. Megan said she remembered the book always being around. It was very large and she hadn't read it, but sometimes, when she opened it and looked at the pictures, sometimes there were prairie flowers drying between its leaves.

Now, I love books; I don't really believe in using them as a flower press–but in this case, the more I thought about it, the lovelier the story became. Believe me, this is a book very difficult to read. Even in short bits, sixteen centuries of cruelty done in the name of Christianity is very hard to take. Yet, between these horrible acts of human beings, the wild, uncontrollable beauty of flowers is laid.

And of course, when we think of flowers, Christians remember the words of Jesus:

> Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin, yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

Those poor, tortured men and women, facing all the assembled, rich, splendidly dressed lords of the state and of the church–in the eyes of Jesus, who was truly "dressed" the most beautifully? Pressing wild flowers between the leaves of this book is right, and lovely.

And in this immense library of lives gloriously lived and ended, there is of course also a flower story to discover. It is the story of a zealous Lutheran

minister–van Braght was completely ecumenical in his accounts of martyrs–named Leonhard Keyser:

> In the second year of his ministry [1527] Leonhard Keyser was apprehended at Scharding, in Bavaria, and condemned by the bishop of Passau and others . . . to be burned on Friday before St. Lawrence day, in August . . . . Having bound him on a cart, they took him to the fire, the priests going alongside, and speaking Latin to him, but he, on account of the people, answered them in German . . . .When he came out into the field, and was approaching the fire, he, bound as he was, leaned down at the side of the cart, and plucked a flower with his hand, saying to the judge, who rode on horseback along side of the cart: "Lord judge, here I pluck a flower; if you can burn this flower and me, you have justly condemned me; but, on the other hand, if you cannot burn me and this flower in my hand, consider what you have done and repent." Thereupon the judge and the three executioners threw an extraordinary quantity of wood into the fire, in order to burn him immediately to ashes by the great fire. But when the wood was entirely burned up, his body was taken from the fire uninjured. Then the three executioners and their assistants built another great fire of wood, which, when it was consumed, his body still remained uninjured, only his hair and his nails were somewhat burnt brown, and, the ashes having been removed from his body, the latter was found smooth and clear, and the flower in his hand, not withered, or burnt in the least, the executioners then cut his body into pieces, which they threw into a new fire. When the wood was burned up, the pieces lay unconsumed in the fire. Finally they took the pieces and threw them into the river Inn [which runs into the Danube at Passau]. This judge was so terrified by this occurrence that he resigned his office, and moved to another place. His chief servant, who was with the judge, and saw and heard all this, came to us in Moravia, became our brother and lived and died piously. That it might not be

> forgotten our teachers have recorded this as it came from his own lips, and now cause it to be promulgated and made known.

"That it might not be forgotten." What is it we should not forget?

We should not forget those who we know have suffered, and especially those who died as martyrs for their faith and convictions. We must remember them, and tell their stories to each other.

And, I would say, there is one other thing we should not forget:

When you are approaching the fire, remember this: flowers are your best, your only protection.

Three Poems

Sarah Klassen

PRAISE GOD

Bells toll a sombre invitation
and the people come.
The woman's shoes have been removed
for death. Doomed,
she's arrayed in a dull red
petticoat. Before the end
she lifts a slender hand
like this
as if in benediction,
pulls from her aching mouth the wooden gag
meant to keep her mute
and begins
bravely
singing her terrified heart out.

Adriantje Jans of Malenaarsgraaf
Dordrecht, 1572

These poems were set to music by Carol Dyck, and performed to accompany both presentations of Rudy Wiebe's meditation, "Flowers for Approaching the Fire." "Praise God" was first published in *The Fiddlehead* 182 (Winter 1994); "Spoils," in *Event* 23.3 (Winter 1994/95); and "Recanting," in *Descant 96* 28.1 (Spring 1997). Sarah Klassen's new collection of poetry, "Dangerous Elements," which includes her entire suite of martyr poems, is scheduled to be published by Quarry Press in fall 1998.

SPOILS

What's left of you is this letter
addressed to your eldest, a boy,
begging him with your whole heart to follow
Jesus, watch over his younger brother
and look for his mother in the shining
new Jerusalem.

That letter's left, and the sharp tongue
screw the tormentors used
to prevent your *good witness*. Your weeping
son plucked it from warm ashes
when you were gone
and we have it.
Everything else tangible went up in flame
or scattered like straw
before the indifferent wind.

Maeyken Wens
Antwerp, 1573

RECANTING

Felistis for her execution tied
a snow-white apron around her waist.
She was always a good woman:

served the jailer's wife any way she could
up until the burning: cleaning pots, setting the table,
keeping the fire alive in the kitchen. Humble enough
she volunteered to take the stinking garbage out.
But won't you run away? the jailer's wife
asked. Felistis searched
the unexamined corners of her heart.
Convicted
she admitted: knowledge
of the body's frailty, fear, unbridled desire
to keep on breathing. To behold the sun.

Compelled to withdraw the offer Felistis remained
faultless to the end.

Felistis Jans, surnamed Resinx
Amsterdam, 1553

Book Review

John Howard Yoder. *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

In this last book to be published before his death, John Howard Yoder took on the task of clarifying and defending his life's work in biblical ethics. It is explicitly and self-consciously about the theologian himself. This is evident in several transparent ways. First, Yoder informs readers in the Introduction that his aim here is to correct the "misunderstanding and misrepresentation" of his position "by friends as well as friendly critics" as advocating a "sectarian" isolation of the ethical life of the church from public life and a rejection of public politics. "The essays in this collection," he says, "are intentionally devoted to demonstrating the wrongness of that characterization of my stance [as 'against the nations']."

Secondly, the whole book, mostly a collection of previously unpublished work, is indeed structured around this goal. The first section contains his most recent essays, all of which defend the claim that the ethics of Jesus (grounded in the ethics of the Jewish people in exile) is an ethic "for the nations," and not just for the community of believers. The following three sections contain much earlier essays and lectures, written as early as 1963, which Yoder offers as evidence that this theme has always been present in his thought. Thirdly, to reinforce the point, all of the earlier essays are supplemented with interpretive footnotes added by Yoder for inclusion in this book. Most of these notes are references to his other publications, designed to show that they fit together into one coherent whole.

To a great extent the strategy succeeds admirably. Consequently, the book not only goes a long way toward meeting Yoder's objective, but also, perhaps more interestingly, illustrates why the misunderstanding of his views could have occurred so easily. The language of the earlier essays has more the "against the nations" sectarian flavor than the later ones. For example, the early essays emphasize the distinctiveness of the ethic of Jesus over against the ethical outlook of the non-Christian social order. Christian ethics is "for

Christians," and the larger society and its political structures cannot be expected to understand or appropriate it. The tone is one of the "over-against" nature of the Christian gospel–it stands in harsh judgment on an irredeemable social order.

In the later essays both the language and the tone are altered. Here the dominant image is God's command through Jeremiah to the people of Israel in exile to "Seek the peace of the city where I have sent you," which, Yoder says, "engaged the Jews to live *for the nations*." The earlier language of church "against" a world that can never be Christian gives way to a language of church as teacher and example "for" a world that can benefit from it (even if it will never be fully Christian). While the earlier essays insist upon the distinctiveness of the Christian ethic from all other ways of life, to which it is always an "offense," in the later essays such claims are moderated–"I am not preoccupied with disengaging the distinctiveness of Christianity," Yoder says. Christian ethics is not "just for Christians."

While the tone and language change in the later essays, Yoder succeeds in demonstrating that the basic axioms of his view have not changed: (1) The primary responsibility of the church is itself to live according to the discipline of Christ, as demonstrated in the historical person of Jesus; (2) The fundamental elements of this ethic–love, forgiveness, servanthood, nonviolence–contradict the dominant values of non-Christian society, which are based on the necessity of power, violence and revenge; (3) The social responsibility of Christians is *not* to "take charge" of that social order or to "make history come out right"; (4) The Christian gospel does not provide a blueprint for the just or good society. The identification of the gospel with any political ideology is idolatry; (5) The Christian hope for history is ultimately in the redemptive work of God in the world. It is God alone to whom the church must look to "fight for us." These axioms form a consistent, unifying thread running through all these essays, confirming Yoder's claim that he has always been committed to the view that the Christian ethic is not sectarian but truly a vision "for the nations."

While Yoder's collection provides a strong case for the consistency of his stance over the years, it is unfortunate that even the more recent essays stake out little new theological ground. This is all the more disappointing since this volume has turned out to be Yoder's final book. It leaves unanswered

so many of the questions his friends and critics have put to him. For example, Yoder's intellectual strength is his ability to uncover the flaws in the philosophical and political ideologies of mainstream cultures–from Babylon and Athens to Constantinian Rome and Protestant America. He can reduce the epistemological foundations of modern ethics to ashes in a paragraph, but he exempts his own interpretations of the Bible and the Judeo-Christian story from the implications of his own critique. All the ethical outlooks of the non-Christian world are subject to the confusion of language and reason symbolized by Babel, but (Yoder's interpretation of) the biblical canon stands immune to the critique of Babel. Yoder is staunchly anti-foundationalist in his view of the possibility of an ethic that Christians and non-Christians might share, but he is strangely foundationalist in his biblical hermeneutics–there is only one right way to tell the story of Jesus. Its implications for the communal life of the church are clear; the problem is not one of *knowing* the truth but of *living* it. But are things all this clear for the church? Doesn't it learn much from the "world" about how to interpret its own story, just as the "world" learns from it? This is one respect in which Yoder's essays reinforce the criticism that his view is stereotypically "sectarian."

These essays also fail to discuss another critical issue which Yoder needed to address in order to provide a persuasive ethic for the church and "the nations." His main point has always been that the ethic of the church is not the ethic of power, control, and "social engineering" which characterizes non-Christian approaches to society and politics. The "politics of Jesus" provide a radical alternative order for the community of believers, based on love, forgiveness, and servanthood. So, what then does this alternative community look like? How does it handle the problems of human finitude and failing in its own organizational structures? What do these alternative values mean in everyday practice? By Yoder's own argument, the success of the community of believers in implementing an alternative way of life is the only validation of its witness to the world. Yet his writings have always been evasive on this issue. He avoids it with the argument that practical details cannot be specified in a blueprint applying to all times and places. They must be worked out in the day-to-day discernment guided by the Holy Spirit.

But surely this is not enough. If there is a better way to do things than the way nations and states typically do them, why can't they be specified? It

does not help to say, as Yoder always liked to say, that the church must avoid the temptation to "take charge" and "engineer" society. For, if the church is to establish an alternative moral community, then it must "take charge" of its own institutions and "engineer" them in certain ways. An ethic based on the inappropriateness of "taking charge" is no help here.

Yoder was well aware of these challenges. Those who admire the power of his thought and the insightfulness of his critiques of culture can only hope that they are addressed in other unpublished essays which may appear posthumously.

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