



# ***The Conrad Grebel Review***

**Fall 2011**



# ***The Conrad Grebel Review***

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*Cover photograph: Solidarity protest in Gdansk, Poland (1980) by T. Michalak (public domain.)*

## Foreword

We are delighted to offer in this issue a set of articles focusing on the recently published *Nonviolence – A Brief History: The Warsaw Lectures* (Baylor University Press, 2010), which presents a series of addresses given by John Howard Yoder in 1983. Six articles written by authors from various disciplinary and religious perspectives take up the cross-cultural applicability of Yoder’s framework, the relationship between nonviolence and the particularity of the church, the “realism” of Yoder’s account of nonviolent peacemaking, and the relationship between nonviolence and the Jewish concept of Shabbat. The Introduction by Guest Editor Paul H. Martens, who was a co-editor of *Nonviolence – A Brief History*, provides a helpful overview and suggests how these essays can help ask “further and perhaps sharper questions, both of ourselves and of Yoder.”

*Jeremy M. Bergen*  
Editor

*Stephen A. Jones*  
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## Introduction

*Paul H. Martens*

To paraphrase an occasional observation whispered – usually inflected with a hint of disdain – in Mennonite circles over the past few years, “John Howard Yoder has published more since he passed away than he did when he was alive!” It is doubtful whether this statement is true, but the sentiment expressed does not depend on its truth. In a subtle way, it suggests that perhaps we already have enough Yoder. As one complicit in the production of Yoder’s posthumous publications, I simply offer that as long as Yoder continues to fascinate, intrigue, trouble, and encourage us as we pursue faithful living today, so be it! This was my hope as one of the editors of *Nonviolence – A Brief History: The Warsaw Lectures*, and it is my hope as one of the editors of this special issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review*.

The lectures gathered under the title of *Nonviolence – A Brief History* were presented in May 1983 in Warsaw, Poland at the invitation of Witold Benedyktowicz, president of the Polish Ecumenical Council. To understate the case, it was a tense time as the Solidarity (*Solidarność*) Movement was threatening the hold of the Polish Communist Party through mass strikes held just a couple of years before. And, to add to the mix, the relationship between the dominant Roman Catholic Church and the rest of the churches in Poland was less than cordial.

Yoder sensitively stepped into this virtual minefield and, without explicitly mentioning the specifics of the Polish context, offered eleven lectures that, among other claims, address how Christians should embody nonviolence, how the church’s nonviolent witness relates to other religious and secular social thought and movements of the twentieth century, and how Poland’s minority churches should understand the most fruitful trajectories within the Roman Catholic Church.

Although several of the essays in this issue provide partial summaries of Yoder’s *Nonviolence – A Brief History*, it may be helpful to outline the basic structure of that text up front. The eleven lectures making up the text trace a single trajectory, namely the increasing relevance of nonviolent thought and

action. The trajectory takes four steps. First, Yoder outlines the promise of nonviolent action based on the lessons learned from Tolstoy, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr, and others in the twentieth century (chapters 1-3). Second, he addresses two common objections to nonviolence – (a) just war logic and (b) biological and sociological theories – in order to demonstrate that these objections, in reality, support nonviolence in significant ways (chapters 4-5). Third, Yoder returns to more familiar territory by contextualizing the twentieth-century movement within a rich Jewish-Christian framework (chapters 6-8). To conclude, he outlines the hope for the future by illuminating how the nonviolent movement is blooming and bearing fruit within the contemporary Roman Catholic Church (chapters 9-11).<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

This issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review* is evidence that lectures given in Warsaw twenty-eight years ago still speak today. I am humbled by, and most grateful for, the six thoughtful and provocative engagements with those lectures that are gathered here. Working on these pieces was a luxury that I do not deserve! Here I will offer a few introductory comments about each contribution and point towards a couple of debates that transcend the individual papers.

In the first essay – “Is Warsaw Close Enough?” – Ann Riggs queries and extends Yoder’s text from a Kenyan perspective, one that is daily challenged by the temptation of corruption and its intimate relationship with violence. Drawing on Dom Hélder Câmara’s description of corruption as “first violence,” Riggs utilizes Yoder’s definition of the polis, “of the wholeness of man in his socialness” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 95), to articulate a rejection of corruption because it is an action guided by a perverted sense of the social. Against this background, the lessons of Tolstoy, King, and Gandhi distilled by Yoder can address from different perspectives how hate is overcome by love. Facing a society built largely upon corruption and violence, Riggs concludes with confident hope by returning to Yoder’s claim that “The means is the end in process of becoming” (ibid., 46) in order to embrace the task of transforming Kenyan society as well as the task of becoming a new people of peace in the Friends Theological College a little

more every day.

Transporting us from contemporary Kenya to the civil rights movement in America, Romand Coles offers both a strong affirmation and a critique of nonviolence in the second essay. In the first part, he integrates a reading of Yoder's *The War of the Lamb* into the concerns of *Nonviolence – A Brief History* for the purpose of developing Yoder's suggestive explorations of how the resonant energies of love and vengeance are intertwined in human interaction. Against the real temptation to violence, Coles highlights the intensity and quality of spiritual resonance that releases one to "do the right thing." This is the necessary insight that allows one to see "how nonviolent interaction might become a powerful world-transformative *movement* articulating the 'grain of the universe'" (Coles, 23). Yet, despite his creative illumination of resonant causality in Yoder's "wild peace," he refuses to follow Yoder's unconditional nonviolence. He further problematizes Yoder's reading of the history of the Civil Rights Movement, arguing that a fuller reading reveals that self-defense (or the threat of it) was often required to make space for nonviolence to be publicly proclaimed. And in his conclusion he, like Riggs, brings the conversation into the present by suggesting – unlike Riggs – that unconditional nonviolence risks being implicated in sustaining situations of extreme terror.

In the third essay, Matthew Porter and Myles Wernitz (co-editors of *Nonviolence – A Brief History*) attend directly to Yoder's display of the relationship between nonviolence and the church by contrasting it with that of Stanley Hauerwas's *The Peaceable Kingdom*, published the same year Yoder presented his Warsaw lectures. Despite Hauerwas's proclaimed indebtedness to Yoder's nonviolence and ecclesiology in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Porter and Wernitz argue that the church plays a fundamentally different role in the practice of nonviolence for both thinkers. To put it bluntly, the church forms one virtuously in the practices of nonviolence according to Hauerwas, while a conversion to nonviolence leads one into the church according to Yoder. This difference, say these commentators, allows Yoder to begin to account for nonviolence outside the church, and therefore reflects a significant set of disagreements between him and Hauerwas on the church's role in relation to nonviolence, a set of disagreements that discomfits Hauerwas's strong claim of indebtedness.



Mark Thiessen Nation, in the fourth essay, challenges what he takes to be problematic attributions – the terms “ecumenical” and “cosmopolitan” – assigned to Yoder in the Introduction to *Nonviolence – A Brief History* by the editors, especially and additionally singling out the critical interpretation of Yoder’s development I offered a few years ago in “Universal History and a Not-Particularly Christian Particularity.” (There I suggested a gradual evolution occurred in Yoder’s thought, namely toward positioning his ethical view as a sociological posture that is no longer particularly Christian.)<sup>2</sup> Reading the Introduction (authored by all three editors) through the critical conclusions of my article, Nation seeks to defend Yoder’s Christian particularity, both in its theological and ethical expression. Appealing to *The Priestly Kingdom*, *The Royal Priesthood*, and several other texts, he argues that although Yoder may not have been as careful as he could have been, he never really abandoned “his own particularistic, radically reformed, Christologically and ecclesialogically centered ethics” (Nation, 84).<sup>3</sup>

If Nation defends the Christian particularity of Yoder’s ethic, David Cortright pushes the conversation in the opposite direction. In the fifth essay – “Toward a Realistic Pacifism” – Cortright embraces Yoder’s appropriation of Jesus, Tolstoy, Gandhi, King, and Catholic peacemaking in order to call readers to work for justice in challenging the structures of power that reinforce oppression and exploitation, to return good for evil, and to continue to progress toward social and economic tolerability. Cortright also applauds Yoder’s insistence that Just War logic increasingly leads its practitioners to pragmatic pacifism. Yet Cortright moves further than Yoder by arguing that nonviolent discipline is possible without a religious foundation. Moving in the optimistic direction already suggested in the chapter of *Nonviolence – A Brief History* entitled “The Science of Conflict,” Cortright asserts that nonviolence is being effectively understood and applied in a thoroughly secular, pragmatic context more often than not.

Peter Ochs brings things to a close with comments on the “wonders” and “burdens” of Yoder’s approach to Judaism and, by extension, Yoder’s approach to the relationship between divine speech and human speech. While praising much of Yoder’s own practice, Ochs worries about Yoder’s occasional decidedly modern confidence that natural or human language can be trusted as equal to the task of disclosing the things of God, “the

good news.” He worries that Yoder overstates the cure for the Christian heritage of spiritualism by too precisely articulating nonviolence as “a piece of Christian religious law” (Ochs, 96) without appropriate provision for the inductive reasoning and debate common to the tradition of rabbinic case law. And, despite Yoder’s attempts to the contrary, Ochs argues that Yoder’s description of “Christianity,” with its confident overcoming of *mysterium*, becomes a form of conceptual totalization in the fashion of modern reason. Unfortunately, this totalization (even if nonviolent) is not banal, because modernity’s well-intentioned pursuit of universal truth and human welfare has tended to generate as much evil as good (Ochs, 92). Precisely to avoid this problem, Ochs concludes by outlining a hopeful, expansive notion of *Shabbat* – “the day of the completion of creation” (Ochs, 99) – in place of Yoder’s normative account of nonviolence.

\* \* \* \* \*

Not all of the contributors consider themselves adherents to nonviolence alone, nor do they all consider themselves Christians. As even the cursory summary sketched above suggests, their essays illuminate aspects of Yoder’s thought that help us ask further and perhaps sharper questions, both of ourselves and of Yoder. Yoder was a Christian who claimed nonviolence as normative. Yet because he explicitly describes nonviolence as a way of existence around which Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Hindus, and secular social theorists, political scientists, economists, and biologists should converge on their own terms (given time, he would no doubt address others too), he opened doors to conversation and debate well beyond his own experience and expertise. Yoder leaves us with a choice: either further these conversations or foreclose them (foreclosing is, of course, one way of furthering as well).

Therefore, there are several ways to invigorate conversations among and beyond these essays. With respect to a most basic form of the conversation on nonviolence as an ethical norm, we find that Riggs, Nation, and Cortright generally affirm Yoder’s position, while Coles and Ochs remain skeptical that nonviolence as a norm – at least an absolute norm – can be justified either theologically (Ochs) or historically (Coles). Further,

with respect to the relationship between a religious vision and nonviolence, we find that (1) Riggs affirms and extends Yoder's position with prayer and thanksgiving, while Nation sharply defends the Christian particularity of Yoder's nonviolence; (2) Cortright applauds Yoder while suggesting that social science may be self-sufficient in maintaining nonviolence; (3) Porter and Werntz are positioned somewhere between Nation and Cortright; and (4) Ochs argues that a humble understanding of God calls nonviolence into question. Clearly, discussion on this issue has a most vibrant future.

These are only the most obvious debates in these essays, and there are many more. It is my wish that readers will engage with the essays in the same hope with which Riggs concludes her contribution (if she will permit a slight paraphrase): Maybe we will go farther than Warsaw.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This summary is drawn from *Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 3. For a fuller summary, see pages 3 to 8 of that volume.

<sup>2</sup> See Paul Martens, "Universal History and a Not-Particularly Christian Particularity: Jeremiah and John Howard Yoder's Social Gospel," in *Power and Practices: Engaging the Work of John Howard Yoder*, ed. Jeremy M. Bergen and Anthony G. Siegrist (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2009), 131-46.

<sup>3</sup> This is not the place to respond fully to Nation's critique. In this context, I will make two brief comments: (1) equating my position with that of the other co-editors of *Nonviolence – A Brief History* assumes too much; and (2) a fuller articulation of my interpretation of Yoder's thought (and my understanding of the disagreement with Nation) is found in Paul Martens, *The Heterodox Yoder* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011).

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## **Is Warsaw Close Enough? Reading Yoder's *Nonviolence – A Brief History* in Kenya**

*Ann K. Riggs*

The publication in 2010 of John Howard Yoder's eleven 1983 Warsaw Lectures<sup>1</sup> brings them into my life early in my second year as head of Friends Theological College (FTC), a Quaker theological seminary in Western Kenya. As I consider using this brief history of nonviolence in one of the courses in ethics I teach, I sit about 25 miles from Kisumu, one of the areas hardest hit by the Kenyan post-election violence of early 2008. Those among our students who had been most directly traumatized by the post-election events have recently graduated, taking with them deep psychic and spiritual wounds that were, sadly, only partially healed by on-campus interventions. I have recently received a dignified elderly visitor who offered me a financial bribe if I would arrange a process he described as "reconciliation" between his younger relative, who is a former member of the college staff, and the college's board of governors.

Do these pieces fit together? Do the *Warsaw Lectures* speak to this time and place and the relationship between corruption and violence in a way that could assist in preparing our FTC students to respond to such situations in their own ministries? Or is this volume too theoretical, too outdated, or too Northern and Western to provide guidance here in the two-thirds world as the second decade of the third millennium begins? Is Warsaw close enough?

### **Corruption and Violence**

Logically speaking, corruption is a kind of violence. When officials in a public or private institution are diverted from carrying out the responsibilities to the common good by which it is defined, trust of and within the institution is violated. The fabric of specific interpersonal relationships is distorted. The context of the web of life actions the institution was designed to support or carry out is damaged. Gaps in the provision of goods or services emerge. The society or sub-society the institution serves is weakened. In ways large

or small the well-being of the entire human community and, in some cases, the wider web of life and the cosmos is lessened.

In two recent books about Kenya, the historical connection between public corruption and physical violence has been documented and painstakingly analyzed. In one of these volumes, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*, Caroline Elkins demonstrates the way corruption in the colonial administration laid the ground for the savagery of the Mau Mau and the British colonial responses to it.<sup>2</sup>

The British system of empire included using local collaborators in positions of authority over the wider population. In areas of East Africa where Kikuyu<sup>3</sup> people lived, such African imperial officials were viewed as exercising illegitimate authority. From a certain perspective one could say that everything done by these officials, called chiefs, was corrupt and not a carrying-out of legitimate social authority. More particularly, as long as the chiefs fulfilled the responsibilities assigned to their role by the higher colonial administration, primarily for collecting taxes and procuring labor for colonial projects and the farms of white settlers, they were not held accountable for financial or other corruption.<sup>4</sup> In return for loyalty, the chiefs, the Home Guard, and others connected with the colonialists were given special material privileges, another form of corruption.<sup>5</sup>

Those corruptions were among the factors leading to the rise of the Mau Mau, a secret Kikuyu society that emerged into public notice in the early 1950s. Mau Mau adherents pledged in highly ritualized ceremonies – what in other contexts might be called liturgies – to defend the unity and needs of the Kikuyu community and to resist and expel the intruding colonials. Mau Mau goals of land and freedom were served at varying levels of involvement and committed to with a series of oaths. The seventh and highest oath was *batuni*, the killing oath. In rapid escalation of atrocities and retaliatory atrocities, the Mau Mau and the British and Africans connected with them became locked in an embrace of violence. For some, land and freedom meant specifically a rejection of the imposed chiefs and their corruption.<sup>6</sup>

In another volume, *It's Our Turn to Eat: The Story of a Kenyan Whistle-Blower*, Michela Wrong recounts a more recent narrative of corruption and violence.<sup>7</sup> In the decades after independence, corruption became tied in a

special way to ethnicity, to tribe. Processes of giving favors to those of one's own tribe continued and deepened. Everyday services became something to be paid for. A study undertaken in 2001 by Transparency International found that the average urban-dwelling Kenyan paid 16 bribes a month, accounting for 31.4 percent of the average household's income.<sup>8</sup> Although many live in rural areas, where life situations are generally harsher, a 1998 study found that Kalenjin children were 50 percent less likely to die before the age of five than children from other tribes. Former president Daniel arap Moi, a Kalenjin himself, had made sure that Kalenjin areas had ample resources for medical care and high quality roads leading to them.<sup>9</sup> In this context, "eating" refers to the opportunity to turn the corruption tables to the advantage of one's own group.

Late in 2007 Kenyans went to the polls for a presidential election, after which violence erupted in diverse areas. In Kisumu, disappointed Luo who had hoped it was their turn to "eat" looted and burned.<sup>10</sup> In the Rift Valley, 95 percent of violent clashes occurred in areas where notoriously corrupt land redistribution had been carried out decades before.<sup>11</sup>

Wrong contends that donor organizations from the World Bank to World Vision assisted in creating the culture of pervasive public corruption. By failing to insist that the money they donate be handled and spent according to the same standards applying anywhere else in the world, they are complicit in the violence that has followed the long decades of corruption. She writes:

Kenyan journalist Kwamchetsi Makokha is not alone in detecting an incipient racism, rather than altruism, in our lack of discrimination. 'Fundamentally the West doesn't care enough about Africa to pay too much attention to how its money is spent.' By subjecting donor budgets to unprecedented scrutiny, the global recession may, ironically, succeed where any number of skeptical reports on aid have failed, making it impossible for Africa's foreign backers to maintain their Pollyanna perspectives.<sup>12</sup>

Further, Wrong quotes Hussein Were, a Kenyan engineer whose painful life experience of workplace and professional ethnic discrimination and corruption she documents, in asserting that no new mechanisms are

needed for donors to be able to effectively impact corruption: “You don’t need any more bodies, you don’t need any more laws, you just need good people and the will.”<sup>13</sup>

In the shadow of such public corruption, a pervasive culture of corruption in private institutions, including Christian churches and their related service institutions such as hospitals and colleges, has also grown up. Recently the church-related hospital a few doors down from our college abruptly dismissed its administrator. He had been minimally competent at some key tasks and was helping himself to the institution’s scarce funds. Here in Kenya even social protest is often corrupt. A protest that was recently planned against another nearby institution, but failed to materialize, was expected to feature modest compensation for the “protesters,” a common practice.

Corruption is an instance of what Dom Hélder Câmara called “first violence.”<sup>14</sup> Câmara (1909-1999) was Catholic Archbishop of Olinda and Recife in northeast Brazil. In his deep analysis of the situation of the less and least developed countries, and the less and least developed communities within the world’s more developed areas, the violence that can erupt in response to their situation and the violence by which it may be repressed delineate what he calls “a spiral of violence.” In his book of that title he writes:

Look closely at the injustices in the underdeveloped countries, in the relations between the developed world and the underdeveloped world. You will find that everywhere the injustices are a form of violence. One can and must say that they are everywhere the basic violence, violence No. 1. . . . No-one is born to be a slave. No-one seeks to suffer injustices, humiliations and restrictions. A human being condemned to a sub-human situation is like an animal – an ox or a donkey – wallowing in the mud.

Now the egoism of some privileged groups drives countless human beings into this sub-human condition, where they suffer restrictions, humiliations, injustices; without prospects, without hope, their condition is that of slaves.

This established violence, this violence No. 1, attracts violence No.

2, revolt.<sup>15</sup>

My recent encounter with corruption, then, was an encounter with violence. John Howard Yoder ends his Warsaw lectures by quoting Câmara and his collaborator in promoting nonviolence in Latin America, the poet and sculptor Adolfo Pérez Esquivel: “‘It is love, not violence or hatred, that will have the last word in history.’ If that is the last word, say Câmara and Pérez Esquivel, it must be our word now” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 145). Yoder, along with Câmara and Pérez Esquivel, propose that I should respond to this sinful proposal of corruption with love – indeed, with suffering love. But which is the path of suffering love? And does Yoder’s newly-published work assist someone who wants to learn that path?

### **Multiple Voices of Temptation**

My visitor that day was an elderly Friend, a *mzee* in Kiswahili, whom I had not previously met. He had many years before been a leader within the Board of Governors of Friends Theological College. He was someone who as an individual and institutionally could claim informal authority. He had come to ask me to engage in what he presented as a deeply Christian task: he wanted me to arrange an occasion for reconciliation between the FTC board and a cousin of his, who some months before had left employment at the college, and to reinstate her here. Previous to her leaving FTC, in discussions with board members others in our community had accused her of very poor judgment in carrying out her responsibilities (engaging in intimate personal relationships with students and staff of lower authority than herself). In the wake of these claims, she had never taken an opportunity to respond formally to the complaints. She had been denied personal justice. She was, her cousin reported, preparing to sue the college.

In preference to legal action she was now asking for an opportunity for personal reconciliation between herself and the board, a reconciliation that would make it possible for me to rehire her. My visitor clearly thought the occasion might well include his younger relative admitting to some disregard of the college’s expectations regarding her personal life. He pointed out that it would be embarrassing for the college to be taken to court. (He did not quote Matthew 18:15 to me, but that text was certainly in the background of our conversation.<sup>16</sup>) He continued by recounting that he knew there was



a Friend who had failed to pay back a loan due to the college years ago. He knew this person and believed he could see to it that the money was finally paid. He was certain others had written off the loan as a bad debt.

As the situation was presented to me by my visitor, the temptations offered were numerous, contradictory, and in no way unique. Any of our students might be faced with a similar set of temptations in their future ministries:

- agree to the reconciliation process and take the money for my own use.
- agree to the reconciliation process and recover the money for the college, accepting the extra funds for current pressing needs and, perhaps, allowing Friends to see me as having achieved something others had thought impossible.
- scrupulously reject the funds but agree to the reconciliation process, following the clear instruction of Jesus' words as recounted in Matthew 18:15-16.
- be a peacemaker, someone who could be called a child of God (Matthew 5:9).
- protect the college from a lawsuit that not only might be costly and/or embarrassing but would certainly be contrary to the classic Quaker rejection of settling disputes in court.
- defer to the respected *mzee*, because in Kenyan culture I would be expected to do so, and as a North American it would be colonial of me not to defer to the culture.
- agree to the proposal, with the idea that in the future the former employee's conflict with the college would be focused on the board of governors rather than on myself, the chief executive who had dismissed her.

A list of reasons to agree to the proposal(s) offered, some with more moral cogency than others, might continue further.

I rejected the proposal. To agree would have been corruption, a

form of first violence. In response to all these diverging temptations, it was appropriate for me to say, as in the Warsaw lectures Yoder describes Jesus as saying “Your definition of the *polis*, of the social, of the wholeness of man in his socialness, is perverted” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 95). Corruption is action guided by a perverted sense of the social. That perversion may appear even within the very way events, possibilities, and potential responses to them are characterized or delineated.

It seemed – and it still seems – very unlikely to me that this former staff member had actually failed in her responsibilities in the ways portrayed. Yet, from my own observation of her professional performance it seemed to me that the misguided accusations did give voice to an actual damaging of community life and of teaching-learning relationships. She had been dismissed in part because, despite her long years of experience, she had not been a highly effective teacher. But more emphatically she had failed to engage in community-nurturing interactions with colleagues and students. The accusations of specific failures, though almost certainly unjust, were symptoms of this larger, more broadly social, picture.

It was the former staff member and her familial advocate who had redefined the situation into a matter of radically personal concerns and refocused it on personal reconciliation, ongoing hostility, and peacemaking. To accept that framing, rather than keeping the focus on questions of the institution’s faithfulness to its broader social purposes and its community responsibilities to all, would have been a corruption, a perversion “of the *polis*, of the social.”

The institutional leader or the pastor who seeks to be faithful to the call to suffering love in this particular context has the responsibility to keep the right questions in view, accepting any discomforts or lawsuits that might come in response. To my reading, Yoder’s Warsaw lectures do indeed give important tools and resources for meeting these demands within the current African context.

### **Yoder’s Warsaw Response**

By way of conclusion, let us briefly note four points at which Yoder’s Warsaw lectures are especially helpful in addressing the questions raised by this characteristically African test case.

First, in lecture seven, “Jesus and Nonviolent Liberation,” Yoder discusses five traditions of 20th-century theological discourse that he finds to be falsely conceived dichotomies. “*The tradition tells us we must choose between the individual and the social,*” he writes (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 96; italics in original). “*The tradition tells us we must choose between the political and the sectarian*” (Ibid., 94; italics in original). In the view of this dubious tradition “the ‘ethics of the Sermon on the Mount’ is for face-to-face personal encounters; an ethic of the ‘secular vocation’ is needed for social structures” (ibid., 96).

As we have seen, in their accounts of the rise and carrying out of corruption and responding violence in Kenya over the course of a century, Elkins and Wrong trace how distortion of the personal dimensions of social action has supported and fueled now deeply entrenched spirals of public violence. If contemporary church and para-church donors will not care enough to actively and publicly resist a blasé acceptance of graft in the programs they fund, and to insist on the integrity of recording and management in the use of their gifts, who will?

Painfully, the opposite has sometimes been true. In 1956 the Christian Council of Kenya had extensive documentation of the savagery of the British repressive response to the Mau Mau. Pastoral representatives who had access to the numerous detainment camps were the best informed outsiders. They even had the support of the Church of England in Britain and other figures for public disclosure of Kenyan atrocities.<sup>17</sup> Instead, they sought to bring “the Kingdom of God and its standards of righteousness” to the attention of the government “in the spirit of our Master who directed as a first step ‘if thy brother shall trespass against thee go and tell him his faults between thee and him alone’” – without furthering more public steps.<sup>18</sup>

Yoder proposes, supports, and encourages a reordering of the “perversion” of one’s sense of sociality and human wholeness that lies in these false dichotomies. It is, he proposes, a matter of conversion, a transformation of worldview and perception that is simultaneously practical, intellectual, and spiritual (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, e.g., 119): “Tradition tells us to choose between respect for persons and participation in the movement of history; Jesus refuses, because the movement of history is personal. There is no choosing between spirit and flesh, between theory and praxis, between

belief and behavior, between the ideal and the possible” (ibid., 96).

A community is not simply an aggregation of numerous private individuals, but a fabric in which the dignity, value, and contributions of all support the well-being of all and each. African traditional culture is radically social.<sup>19</sup> Christianity brought a new focus on the individual into this culture, in the concept of the salvation of a believing individual through reconciliation of that individual and God by faith in Jesus Christ. Too easily this shift can become a doorway to a perversion of both the society and the individual rather than a pathway to the healing and transformation of both.

Second, Yoder’s account of nonviolence in the Warsaw lectures is not tied to free church self-understandings as these have developed and been elaborated in the global North and West.<sup>20</sup> In his final three lectures, Yoder presents heroes of nonviolence within the Catholic Church: among them are scholars, theoreticians, and practitioners of the most hands-on of ministries – laypeople, Jesuits, and archbishops. He does not exclude from his understanding of “peace church” communities and persons in highly differentiated relationships of authority and power. This offers an intriguing and challenging contrast to the linking of “violence and dominative power”<sup>21</sup> prominent in some current North Atlantic analyses within my own Quaker community and within such collaborative groups as Christian Peacemaker Teams.

In a review of *Seeking Peace in Africa: Stories of African Peacemakers*,<sup>22</sup> John C. Yoder notes among a list of uniquely African characteristics, approaches, and perspectives on peacemaking the role of authority figures. In his assessment Westerners and Northerners favor democratic approaches through which conflicting groups “confront each other, listen to stories of pain and grief, express forgiveness and develop egalitarian plans for reconciliation and justice.” On the basis of essays in the book under review, he claims that “Africans often are more comfortable relying on the authoritative intervention of respected and powerful leaders, who investigate a situation, determine a strategy for action and impose a solution on the community.”<sup>23</sup>

Based on my lived African experience, I would not say there is no place in Africa for the more egalitarian approach preferred by members of the free church peace churches of the global North and West. Yet African

Friends do ascribe a higher responsibility for the making and maintaining of peace to elders and leaders than they do to others in the community. That is why the elderly cousin of that former staff member was in my office to talk about processes of reconciliation. Thus the Warsaw lectures, with their openness to diverse social patterns, are more accessible for African use than some other materials from the global North and West might be.

Third, in the Warsaw lectures John Howard Yoder employs multiple references, terms, and names. In speaking of Leo Tolstoy's approach he claims nonviolence is "the 'key' to the Scripture message: the cure for evil is suffering" (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, here 21; the following quotations are from the pages indicated). He quotes Martin Luther King, Jr., who is himself drawing upon Gandhi: "We must meet the forces of hate with the power of love; we must meet physical force with soul force" (37). "There is no clash between psychic wholeness and love of the enemy" (72). "The shedding of the blood of a fellow human being is the fundamental denial of human dignity (Genesis 4) from which all other sins against society are derived," Yoder quotes from a Jewish perspective (82). The meaning of history is carried "by the creation of a new human fellowship through the cross, defined precisely by transcending enmity between classes of people" (104). "To be the kind of person who loves one's enemies, to be a servant, and to be meek are themselves more adequate definitions of doing the will of God than are tactical projections about how to maximize the likelihood of bringing about certain desirable states of the total social system" (113). The cross, says Yoder, "is not a tactic of resistance; it is first of all, God's means of reconciliation" (118). Each way of speaking of his topic opens insights into it from different perspectives and in response to different concerns and approaches. This diversity is itself a useful resource in bridging theological perspectives from diverse social and ecclesial contexts.

In the context of the corruption that is an element of the "first violence" of so many local settings, one of Yoder's compact and apt observations seems particularly useful in my own Kenyan setting. "The means is the end in the process of becoming," Yoder observes. "Only fidelity to love as means can be an instrument for love as end" (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 46). Because corruption and violence – first and second and third violence – were means for building the Kenyan society of today, corruption

and violence have come to characterize the current end of that building.

Lastly, Yoder's word on the centrality of transformation to nonviolence is particularly welcome. Each morning students pray in the Friends Theological College chapel. They almost always include a thanksgiving to God for how far he has brought each one of us. They believe that God will have a new chance today to bring us farther and transform us into his people of peace. Maybe they will go farther than Warsaw.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Nonviolence – A Brief History; The Warsaw Lectures*, ed. Paul Martens, Matthew Porter, and Myles Werntz (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning; The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Kenya is made up of 40 to 70 different tribal peoples, depending on how the groups and subgroups are designated. In a 2009 census: Kikuyu 17.1%, Luhya 13.8%, Kalenjin 12.8%, Luo 10.5%; the many dozens of smaller African tribes and resident Arabs, South Asians, Europeans making up the remaining 47%, [www.mwakilishi.com/content/articles/2010/08/31/census-2009-kenyas-population-reaches-386m.html](http://www.mwakilishi.com/content/articles/2010/08/31/census-2009-kenyas-population-reaches-386m.html), accessed 10 February 2011.

The struggle for independence from Britain was focused particularly in conflict between the colonial authorities and the Kikuyus. Much of the land assigned to European settlers had been Kikuyu land. Since independence, the most powerful groups within Kenyan politics have been and continue to be the Kikuyu and Kalenjin. In the late 2007 election after which so much violence erupted, there was a prominent and appealing Luo candidate who many thought would win. In a country riddled with corruption, questions inevitably arose about the integrity of the election process. A Luo did win an important election in the subsequent year, 2008: US President Barack Obama is ethnically Luo.

Due to mission patterns in former days, the overwhelming majority of Kenyan Quakers are Luhya. Despite their large numbers, the Luhya community is proportionally less well represented in national politics than other groups.

<sup>4</sup> Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 18-19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, e.g., 28-9, 71, 275.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-28.

<sup>7</sup> Michela Wrong, *It's Our Turn to Eat: The Story of a Kenyan Whistle-Blower* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 295-316.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 326f.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>14</sup> Hélder Câmara, *Spiral of Violence* (London: Sheed and Ward Stagbooks, 1971).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 29f.

<sup>16</sup> *If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.* (NRSV)

<sup>17</sup> Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 298-303.

<sup>18</sup> Christian Council of Kenya, “Press Release—Statement by Church Leaders of Kenya,” 8 July 1956, quoted by Elkins, 303.

<sup>19</sup> John S. Mbiti offers an excellent introduction to African traditional philosophy, religion, and culture in his *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed. (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2003) and *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>21</sup> Christian Peacemaker Teams, “Statement of Identity,” [www.cpt.org/about/identity\\_statement](http://www.cpt.org/about/identity_statement), accessed 31 August 2011.

<sup>22</sup> John C. Yoder, Review of Donald E. Miller, Scott Holland, Lon Fendall, and Dean Johnson, eds., *Seeking Peace in Africa: Stories of African Peacemakers* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing, 2007), in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 82.4 (Oct. 2008): 620-23.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 622.

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# **The Wild Peace (not) of John Howard Yoder: Reflections on *Nonviolence – A Brief History***

*Romand Coles*

*Wild peace, because the field must have it.*

– Yehuda Amichai<sup>1</sup>

It's coming from the feel that this ain't exactly real -

*Or it's real, but it ain't exactly there...*

From the staggering account of the Sermon on the Mount

Which I don't pretend to understand at all.

– Leonard Cohen<sup>2</sup>

## **I**

We know the fields. Some bear gifts of bounty; some bear gifts of austerity. Some have been fashioned by human projects attentive and grateful; others have been assaulted by the oblivious ambitions of corrupt principalities and powers that dwarf the delusions of Babel. No field is free from the specters of another field we know too well: a field drenched with rivers of blood which swell from a seemingly interminable source that threatens to drown our sense that “the field must have it.”

John Howard Yoder's writing is a long and faithful meditation on how the field must have it – the Victory of the Lamb – and his 1983 lectures to the Polish Ecumenical Council, now presented in *Nonviolence – A Brief History*, are no exception. Like the Jews, who were “the first hearers of Jesus,” Yoder “believed a history in which the impossible had happened. They [and he] could hear the promise without filtering it through a grid of their [and his] sense of the limits of the possible.”<sup>3</sup> Jewish history, as Yoder hears it, is the narrative of a community hearing, straying from, discerningly recovering, and reforming itself in light of the meaning of God's promise of human flourishing through regenerative justice, love, and peacemaking.



This history reaches an epiphany in Jeremiah's redefinition of diaspora as a providential gift, wherein Jews are called to become a nation without kingship or sovereignty, seeking their good in, with, and for other nations. Yoder plainly states the paradox that it is precisely the Jews who did not see Jesus as the consummate image of divinity, who for nearly two thousand years best and most continuously incarnated the ecclesia of loving peace that Jesus lived and proclaimed – while most Christians betrayed this image with a kiss.

These impossibilities, too, have happened. And it is precisely in the complicated hollow between these multiple impossibilities (murderous violence, calls and incarnations of peace, betrayals through the call, approximations of peace that are greater perhaps because more modestly articulated) where I engage Yoder's reflections to discern grains of hope within the "crooked timber" of our being. In this essay I focus on a couple of themes that Yoder articulates in his Warsaw Lectures in ways that shed new, important light on his widely-received politics of Jesus. In particular, I am fascinated by his insights into what I will call "the intertwining of resonant energies" of love, vengeance, and mimetic violence, as well as his emphasis that such energies are indispensable to the transformative power of nonviolent action. Indeed, nonviolent political creativity hinges upon cultivating a profoundly intimate, complicated relationship between energies of love and of mimetic violence. I believe this relationship is not only at the heart of Yoder's understanding of intercorporeal creativity but pivotal to his understanding of the "grain of the universe."

Through his articulation of entangled modes of resonant energy, Yoder illuminates what it might mean to have a mindful faith in "wild peace, because the fields must have it." Yoder's "wild peace" and what I have elsewhere called his "wild patience" are co-constitutive.<sup>4</sup> Neither can be understood in absence of the other. Because this thematic element also received illumination in Yoder's posthumous *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking*, I shall move freely between these two texts.<sup>5</sup> I conclude by drawing attention to less brief historical discussions of the ethical relationships between defensive violence and peacemaking, in ways that cause trouble both for pacifists and for those who are not quite so – or not so purely.

## II

Yoder's reflections on the charged field of the victorious "impossibility" of Jesus' life, word, cross, and resurrection acquire distinctive insight and gravitas in the Warsaw lectures because he consistently tends to questions about the resonant energies enabling peacemaking and how they are intertwined with the resonant energies of violence propelling action in that other field of blood-drenched "impossibility." Indeed, work in the fields of nonviolence requires a visceral connection to work in the fields of murder.

Tolstoy's brilliant (if problematic) reduction of the Scriptures to the proclamation of love of the enemy and nonresistance to evil in the Sermon on the Mount informs Yoder's reflections in his Polish lectures. For Tolstoy, the key to Jesus' message is that "the cure for evil is suffering" (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 21). At the heart of this proclamation is Tolstoy's sense that the key to "what is wrong with the world is most fundamentally that people respond to evil with evil and thereby aggravate the spiral of violence . . . . By refusing to extend the chain of vengeance, we break into the world with good news. This one key opened the door to a restructuring of the entire universe of Christian life and thought." It is the "stubborn nerve" of Tolstoy's refusal to let the world's spiraling evil define "acceptable Christian behavior" – his courageous "countercosmology" and active strategy for nonviolent resistance – that impressed Gandhi (*ibid.*, 22).

Yoder's lectures can be read as patient critical reflections on Christianity's uncourageous efforts to rearticulate the good news of the Sermon on the Mount within the confines of the world's chains and spirals of violence in ways that fall victim to, and perpetuate, those very cycles. One of Yoder's most perspicuous claims is that the deleterious effects of these spirals and chains can be witnessed not only in the problematic nature of myriad just war theories but in the fact that even the best of such theories tend with haunting inexorability to be unplugged and ignored during millennia of Christian violence and convenient silence. Yoder's own courageous effort to resist these chains and spirals is evident in his critique and the astonishingly charitable spirit with which he engages those he resists.

If Yoder's understanding of the wisdom of the Sermon on the Mount is intimately enmeshed with his sense of what is most "fundamentally wrong

with the world,” we must explore the latter more fully. Here the language of spirals, cycles, and chains is not quite adequate for illuminating either the proliferative character of violence or the possibilities for seeing, thinking, and doing a new thing. To grasp the depth of Yoder’s thinking, we must return with him to that barren field of the other impossibility, where Cain lifted his hand and struck his brother Abel dead.

Yoder’s work in these difficult soils informs his Polish lectures, yet a fuller account is contained in *The War of the Lamb*, where he offers a powerful reading of Genesis 4 that focuses on the fact that, contrary to expectation, Yahweh acts not to protect others from the murderer in their midst but “to protect Cain from the primeval vengeance he has every reason to fear.” In Genesis, says Yoder, “the rest of humanity is first alluded to not as a resource for affection or procreation or community, but as a threat. The very first reference to the rest of humanity is “whoever finds me will slay me.” Here we arrive at the heart of the insight: “That is the primeval definition of *violence* . . . that there are people out there whose response to Cain’s deed is *mimetic*. They will quasi-automatically, as by reflex, want to do to him what he had done to Abel. . . . It will seem self-evident.” So Yahweh “*intervenes to protect Cain’s life from the universally threatening vengeance*” and does so by threatening any who act thus with a massive vengeance that “shall be taken on him sevenfold” (*War of the Lamb*, 28). Yahweh seeks to out-resonate resonant violence.

This saves Cain, but not humanity. For Cain’s distant descendant Lamech seems to have a multiplicative mimetic relation not only to violence but to the intensification of it – even to the shadow of a threat of it, when he brags that he retaliates seventy-sevenfold. Thus we see the resonant, (de)generative character of violent mimesis, which is not merely replicative in a way that could be employed mainly for a “preventive, protective function” but rather becomes an “engine of destruction” (*War of the Lamb*, 29). It is the resonance of human flesh with vengeance that is far more illuminating of our condition than terms like chains, yokes, and spirals. It is such “resonant causality”<sup>6</sup> – far more than the forces of Newtonian causality or the force of flawed reasons – that accounts for the overwhelming extent to which “evil means poison the social system and vitiate the very ends for the sake of which they were resorted to, by creating uncontrollable cause/

effect ripples beyond what was intended by or can be controlled by their authors” (ibid., 152). We cannot calculate or control such resonant causality, because it happens in our flesh before and more powerfully than we think, and thereby gives birth to a world that (de)generates into waves defying linear calculability.

For these reasons, Yoder writes: “But then if the phenomenon of violence is not rational in its causes, its functions, and its objectives, neither will its cure be rational. The cure will have to be something as primitive, as elemental, as the evil. It will have to act upon the deep levels of meaning and motivation, deeper than mental self-definition and self-control” (*War of the Lamb*, 30). Yoder’s explorations of these deeper waters constitute the most valuable dimension of his gift in the Warsaw Lectures and *The War of the Lamb*. While René Girard is not mentioned in the lectures, he is an explicit presence in *The War of the Lamb* and the focus of Yoder’s reflections in his 1986 review of Girard’s *The Scapegoat* (published in French in 1982).<sup>7</sup> Entangled with his interpretation of Genesis 4, Girardian themes increasingly inform Yoder’s sense of what is indispensable for creative nonviolent action anywhere, anytime – and especially today, when the resonance of vengeance everywhere receives amplification in the ubiquitous virtual “resonance machine.”<sup>8</sup>

### III

Yoder is famous for “changing the questions.” Hence, for example, in his debates with just war theorists, he calls us away from the widespread focus on “rules and exceptions” and toward the ongoing cultivation of an alternative polis – an ecclesia – that engenders everyday practices, habits, processes, institutions, virtues, and receptive creative capacities. Through those capacities we may acquire rich orientations, imaginations, and powers for engaging in nonviolent conflict resolution, sharing wealth, practicing dialogical discernment, and worshiping the holy. Thus we might better learn to live in ways tending to avert crisis situations, on the one hand, and to act in relation to crises that nevertheless will occur with more powerfully cruciform imaginations and creative repertoires, on the other.

Given the registers in which Yoder’s reflections tend to run, even

focusing on nonviolent direct action – as vital as such action is to the reflections on peacemaking in the Polish Lectures – is “only the tip of an iceberg” that more profoundly concerns building an alternative culture. “They are only the exceptionally visible part of a much larger unity. They are . . . as is the case with icebergs, only visible and effective in proportion to the size of the hidden block below the surface. The integrity, the credibility, the intelligibility, and the actual social impact of specific tactics or techniques or dramatic direct action . . . will be proportionate to the size and the solidity of the floe beneath the waves” (*War of the Lamb*, 157).

Anyone who reads Yoder should know this. Yet analogous to the “floe beneath the waves,” I suggest that there is a flow beneath – or, rather, *in* – the floe that is similarly the indispensably intimate, deep co-condition of possibility toward which the Warsaw Lectures (and proximate works) are moving. Missing the flow in the floe is like missing the floe beneath the waves: Not only do the writing and the politics of nonviolence risk losing much of their “depth, credibility, intelligibility, and actual social impact,” additionally we miss the registers in which we must work in order that peacemaking might become more possible and real. Yoder’s engagements with specific interlocutors – in Poland and elsewhere – often prevented him from staying with this indispensable line of inquiry as persistently as we, and possibly Yoder himself, might wish. My task here is to gather and interweave these strands into a form that works the “deeper levels of meaning and motivation” that Yoder insists we must engage if we are to have a chance of subduing the proliferative resonance of vengeance that even in older times was boasting multiples of seventy-seven.

In a lecture on “The Changing Conversation between the Peace Churches and Mainstream Christianity,” Yoder *ends* by noting how elements of ecumenical context inhibited crucial *beginnings*: “As the ecumenical conversation obligated me to do, I have reported on the ordinary stuff of the standard debate about political ethics” (*War of the Lamb*, 106). Yoder’s receptivity to context is part of his brilliance. Yet one senses in his voice a certain weight – a certain acknowledgement of the contextual confinements of spirit. Indeed, it is precisely the resonance of spirit which is constrained, as he says in the next sentence: “That debate, however, ignores the way that other dimensions of human reality predispose the weighing of actions.”

Yoder goes on to note how “Hugh Barbour’s exposition in the subjective religious experience of radical Puritanism in England, under that ‘Terror and Power of the Light,’ interprets profoundly the rootage of the renunciation of the violence in the inner experience of overpowering grace.” Whether thinking of Anabaptist *Gelassenheit* or Dunkard *perfecting love*, or humility, sanctification, or numerous other terms, Yoder notes that for all the differences, they evoke “the view of human dignity that frees the believer from temptations to feel called to set the world right by force.” They speak to an intensity and quality of spiritual resonance that releases us to “do a new thing.” “*Probably this commonality is more important subjectively for the peace churches’ witness than any of the more standard ethical issues I was reviewing before*” (*War of the Lamb*, 106, my emphasis). If, without resubjectifying “religious experience” in ways that would lose everything else we have already learned from Yoder, we take a soulful reading of the Warsaw lectures, we gain insight into how nonviolent interaction might become a powerful world-transformative *movement* articulating the “grain of the universe.”

The centrality of spiritual resonance is evident from the beginning of the first lecture<sup>9</sup>: “Tolstoy was first of all a convert,” which is to say he was one who underwent a “profound change of . . . orientation . . . which took place at once from within and from without and made of him a different person than he had been before” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 19-20). Tolstoy’s conversion and his life’s work, says Yoder, are rooted in “his ability to perceive the depths of human being and relating and to describe that perception dramatically.” Tolstoy’s resonance with Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount allows him to “march against the stream of hostility drawn upon him by his new views” (*ibid.*, 20). It reconfigures how the world appears and the self’s relation to it.

The theme of conversion, power, and creativity appears repeatedly in the first three lectures. Gandhi underwent a resonant conversion when he read Tolstoy. Far more than specificities of Christian doctrine, Jesus, portraits of peasant life, or “even the notion of love of the enemy all by itself,” it was “Tolstoy’s readiness to hold . . . to a rejection of the dominant ‘realistic worldview,’ with its self-evident acceptance of the chain of violent causes and violent effects” that most held sway over Gandhi (*Nonviolence*

– *A Brief History*, 23). It was the resonance or energetic force of Tolstoy’s movement beyond the multiplicative resonance of violence that most registered with Gandhi. This force provoked a conversion that moved him to articulate in word and deed a spiritual power he called “soul force” or, in Yoder’s paraphrasing, the “power of truth as a force”: “Gandhi’s vision of the cosmos as a unity of spiritual powers, interwoven in an unbroken net of causation, made sense out of the notion that fasting or prayer or sexual continence, and above all the active renunciation of violence, could exert spiritual power . . . upon an adversary . . . to restore to a fuller community” (ibid., 24-25).

Gandhi underwent this force not as a single conversion to Jesus, but rather “in a pilgrimage of repeated conversion all through his life story” – “little conversions” provoked by readings, political events, and “living between cultures” (ibid., 24). Gandhi’s power is the power of this repeatedly renewed resonance, to which he gave cosmological and political organizational expression – with Tolstoy, but far beyond him.

Just as the force of Tolstoy’s conversion found resonance in Gandhi, Yoder points out that it was Martin Luther King, Jr.’s discovery of Gandhi that seems to have provoked a resonant “turning point” in King’s “sense of mission.” Before then, King was aware of neither the “theological power of [nonviolence’s] rootage in the cross of Jesus Christ nor of the social power of organized resistance” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 30). Yet King’s conversion found resonance in a tradition and ecclesial body politics of the black Baptist church that was far different from Gandhi’s majority culture Hinduism. In critical response to majority racism, the black Baptist polity “could find in every hamlet and on every city block a congregation” that engendered a whole way of life intertwining alternative modes of politics, economics, and worship “where countercultural consciousness and an alternative interpretation of social history could be maintained” (ibid., 32). Hence, the conversion to nonviolent action that passed from Gandhi to King found an extraordinarily rich context in which to proliferate.

However, this richness exceeds the more familiar “politics of Jesus” themes that are absolutely indispensable to it, and Yoder’s account of this excess carefully emphasizes cultivated practices of resonant, frequently repeated conversion:

As contrasted with other forms of Christianity, baptistic piety makes indispensable the personal, mature, and often dramatic religious decision of the individual. There is no cultic ritual which can be carried on around the altar independent of the believer's own participation. . . . Only personal conversion makes one a member of a community through adult baptism. The worship experience commemorates, renews, prolongs, and projects the drama of conversion into a series of renewed calls to decision and commitment. When the bus boycott movement broke out spontaneously<sup>10</sup> in Montgomery, the rallies held every evening in the churches were a simple transposition of the format of revival-preaching indigenous assemblies, which the participants were already accustomed to attending periodically, for the purpose of being newly awakened in their Christian commitment." (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 32)

King was a profoundly gifted speaker, and Yoder notes that such personal gifts are often indispensable aspects of powerful and creative nonviolent movements (see *War of the Lamb*, 159). Yet King's gift for resonance, rhetoric, and brilliant oratory were nurtured in the specific context of the black Baptist church, where many people practiced the arts of responding to and intensifying "the skills of the preacher, which are also a necessary part of Baptist leadership" (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 33). The preacher's resounding eloquence and the revival practice of the assemblies are co-constitutive and inextricably intertwined.<sup>11</sup>

#### IV

Yet, violence and vengeance are resonant too, and Baptist preaching and revivals often resound with both. How should we understand the relationships and differences between resonant affective energies that are constitutive aspects of Yoder's account of *both* the politics of Jesus *and* the politics of Lamech? And how does Yoder articulate a faith that one will reign over the other in a victory of the Lamb that expresses the "grain of the universe"? A key aspect of Yoder's response to this latter question concerns cultivating a *quality* of resonant energy that is a condition of the creative character and



overwhelming potential magnitude of peacemaking. The energetic spirit of peaceable love is crucial to this quality. Yet to understand Yoder here we must not jump too quickly into distinguishing between the energies of violence and those of peace, lest we miss one of Yoder's most remarkable ideas, namely that part of the distinctiveness of resonant peacemaking is born/e in relation to resonant vengeance.

Yoder's Jesus is repeatedly tempted: "The aura of reverence surrounding the passion story often keeps us from asking concretely what the temptation was in those last hours. Yet if we do ask, the answer is unavoidable: Jesus was still tempted to take the path of the Zealots, to use righteous revolutionary violence to drive the Romans from his country and renew the possibility for God's people to live according to God's law" (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 90). Such question-blocking reverence can blind us to the resonance between the energy of the peacemaker and the energy of mimetic violence. Such blindness in turn renders nonviolence innocuous:

[We] . . . misunderstand the whole meaning of his work if [we] do not see the passion and zeal with which he saw himself to be called to proclaim the breaking in of God's sovereignty in matters of human justice and the beginning of a new order among men and women. If we are not tempted by the Zealot option as he was, then our renunciation of the Zealot means of revolutionary violence cannot mean what it meant for him. If we are passive, or quietist, or tired, or patient with the fallenness and oppressiveness of the world, we fail to see in him authentically the anointed one, the one who was to bring down the mighty from their thrones and exalt the lowly. (ibid., 91)

Consider this passage carefully. Jesus' nonviolent interaction will become *invisible* if his relationship to the Zealot temptation does not resonate with a similar temptation in each of us. When Yoder says that we will "misunderstand the whole meaning of [Jesus'] work," surely he has in mind the intensity, urgency, and activity of Jesus' life. Yet the most profound danger is that we will fail to understand the qualitative shift in resonant energy at the heart of the creative character of the peaceable kingdom – "the beginning of a new order among men and women" – its very possibility.

Many moderns construe creativity and genius in radically subjective fashion as a mysterious energy within a single self. While distinctive individual *charisms* – gifts – are crucial to Yoder’s understanding of the world and political transformation, the possibility of such gifts coming into being, and being given, hinges upon the character of human interrelationships: they are born/e in the inter-world. Hence, in rejecting the Zealot temptation, at the most elemental level Jesus sought not atomistic, individual nonviolent gifts. Rather, the alternative was “the gathering of a new kind of people . . . a structured community best described by the name ‘assembly’ (*ecclesia*),” that articulates itself through dialogue, forgiveness, sharing, and de-stratifying hospitality (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 90). Such an assembly would be the bearer of manifold unique gifts capable of overcoming the multiplicative cycles of vengeance, and this would be achieved, paradoxically in part, by cultivating a distinctive relationship with the mimetic energies of violence.

To see and creatively become peacemakers, we must profoundly resonate until our last moments with mimetic temptations of violence. Hence, Yoder urges us not to be a culture “ashamed of its vengefulness” but rather to grant it “a deep anthropological legitimacy” (*War of the Lamb*, 33). Some elements of human aggressiveness are “fundamentally wholesome and ready to be used in giving power and structure to the reconstitutions of human community.” Thus, “too much emphasis at the wrong time on giving in to others and loving your enemies is itself psychologically dangerous” for the development of individuals and communities (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 71).

Yet the proper uses, work, and place of this aggressive energy hinge upon an ecclesial context – an assembled people – that renounces violent action in order to create an ultimately far more resonant and thus more powerful form of holy engagement. “The firm renunciation of violence produces a context for creativity, whereas holding open the notion of violence as last resort [through merely tactical affirmations of nonviolence] removes that incentive” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 47). Creative nonviolent interaction happens when the profound temptations to righteous violence are both deeply acknowledged and tapped, yet limited by energies and ethics of love as well as by institutions and practices of renouncing violent action. In cradling *both* these types of energy – and the conflict between them

– the assembly generates the politically energetic mixture and conditions for hyper-creative nonviolence. From one angle, Yoder conceives of this as a condition in which individuals and communities are fueled and driven toward creative responses to conflict, a kind of pressure cooker for political creativity capable of breaking out of the confines of a violent world. From another angle, he sees it as a condition of grace, a pressure cooker making us viscerally aware of cracks in the order of mimetic violence – cracks through which the in-breaking of grace happens.

However, the rhetoric of “cracks” may mislead us here. It may be better to imagine this assembly-engendered situation of “orchestrated conflict” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 47) as one that is conducive to deep resonances through which newness is *both* immediately created in relationships within the pressure cooker *and* discerningly received from beyond in the form of grace. This articulates a vital, visceral, and often overlooked, dimension of what Yoder meant by “grain of the universe” – a grain powerfully realigned by resonant energies incarnated in the life and words of Jesus Christ. It adds sense to Yoder’s claim, with Paul, that “Jesus chose the cross as an alternative social strategy of strength, not weakness” (*War of the Lamb*, 41). Such resonant grace is likely akin to what Yehuda Amichai evoked with the phrase “wild peace.”

While Yoder was deeply attuned to the wild peacemaking energies of the call-and- response practices of the black Baptist church, such wild peace was inextricably linked in his view with a wild patience (ever-reforming itself in renewed receptivity to possibilities beyond violence) that carefully articulated a cruciform wild pragmatism (insofar as it wrought in-breaking newness into enduring institutionalized forms exemplified biblically in Jubilee). Yoder liked to distill historical narratives and lessons learned into lists of general import. On these lists were creative strategies from writing, sit-ins, boycotts, and marches to freedom rides, voter registration, anti-war actions, rituals of spiritual renewal, and more (see *Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 35-36; 46-48). Each event and the lessons drawn articulate vital aspects of the “politics of Jesus.” The wild peace of acknowledged and tapped impulses and energies of violence that are ultimately renounced are, somewhat counter-intuitively, conditions for wild patience. Patience born/e otherwise is, Yoder suggests, too often akin to complacency and lacks the

intense resonant discernment of the ecclesia of wild patience through which the grace of unexpected gifts and possibilities for the politics of Jesus may be received. The vulnerable opening of wild patience draws significant power from the energies of vengeance that undergo qualitative transformation under conditions of the wild peace cultivated in relationship to them. These in turn give birth to pragmatic articulations of the body politic that are also wild, because they move beyond the domesticated assumptions of political life based on the necessity of violence.

## V

Yoder writes repeatedly of how merely tactical nonviolence, which retains the prerogative of resorting to violence, greatly depletes the context for nonviolent creativity by holding open a pressure-releasing option that can be chosen at will. This is undoubtedly true, and it poses profoundly troubling questions for everyone who (like me) cannot quite imagine their way to lives unconditionally devoted to nonviolence. Yet a closer look at the history that Yoder draws upon to inform his views suggests an incredibly entangled relationship between nonviolent action and defensive violent practices that may complicate matters for an emerging politics of Jesus. Indeed, questions arising from this complex crystal of unwonted relations cast illuminations that should leave none untroubled.

If the Civil Rights Movement drew heavily on the image and practices of Christ's redemptive suffering, it equally drew on a rich, centuries-long tradition of self-defense in the black community. It is striking how matter-of-fact this recognition is, even among the most peaceful warriors such as Bob Moses, who years later wrote of how Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organizers in the early 1960s relied daily on the home bases of black folk across Mississippi who were heavily armed and, in keeping with a long tradition of survival, would shoot back when white vigilantes attacked.<sup>12</sup> The record across the American south is quite clear: every time the body of Christ tried to form its beloved community in any way that remotely sought to proclaim and practice a politics that would encroach upon white supremacy, a tradition involving intricate combinations of state-sanctioned and vigilante violence responded with lynchings, shootings,

burnings, bombings, beatings, rapes, drowning, and more. SNCC organizers and sympathizers would have been murdered upon arrival, had it not been for loaded guns in supporters' living rooms. These loaded guns had also played a role in holding open a modicum of trembling space in prior decades.<sup>13</sup>

Hence, though it is omitted from the narratives of many (including Yoder) who celebrate the nonviolent action of the US Civil Rights Movement, it is an inconvenient truth that – just as Yoder's articulation of resonant nonviolence is intertwined with energies of mimetic violence – the struggle for the Beloved Community was made possible by *both* the tradition of a politics of Jesus *and* the tradition of “negroes with guns” willing to use them in self-defense.<sup>14</sup> Paradoxically, the tradition of self-defense was indispensable for creating spaces where nonviolent interaction could be publically proclaimed, incarnated, and advanced. The successes of the Civil Rights Movement were due to an uneasy balancing act between these two traditions, and Jim Crow (state and local laws mandating racial segregation) would likely still be in place, were it not for the creative relational organizing made possible by this uneasy mixture that pushed back against a system of white supremacy ready to annihilate every trace of emergent resistance. And, strangely, it is doubtful that Yoder's resonant assembly of creative politics fueled by the conflict between temptations of the zealot and energetic commitments to nonviolence could have stitched itself together in Mississippi and Alabama otherwise.

In this context I don't know what it would mean – or how it could mean good news – to affirm that for many more generations, children should be born into the brutality of white supremacy in order to remain true to an image of nonviolence that would refuse this strange complicity with traditions of self-defense. I find Yoder compelling because in most cases he translates to and fro between “we do see Jesus” and arguments about worldly interaction that make sense to those, including me, who do not see Jesus in quite the same way. When I look at the history of the Civil Rights Movement, Yoder's arguments and efforts appear to be on more troubled ground.

Hence, looking into the tortured face of this difficult – even impossible – situation, how might people who are compelled by most of what Yoder writes, yet moved by a fuller reading of a history to question the

unconditional commitment to nonviolence, begin to articulate an alternative ethical-political movement by which nonviolence can appear, intensify, and expand the zones in which “the field must have it”? How might we envision an alternative with more capacity to resist the slippery slope toward unjust warfare that Yoder portrays? I have in mind a movement that advances creative practices of peacemaking and refuses to seek justice by violently reaching for what Yoder called the “handles of history.” At the same time, however, this movement would not entirely refuse cultivating a tradition of defensive violence when impossible extremities of violent assault are the norm (I have in mind situations like Nazi Germany, where I find pacifist Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s participation in a plot to assassinate Hitler exemplary).

A highly imperfect image of such a prophetic movement under severe conditions might be glimpsed from an instance in 1970 of a theatrical, prophetic, protest politics born of the tensely intertwining traditions of black gospel vision and self-defense. To the white folks in Oxford, North Carolina, who brutally murdered Henry Marrow under the pretext of a highly doubtful flirtatious comment to a white woman, he was just another worthless nigger. Yet to many black folks, his senseless murder and the usual lack of seriousness with which law enforcement responded was the straw that finally broke the back of all deference and ushered in a militant effort to bring down Jim Crow in all its forms (civil rights laws had made no difference in Oxford at the time).

One of the central events organized in response to the murder was a 50-mile march from Oxford into Raleigh, North Carolina. Tim Tyson, in *Blood Done Sign My Name*, describes the march as a product of negotiations amidst an ideologically fragmented movement ranging from pacifist preachers to militant youth and veterans from Vietnam who thought selective violence was part of what was necessary:

About seventy marchers left Oxford . . . down the Jefferson Davis Highway behind a mule-drawn wagon. Atop the wagon sat Willie Mae Marrow, the bereaved widow, visibly pregnant with the dead man’s third child, wearing a dark veil and holding one daughter on her lap while comforting another. “That was the symbolic part . . .” The mule cart echoed the one that had

hauled Dr. King's coffin through the streets of Atlanta two years earlier. The mule was a southern-inflected symbol of the fact that the humble Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey, and also of the menial labor that white supremacy had imposed upon black people; the black woman was "de mule uh de world", as Zora Neale Hurston once wrote . . . . A placard around the neck of the mule listed black uprisings that sounded the threat of retaliation: REMEMBER WATTS, DETROIT, NEWARK, OXFORD."<sup>15</sup>

Willie Mae Marrow had been receiving death threats; the openly-armed Ku Klux Klan had pledged to stop the march with violence; some whites circled the marchers in cars, firing pistols in the air; others leapt out of roadside trailers draped with Confederate flags, took up firing positions, yelled 'Hey niggers!' and let loose a few rounds. In no case did the marchers return fire, and the procession grew to nearly a thousand people by the time they arrived in Raleigh. Yet this is not to say that they did not feel the mighty temptation to resist, or that they were unprepared to do so if things became bloody:

Despite the traditional songs and chants of the movement, which balanced the new Black Power anthems, the marchers were well armed. No one carried a weapon in plain view, but . . . marshal[s] kept their guns close at hand and out of sight. . . . "Ben[jamin Chavez] and them said it had to be nonviolent . . . but we all had our shit with us. That wagon with the mule had more guns on it than a damn army tank."<sup>16</sup>

There is no point in attempting to play out the many possible scenarios at this juncture, had things unfolded differently. The shape of the march itself was an amalgamation of differences – between those who were wedded to the gospel vision and those who cultivated varying degrees of militancy rooted in the tradition of self-defense – rather than the product of a deep consensus embodying one vision. Yet the image of the widow on the mule cart resonating with King's funeral resonating with Jesus moving into Jerusalem is worthy of serious reflection. It crystallizes the precarious and dangerous relationship between beloved community and defensive violence

to which I find myself called as a “least worse” response to situations of extreme violence.

In the image of this procession, the marchers performed an assembly that sought to mourn the dead, comfort the widow and children, seek restorative justice, and militantly transform the face of racist vengeful power toward beloved community. They incarnated a politics that embodied incredible restraint and wild patience. By hiding their guns in the wagon they led by taking life-threatening risks. By incarnating substantial vulnerability even as threats of retaliation hung from the head of the mule, they walked the talk of peacemaking. Yet the presence of guns reflects the long tradition of self-defense that was *also* crucial to the emergence of the movement in the preceding decade. The presence of guns reflects a limit that was necessary for the ecclesia to be more than a space of survival, consolation, and waiting through future centuries of bloody Jim and Jane Crow. The march suggests an ambition not to rule a world of force by force but to hold open a space to advance a radically democratic and pacific initiative without having one’s children’s, spouse’s, and friends’ skulls smashed and brains blown out for a misapprehended comment auguring the slightest transgression of apartheid. If the assembly was to become the insurgent body of Christ, it needed some respite from the endless murder which disassembled every hint of resistant organizing and relationship building. When in 1966 SNCC moved its voter registration campaign into arguably the most bloody bastion of racism in the US – Lowndes County, Alabama – they resonated with and extended the same tradition of tension between the gospel vision and self-defense in what became the beginning of the Black Panthers.<sup>17</sup>

We know how easy it is for this amalgam to spin itself insane. To one degree or another, it usually – probably always – does so. Yoder is right to argue that merely tactical nonviolence significantly attenuates the creative context through which the beloved community breaks in upon the violent cycles of history. While the march from Oxford to Raleigh was a profoundly creative incarnation of gospel vision, this creativity would have largely disappeared from the scene (at least on the part of those committed to firing back) had some of the bullets from white guns found the flesh of the marchers. Yoder is also right that this performance, a product of unstable compromise that I have temporarily crafted into a heuristic “position,” greatly



risks being swept up in energies of resonant vengeance that overwhelm the best intentions of forbearance among its risk-taking leaders.

There is neither peace, comfort, nor confidence in the position toward which I lean, in the face of situations of most extreme violence, as the “least worse” response. Yet I am unable to discern these qualities in a politics of unconditional nonviolence in such situations either. Unconditional nonviolence risks being likely implicated in sustaining situations of extreme terror. What we have here is a mess.

Perhaps the best we can do is to act carefully with a profound awareness of the depth of the mess. The temptation to deny the underside of our politics is probably too much for any one – or any single type of politics – to bear. The impulse to elide tragedy – especially that in which we are implicated – is overwhelming for nearly all of us, as Iris Murdoch argued in such strong terms.<sup>18</sup>

Hence I would urge that we now *disaggregate* the position I constructed for heuristic purposes from an uneasy walk to Raleigh in order to salvage it. There are people unconditionally committed to nonviolence, and there are people strongly committed to nonviolence but not without limits. Perhaps we all need the difference, in order to wake each other up to the underside of our politics. Thus I am grateful for Yoder and Yoderians, not merely for what they may do that I may not, but for reminding me of how deep is the mess and how resonant are the risks of even highly restrained defensive violence. Perhaps in the tensions between the energies and risks of unconditional nonviolence, on the one hand, and those that come with acknowledging limits in the form of defense in extremity, on the other, we can maintain an agonistic engagement through which we might become less bad when faced with the worst. Perhaps?

*Only the voice that rises at the end of a question  
still rises above the world and hangs there,  
even if it was made by mortar shells, like a ripped flag,  
like a mutilated cloud.*

– Yehuda Amichai<sup>19</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Yehuda Amichai, *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, ed. and trans. Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1996). Years ago, this poem was brought to my attention by Peter Dula.

<sup>2</sup> Leonard Cohen, “Democracy,” on *The Future*, Stranger Music Inc. (BMI), 1992.

<sup>3</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Nonviolence – A Brief History: The Warsaw Lectures*, ed. Paul Martens, Matthew Porter, and Myles Werntz (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2010). 78. Hereafter cited in parentheses in the text as *Nonviolence – A Brief History*.

<sup>4</sup> See “The Wild Patience of John Howard Yoder” in Romand Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics: Reflections for the Possibility of Democracy* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking*, ed. Mark Thiessen Nation, Glen Stassen, and Matt Hamsher (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009). Hereafter cited in parentheses in the text as *War of the Lamb*.

<sup>6</sup> The concept of “resonant causality,” which dates back to 19th-century theoretical physicist Henri Poincaré, is central to the views of Nobel Prize-winning theoretical chemist Ilya Prigogine, whose *The End of Certainty: Time, Chaos, and New Laws of Nature* (New York: The Free Press, 1996) is revolutionizing science theory. Political theorist William Connolly makes provocative use of the concept in *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2008), drawing on chaos theory, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and others. “Resonant causality,” for Connolly, is a form of causality in which “diverse elements infiltrate each other, metabolizing into a moving complex.” Elements “slide and blend into one another, though each also retains a modicum of independence from the others.” It is causation as “resonance between elements that become fused to a considerable degree.” See *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style*, 39. For a fuller discussion of resonance and receptivity, see my “The Neuropolitical *Habitus* of Resonant Receptivity Democracy” in *Neuroscience and Political Theory*, ed. Frank VanderValk (New York: Routledge Press, forthcoming 2012).

<sup>7</sup> John Howard Yoder, review of *The Scapegoat* by René Girard in *Religion and Literature* 19.3 (Fall 1986): 89-92.

<sup>8</sup> The notion of “resonance machine” is developed throughout Connolly’s *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style*. It refers to multiplicative relationships of energetic spiritual affinity across numerous spheres of contemporary life, from capitalism and right-wing fundamentalism, to NASCAR and militarism – particularly amplified in right-wing media domains such as FOX News.

<sup>9</sup> Glen Stassen is absolutely right when he suggests, in his ‘Introduction’ to *War of the Lamb*, that the third chapter (nearly identical to the first lecture in *Nonviolence*) provides an “illuminating flash” in which we find that “much of the heart of Yoder’s own faith and vision are here” (16).

<sup>10</sup> “Broke out spontaneously” is, of course, a myth that conceals many layers of preparation and long-term organizing.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Robert P. Moses and Charles E. Cobb Jr., *Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Timothy B. Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name: A True Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>17</sup> Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), especially "Comic and Tragic."

<sup>19</sup> This poem was brought to my attention by Lia Haro. See Yehuda Amichai, "Look: Thoughts and Dreams" in *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, 7.

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## **On ‘Seeing’ Nonviolence in 1983: Nonviolence and Ecclesiology in Hauerwas and Yoder**

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In this article we will explore the significance of John Howard Yoder’s *Nonviolence – A Brief History: The Warsaw Lectures*, delivered in 1983, by way of textual comparison with one of that year’s landmark theological works, Stanley Hauerwas’s *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. In so doing we are entering the burgeoning discussion on the theological relationship between these two figures in order to illuminate the inner dynamics of *Nonviolence – A Brief History*. Our exploration will comprise three parts. First, we survey comparisons that have been made between Yoder and Hauerwas’s ethics. Second, we narrate the arguments of both *The Peaceable Kingdom* and *Nonviolence*, looking particularly at how the texts describe (1) what nonviolence is, (2) how nonviolence is enabled and sustained, and (3) what sources inform Yoder and Hauerwas’s nonviolence. Finally, we draw out some of the theological rationale of *Nonviolence* by direct comparison with *Peaceable Kingdom*.

### **Yoder and Hauerwas: Connection and Comparison**

A kind of cottage industry has emerged on the Yoder-Hauerwas relationship. Arguments explaining the two authors’ divergent views include their divergent moral psychology, allowance for internal dissent, approval of voluntarism, and posture on Enlightenment liberalism.<sup>1</sup> Less frequent are arguments for their coherence, pointing to their common commitment to nonviolence, and their common rejection of “Constantinian” assumptions of privilege by the church.<sup>2</sup> While these comparisons are illuminating on various points, they do not quite interrogate the heart of the relationship between Yoder and Hauerwas.

Hauerwas has stated on multiple occasions (with perhaps a bit of characteristic hyperbole) that “everything John Howard Yoder believes, I think is true,” and that “I oftentimes feel I learned everything from John.”<sup>3</sup> Naming the totality of what he learned from Yoder over their thirty-plus years

of friendship would be the subject of a monograph. But, instructively, what Hauerwas points to in many of his reflections on Yoder is the intersection of nonviolence and ecclesiology.<sup>4</sup> In his reflections on *The Politics of Jesus*, Hauerwas described Yoder's work as "based on the life of a community. Nonviolence is a way of life for Christians."<sup>5</sup> Challenged during his doctoral studies by Yoder's writings on pacifism, Hauerwas writes that "if I was to trust in God's providential care of creation through the calling of the church, then I had to be a pacifist. . . . I am a pacifist because, given the way Yoder had taught me to think, I could not be anything else."<sup>6</sup> It is thus the relationship between nonviolence and ecclesiology that our comparison of these texts will explore.

In 1983, as Yoder was delivering a series of lectures on the nature and heritage of nonviolence to an ecumenical group of Christians in Poland, Hauerwas, his colleague at Notre Dame, was completing and publishing *The Peaceable Kingdom*. In one sense, *Peaceable Kingdom* was a continuation of Hauerwas's earlier concern for the relationship between moral formation and ethical actions, emphasizing the conditions under which Christian ethical action can be undertaken.<sup>7</sup> But in another sense, *Peaceable Kingdom* marked a relatively new trajectory in his writing, as Hauerwas here offered some of his first arguments on the nature and practice of nonviolence.<sup>8</sup> For Yoder, by contrast, writing on nonviolence in 1983 was hardly breaking new ground, since his published writings on the subject stretch back as far as 1949.<sup>9</sup> In the thirty-four years since then, his engagements on this topic had moved from participating in an in-house Mennonite conversation to including other conversation partners, ranging from proponents of Christian realism to advocates of liberation theology and just war.<sup>10</sup> In 1983, as Hauerwas was beginning his reflections on nonviolence out of a concern for the relationship between hermeneutics and virtue, Yoder was fully entrenched in discussions on nonviolence with various non-pacifist positions.

We now turn to *The Peaceable Kingdom* and *Nonviolence – A Brief History*, examining how the authors describe nonviolence and ecclesiology.

### **Hauerwas's Peaceable Kingdom**

Hauerwas's indebtedness to Yoder in a book designed to "show how

peaceableness as the hallmark of Christian life helps illumine other issues” is acknowledged early and often (e.g. *Peaceable Kingdom*, xvii).<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it was Yoder’s account of the church and nonviolence that appeared to Hauerwas to be both the culmination of his early work, and a fundamental challenge to Hauerwas’s approach to discipleship.

The more I read of Yoder’s scattered essays, the more I began to think he represented a fundamental challenge to the way I had been taught to think of ‘social ethics’. *Surprisingly, Yoder’s account of the church fit almost exactly the kind of community I was beginning to think was required by an ethics of virtue.* . . . However, Yoder was a pill I had no desire to swallow. His ecclesiology could not work apart from his understanding of Jesus and the centrality of nonviolence as the hallmark of the Christian life. (*Peaceable Kingdom*, xxiv, emphasis added)

Here we must investigate what Hauerwas takes to be the connection between ecclesiology and nonviolence. Even from this opening reflection in *Peaceable Kingdom*, we can see that the primary issue is not nonviolence *qua* nonviolence but how nonviolence is dependent on and subservient to ecclesiology.

Hauerwas begins his argument for the church as the locus of formation in Christian virtue with observing that formation in ethics requires being shaped by communities of virtue. Stating that “life in a world of moral fragments is always on the edge of violence” and that for Christians defining the ethical life is “based on a kingdom that has become present in the life of Jesus of Nazareth” (*Peaceable Kingdom*, 5-6), he establishes that nonviolence for Christians must run through ecclesiology. This theme of the church as the locus of moral formation undergirds his essay, which assumes that the church receives a particular kind of peace named by Jesus, and that formation in this peaceability involves not “choices” for or against violence but belonging to a community that embodies this peace as a witness to the world.<sup>12</sup>

Nonviolence is described in three ways in *Peaceable Kingdom*. First and foremost, nonviolence is the quality of character that reflects our having found our “place within God’s story” (*Peaceable Kingdom*, 44); as

we understand the peace of whole existence that comes in trusting others to speak truthfully to us about ourselves and God, we will find ourselves as nonviolent. Violence comes in rejecting the story of trust in God and in embracing a story in which we seek to be agents of control and self-determination (ibid., 48-49). Indeed, peaceableness – of which nonviolence is a part – means bearing witness to the ultimate reality of the universe:

The essential Christian witness is neither to personal experience, nor to what Christianity means to ‘me’, but to the truth that this world is the creation of a good God who is known through the people of Israel and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without such a witness we only abandon the world to the violence derived from the lies that devour our lives. There is, therefore, an inherent relation between truthfulness and peacefulness because peace comes only as we are transformed by a truth that gives us the confidence to rely on nothing else than its witness. (Ibid., 15)

Second, and derivatively, nonviolence is a practice that corresponds to what it means to be a part of this community surrounding Jesus (*Peaceable Kingdom*, 79).<sup>13</sup> Because Jesus’ life is one that “does not serve by forcing itself on others,” Christians live as people of dispossession, as “our possessions are the source of our violence” (ibid., 81, 87). The cross, as the ultimate dispossession – of one’s life and one’s self, is the means by which God has conquered the powers of the world, enabling peaceableness in securing forgiveness (ibid., 87-89). Third, as the quality inherent to Christian community and a practice characterizing disciples within it, the practice of nonviolence becomes the mode of Christian witness outside the church (ibid., 97).<sup>14</sup> As people embodying peace, Christians can have no recourse to violence, as it is not only a betrayal of the community of forgiveness but a rejection of God’s rule of creation.

The church must learn time and time again that its task is not to make the world the kingdom, but to be faithful to the kingdom by showing to the world what it means to be a community of peace. . . . Christians cannot seek justice from the barrel of a gun; and we must be suspicious of that justice that relies on

manipulation of our less than worthy motives, for God does not rule creation through coercion, but through a cross. As Christians, therefore, we seek not so much to be effective as to be faithful – we, thus, cannot do that which promises ‘results’ when the means are unjust. (Ibid., 103-104)

In articulating what Christian ethics is, Hauerwas contends that it is the quality and practice of nonviolence which exemplifies how this witness is fully developed. Arguing against the “What would you do if ...” question often raised by non-pacifists, he asserts that “providence” does not mean that things will work out right, but rather that there is a way of existence which will be maligned but nevertheless exalted in Christ and which “fits with the continuing story of a community’s life with God.” That is, “God’s story cannot be defeated by our attempts to become the authors of this world’s narrative by employing violent means” (*Peaceable Kingdom*, 127-28). Nonviolence is that quality of a community’s life before God which becomes their primary mode of witness against alternate construals of the world’s origin and *telos*.

Two points should be made at this juncture. First, nonviolence is not a “thing,” an object to be possessed or an act, but a quality of character that describes a community’s life before God. Second, this posture of nonviolence for Hauerwas is not sustainable apart from a communal vision of God’s activity and intent – namely the church that bears witness to Jesus of Nazareth. Ethics is not a matter of “decision” but of communal formation, and more specifically, a communal formation that speaks of the true narrative of the world (*Peaceable Kingdom*, 1-12). As Hauerwas puts it, “This love that is characteristic of God’s kingdom is possible for a forgiven people—a people who have learned not to fear one another. For love is the nonviolent apprehension of the other as other” (ibid., 89). This could be predicated of any community, but for him “it is in the church that the narrative of God is lived in a way that makes the kingdom visible” (ibid., 97).

In *Peaceable Kingdom*, Hauerwas appropriates Yoder’s writings on nonviolence for his own concern for moral formation. Precisely because nonviolence is not a matter of personal ethics but of communal formation, nonviolence emerges as the consequence of engaging the particular narrative of the Gospel, and not by the resources of rationality or any intrinsic human



characteristic (*Peaceable Kingdom*, 12). While nonviolence is named as the central characteristic of peaceable communities, it is ultimately a mode of church existence before it is a practice of witness.

Drawing on Yoder's work to extend what the substance of communities of moral formation is, Hauerwas writes that

Yoder means to enliven our imaginations, to free us from our assumptions schooled on the presumption of the necessity of violence, to show that it is 'logically preposterous' to assume that in such situations we can only choose between the first and fourth options [the attackers going unchallenged and killing the attackers]. (Ibid., 126)<sup>15</sup>

For Hauerwas, only in the church shaped by the narrative of Christ can there be the possibility for ethics that do not entail violence. Christians seeking to "author" the world's narrative will be inevitably swept up into violence (ibid., 127-28). Yoder's writings on the nature and practice of nonviolence are framed by Hauerwas's argument about the nature of communal formation, with the conclusion in *Peaceable Kingdom* that ecclesially-based moral formation around the narrative of Christ must precede a nonviolence of ethos, practice, and witness.

We now turn to Yoder's own work from 1983 to compare his assumptions about the nexus of ecclesiology and nonviolence.

### **Yoder's *Nonviolence – A Brief History***

Yoder begins his lectures with a jarring observation that marks an intention different from that of Hauerwas: "One of the most original cultural products of our century is our awareness of the power of organized nonviolent resistance as an instrument in the struggle for justice" (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 17). Yoder is interested in the development of this nonviolent movement, and devotes the first lecture to providing a narrative of nonviolence so that one might perceive its organic unity. This narrative begins with Leo Tolstoy. Not only does nonviolence find a precursor in Christ, it also has a precursor in the Slavic world of Yoder's Polish audience. In fact, nonviolence has many antecedents in history, and they are not always identical with what is commonly understood to be the church. Both in the present volume and in other works, Yoder extols the Jewish community for maintaining

nonviolence as a distinctive mark (ibid., 82).<sup>16</sup> While Hauerwas is engaged in describing nonviolence as a practice of the church, Yoder seems content with a broader description that retains a theological perspective by other means.

Yoder's exposition of Tolstoy highlights further distance between him and Hauerwas. Tolstoy does not adopt nonviolence as part of his communal moral formation but arrives at it as a result of his conversion (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 19-20).<sup>17</sup> He first changed from within as a growing awareness of his own unworthiness overcame him and led him to a change in life direction. He next experienced a change from without when he discovered the “key” to the gospel: the cure for evil is suffering (ibid., 21). From this insight, Tolstoy is compelled to restructure the entire universe of Christian life and thought, developing a counter-cosmology that critiques economic exploitation and imperial domination. Yoder describes this change in cosmology as the conversion that galvanized Tolstoy and sparked nonviolence not only in the Slavic world but elsewhere as well. Under the influence of Tolstoy, Gandhi chose this counter-cosmology and added a certain organizational genius of his own. In turn, Martin Luther King, Jr. was impacted by this counter-cosmology mediated through Gandhi. The resulting organic unity between these luminaries creates what Yoder, echoing the Book of Hebrews, calls the “cloud of witnesses” for nonviolence (ibid., 39).

For Yoder, nonviolence presupposes a distinctive spirituality that comes about as a fruit of conversion and adoption of a counter-cosmology. Nonviolence then becomes a moral commitment for individual who changes orientation. Finally, this moral commitment entails a social strategy of active resistance. Such resistance demands the discipline practiced by a religious community so it can be consistently and coherently demonstrated (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 41). However, it is not clear that Yoder's religious community operates as Hauerwas's locus of moral formation. While converted individuals must certainly find a community in which to participate in disciplined resistance, they do so for the sake of a coherent social action based on a presupposed moral commitment, not for the sake of inculcating such a commitment. However, this does not make the community less important for Yoder, as he insists that nonviolence cannot

work in any other way than through communal action. In a later essay, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” he provides more detail regarding individual roles within a moral community. Some people will be agents of direction, memory, linguistic self-consciousness, or order and due process.<sup>18</sup> But it is already becoming clear in Warsaw that individuals who have undergone a conversion make a communal hermeneutic viable by bringing a certain spirituality and posture along with them.

While a conversion to nonviolence entails a new understanding of one’s neighbor and therefore must include a social reorientation, the key to this transformation is readily available in history and in the gospel rather than exclusive to a church. Nowhere is this availability more evident than in Yoder’s lecture entitled “The Science of Conflict” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 63-72). Here he includes the beginnings of the sociological field of conflict management as part of the organic unity of 20th-century nonviolence. Beginning with general trends in sociology that describe society through models of intergroup conflict rather than stable equilibrium, he interprets various fields of science as moving toward supporting nonviolent resistance as a natural action. From Saul Alinsky to Konrad Lorenz, Yoder is confident that a wide array of research is validating his claim that managing conflict nonviolently is essential to all life on earth.

While both he and Hauerwas insist that nonviolence speaks the truth about the universe, Yoder intends to say this not solely as a theological statement or merely in conjunction with the division between the church and the world. Indeed, for Yoder, “We cannot discuss theology alone. We must constantly interlock with the human sciences, which are talking about the same phenomena from other perspectives” (ibid., 63). There is no room for any kind of dualism that would call such an exchange either unbelief or a confusion of categories.

Regarding the sources for nonviolence, Yoder trots out familiar references after including Tolstoy, Gandhi, and King. As mentioned earlier, he finds nonviolent communities rooted in both the Old and New Testaments. Beginning with the wars of Joshua, the Jewish people have readily understood that Yahweh himself gives victory. The task of the faithful Israelite is to trust rather than to fight (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 75). This understanding continued to guide the Jews as they renounced statehood

and accepted *diaspora* under the leadership of Jeremiah (ibid., 80). Turning to the New Testament, Yoder cites arguments familiar to readers of his *The Politics of Jesus* in order to demonstrate that nonviolent resistance can produce politically significant activity while still remaining faithful to Jesus' example (ibid., 85-96).<sup>19</sup>

The product of Yoder's work is a nonviolent spirituality that can be traced through history, provided we know how and where to look. Those with a disposition toward peace and conflict resolution will more easily discern both the contours of nonviolence in history and its significance. Those from Christian backgrounds will also find this spirituality accessible, but it can also be found in Judaism, in the study of history, or in the social sciences. Nonviolent spirituality is a pluralized phenomenon in *Nonviolence – A Brief History*, and it need not be isolated to one particular communal expression, whether Christian or otherwise. Furthermore, this spirituality can be affirmed in its efforts by non-theological means. It can be demonstrated not only descriptively (nonviolence as a force in history) but prescriptively as well (a set of practices that can be taught without direct reference to theological values).

Yoder finishes his lectures with an account of current movements within Roman Catholic peace theology. He tellingly begins with describing a spirituality that had begun to pervade some segments of the Catholic church and was most pronounced in the Catholic Worker movement and Dorothy Day. Throughout the three lectures, he is quick to point out how the Catholic peace movement began with this spirituality popular among laypeople before being taken up by Catholic academics operating outside their primary institutional responsibilities and only later appearing in statements from bishops (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 107-20, 121, 130-31). Yoder finishes his lectures with an exposition of liberation theology in Latin America, an example of Catholic peace movements arising despite "the heritage of intellectual and institutional domination of the continent by Catholicism" (ibid., 134).

It is clear throughout that the organic unity which Yoder sees within a brief history of nonviolence entails a different relationship between nonviolence and the church than what Hauerwas envisions.

## Conclusion

By placing Hauerwas's *Peaceable Kingdom* alongside Yoder's contemporaneous *Nonviolence – A Brief History*, we contend that contrasts between the two help illuminate what is most distinctive about this newly published text from Yoder.

First, in *Nonviolence*, Yoder casts nonviolence as a resistance movement that is accessible to the world and intelligible on its terms. By contrast, for Hauerwas nonviolence is first a disposition of virtue learned in the church before it is an act of witness. Second, Yoder's lectures speak of nonviolence not as a virtue but as an act, a general nonviolent movement having an organic unity within history. Hauerwas's essay, conversely, describes nonviolence as first a virtue of ecclesial life. Third, Yoder's lectures articulate nonviolence as originating with an individual conversion to a particular spirituality or posture, and then leading to the formation of the religious community as an expression of, and a means of, effective organization; Hauerwas's project emphasizes the formation of the community as prior to engaging in nonviolent activity. Finally, while Hauerwas's church is concerned with moral formation, Yoder's religious community of nonviolence organizes and resists.<sup>20</sup>

While Yoder and Hauerwas agree on both the importance of ecclesiology and the necessity of nonviolence within its composition, this does not necessarily entail either an identical view of what the church is or an identical conception of what the means and sources of nonviolence are. What appears in comparing the two texts is that, while there is some overlap between them in terms of concerns and methods, this does not imply that their projects are the same. Rather, Hauerwas's primer, describing nonviolence against the backdrop of communal moral formation, envisions nonviolence as intrinsic to the church's life, while Yoder's lectures articulate nonviolence in a more plural setting, envisioning nonviolence as arising from multiple vistas. Yoder's *Nonviolence* highlights this important facet of his influential relationship with Hauerwas – a facet that further illuminates the insights of both thinkers.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> J. Alexander Sider, "Friendship, Alienation, Love: Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84.3 (2010): 417-40; Gerald W. Schlabach, "Continuity and Sacrament, or Not: Hauerwas, Yoder, and Their Deep Difference," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 27 (2007): 171-207; Paul Doerksen, "Share the House: Yoder and Hauerwas Among the Nations," in *A Mind Patient and Untamed: Assessing John Howard Yoder's Contributions to Theology, Ethics and Peacemaking*, ed. Ben C. Ollenburger and Gayle Gerber Koontz (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2004); Douglas Harink, "For or Against the Nations: Yoder and Hauerwas, What's the Difference?," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 17 (2001): 167-85.

<sup>2</sup> Gerald Biesecker-Mast, "The Radical Christological Rhetoric of John Howard Yoder" and Craig Hovey, "The Public Ethics of John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas: Difference or Disagreement?," both in *A Mind Patient and Untamed*, pages 39-55 and 205-20 respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Debate with Paige Patterson at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, September 18, 2002, cited in Hovey, 205; Stanley Hauerwas, "History, Theory, and Anabaptism," in Stanley Hauerwas and Chris K. Huebner, *The Wisdom of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 399.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, "Democratic Time: Lessons Learned from Yoder and Wolin," *Cross Currents* 55 (2006): 534-62: "...Yoder's pacifism constitutes a vulnerable politics not only because it is a politics that demands a sense of what it means to follow Jesus, but also because Yoder refuses to let the church 'be assimilated into what he takes to be even the most admirable currents of civic nationalism'" (542).

<sup>5</sup> Hauerwas, "When the Politics of Jesus Makes a Difference," *Christian Century*, October 13, 1993: 982-87 at 982.

<sup>6</sup> Hauerwas, "Confessions of a Mennonite Camp Follower," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 74.4 (2000): 511-22 at 516. Cf. "Remembering John Howard Yoder," *First Things*, April 1998, 15: "Reading Yoder made me a pacifist. It did so because John taught me that nonviolence was not just another 'moral issue' but constitutes the heart of our worship of a crucified messiah."

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> Prior to *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Hauerwas's comments on war and nonviolence were relatively few by comparison. For Hauerwas prior to 1983, see "The Vietnam War: Is it Time to Forgive and Forget – Three Views," *Worldview* 23 (1980), 13-16. Following *The Peaceable Kingdom*, a large number of Hauerwas's works took up the question of Christian involvement in war, such as "On Surviving Justly: An Ethical Analysis of Nuclear Disarmament," *Center Journal* 1 (1983): 123-52, "Pacifism: Some Philosophical Considerations," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 99-104, "The Need for an Ending," *Modern Churchman* 28 (1986): 3-7, and *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Published under the pseudonym Ein Wiedertäufer. "What Would You Do If . . . ? : A Series." *The Youth's Christian Companion*, June 5, 1949, 595; June 12, 607; June 19, 615; June 26,

620; July 10, 636; July 17, 644-45; July 24, 652; Aug. 7, 668.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. "Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 29.2 (April 1955): 101-17, first published in 1954 as Heerewegen Pamphlet #1 (Zeist, The Netherlands); "Exodus and Exile: Two Faces of Liberation," *Cross Currents* 23 (Fall 1973): 297-309; "Another Option to Just War," *This Day* (July 1968): 4-7, 30.

<sup>11</sup> *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1983), xvii. Hauerwas also thanks Yoder for his criticisms of the work (xiii).

<sup>12</sup> Cf.: "Communities teach us what kinds of intentions are appropriate if we are to be the kind of person appropriate to living among these people." (21)

<sup>13</sup> "Peace will come only through the worship of the one God who chooses to rule the world through the power of love, which the world can only perceive as weakness. Jesus thus decisively rejects Israel's temptation to an idolatry that necessarily results in violence between people and nations." (*Peaceable Kingdom*, 79)

<sup>14</sup> "For it is in the church that narrative of God is lived in a way that makes the kingdom visible. The church must be the clear manifestation of a people who have learned to be at pace with themselves, one another, the stranger, and most of all, God." (Ibid., 97.)

<sup>15</sup> Here Hauerwas cites Yoder's article "'What Would You Do If'... An Exercise in Situation Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 2 (1974): 82-83.

<sup>16</sup> "That model of Jewish pacifism was sustained through the Middle Ages after the Christians had made their alliance with the Caesars and continued to be held until our century. Paradoxically, it was the Jews who through all those centuries most faithfully represented within Europe the defenseless style of morality which Jesus taught." (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 82.)

<sup>17</sup> "Tolstoy is first of all a convert." (Ibid., 19.)

<sup>18</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 28-34.

<sup>19</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> This point is made most clearly by Gerald Schlabach in *Unlearning Protestantism* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 47-87.

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## **Toward Realistic Pacifism: John Howard Yoder and the Theory and Practice of Nonviolent Peacemaking**

*David Cortright*

I had the privilege of knowing John Howard Yoder in the 1990s when he taught theology at Notre Dame and we served together as fellows of the University's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. Yoder had a rather stern and aloof personality, but towards me he was always friendly and engaged. He often asked about my research and previous activist work with SANE (the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy) and the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign. He placed newspaper clippings or documents about the peace movement in my mailbox, usually attaching a post-it note or a brief comment. At the time I thought he was simply unloading old files, but it turns out that he had a keen interest in peace advocacy and nonviolent action. He thought very deeply about social action methods as effective means of achieving justice and peace.

We have known of Yoder's monumental intellectual contributions to the theology of Christian pacifism, but it was not until recently, with publication of *Nonviolence – A Brief History: The Warsaw Lectures*, that we came to realize how deeply he also understood the theoretical and practical dimensions of nonviolent action. In these lectures Yoder reveals a thorough knowledge of, and profound insight into, the dynamics of nonviolence. He probes the thinking of Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and many others to examine the core elements of the nonviolent method that contribute to its success. He demonstrates that this method embodies the practical application of principled Christian pacifism.

In this essay I examine Yoder's core insights into the nonviolent message of Jesus and its impact on Gandhi and the development of the nonviolent method. I review Yoder's distinct and uncharacteristically enthusiastic assessment of the importance of nonviolent principles in Catholic social teaching and practice. I focus particularly on his unique interpretation of just war doctrine and its evolution toward pacifism in recent decades in light of the growing viability of Gandhian nonviolence. The essay includes a critique of Yoder's interpretation of the role of religion and



spirituality in nonviolent action. It concludes with an affirmation of Yoder's emphasis on the "science" of peacemaking and conflict mediation, and the importance of our growing knowledge and experience in peacebuilding as evidence of viable alternatives to war.

### **Jesus' Call to Nonviolent Action**

In the Warsaw lectures Yoder repeats his core theme from *The Politics of Jesus* and other works, namely that the Gospels deliver a social message. Not that Jesus is political in the conventional sense, but rather that he came into the world to bring "good news to the poor" and solace for the "least of these." Jesus was a social liberator, the bearer of a new vision of human community. He stood with the poor and the marginalized, not with the powerful and the mighty. He ministered to the sick, the disabled, and the prodigal. He lifted up the persecuted and the meek. He warned the wealthy of the special burden they bear in entering heaven. He said that peacemakers will be children of God, and that we must love everyone, including our enemy. These Gospel messages convey a clear commitment to striving for social justice and transcending violence.

Yoder rejects the conservative religious argument that the Gospels deal only with personal ethics. Sin is not only individual, he points out, but also social. The Gospels call us to work for justice, which means challenging structures of power that reinforce oppression and exploitation. Jesus introduced a revolutionary new way of achieving justice, through forgiveness instead of vengeance. He offered a third way, between quietism and armed revolution (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 91). He did not seek to fashion an organization or an army but rather a new human family, a community of believers committed to seeking reconciliation and love, and willing to suffer for the sake of justice. Nonviolence is at the core of the Christian gospel, Yoder emphasizes.

At the heart of the meaning of Jesus is his teaching of the kingdom of God. At the heart of that teaching is the Sermon on the Mount. At the heart of the Sermon is the contrast between what had been said by them of old and what "I now say to you." At the core of these antitheses is the love of the enemy and non-resistance to evil. (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 21)

The key to the good news of Jesus is that we can be freed from the chain of evil and the deadly spiral of violence engendered by action and reaction in kind. “By refusing to extend the chain of vengeance, we break into the world with good news,” Yoder exudes (*ibid.*, 21). This is not only a theological point but a key element of the political effectiveness of nonviolent action. As Yoder correctly notes, the renunciation of violence has “tactical advantages; it robs the oppressor of the pretext to aggravate his own violence, and it draws the attention of others to the justice of one’s cause” (*ibid.*, 47).

Martin Luther King, Jr. made a similar point in his famous essay, “Loving your Enemies,” where he examines the meaning and the means of following what is arguably Jesus’ most challenging command. It is necessary to love our enemies, King writes, because hate multiplies hate. “Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” Hate and violence only create more violence. It is necessary to step outside this vicious cycle. “The chain reaction of evil – hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars – must be broken,” King insists. Hate scars the soul and distorts the personality. It is as injurious to the one who hates as it is to its victim. It blurs perception and impedes understanding. Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend. We get rid of the enemy by getting rid of enmity, King teaches. Hatred by its nature leads to destruction, but love creates and builds new relationships. “Love transforms with redemptive power.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Jesus and Gandhi**

Although of Hindu origin, Gandhi was deeply influenced by the Gospel message of Jesus. He was particularly moved by the Sermon on the Mount, which he considered to be of sublime beauty and importance. He kept a picture of Christ in his office in South Africa and on the wall of his ashram in India. He often read passages from the Gospels before encounters with his Christian adversaries.<sup>2</sup> He considered Christ the “sower of the seed” of his nonviolent philosophy and method. Gandhi had no recourse to the kind of Christian theological exegesis of which Yoder was a master, but he understood instinctively the transformative power of returning love for hatred, good for evil, and he set about in his public life to harness this force for social uplift.

It was during his early career as a social leader in South Africa, as he was just beginning the struggle over racial oppression against Indian immigrants, that Gandhi first encountered the teachings of Jesus. A Quaker, Michael Coates, introduced him to the Gospels and gave him an intimate understanding of Jesus' teaching of love for all.<sup>3</sup> In the 1920s the British Quaker leader Horace Alexander corresponded with Gandhi and visited his ashram in Ahmedabad, India. Alexander helped Gandhi deepen his understanding of Christian pacifism, introducing him to St. Francis of Assisi and recounting the experiences of pioneering Quakers in England and the Americas.

Gandhi's attraction to Christianity was reinforced by his reading of Leo Tolstoy, whose pacifist writings also impressed Yoder. Late in life Tolstoy experienced a profound religious awakening that led him to embrace absolute pacifism. This former Russian army officer and member of the landed aristocracy renounced wealth and condemned war. He rejected violence and urged resistance to state authority, which he understood as based on the threat of violence. A true Christian cannot serve in the armed forces, he argued, but rather should resist militarism with "humble reasonableness and readiness to bear all suffering."<sup>4</sup> The role of suffering to expiate sin was crucial to Tolstoy, and also impressed Yoder. Suffering is necessary to overcome evil, Tolstoy said. The cross of Jesus brings salvation and conquers sin. In the Warsaw lectures Yoder quotes approvingly Tolstoy's assertion that suffering is the essential element of belief, a core message of the Gospels. Progress in human history, said Tolstoy, is the work of the persecuted. This is the "dramatic and scandalous teaching" of the Gospel, writes Yoder (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 21).

Gandhi and Tolstoy had a brief correspondence at the end of the great writer's life. Gandhi was especially impressed by Tolstoy's message of resistance to social evil. He viewed this as the key to freedom from oppression, an invitation for the Indian people to take collective action against imperial rule. In 1909 Tolstoy wrote a public "Letter to a Hindoo," which Gandhi published in his journal *Indian Opinion*. Tolstoy asserted that the Indian people were responsible for their own subjugation because they allowed the British to maintain colonial domination. Gandhi wrote a commentary on the article's meaning in which he stated that "the English

have not taken India; we have given it to them.” He interpreted Tolstoy’s message succinctly as “slavery consists in submitting.”<sup>5</sup> To achieve freedom requires mass disobedience and the rejection of colonial authority. Through collective sacrifice, Gandhi wrote, the Indian people could overthrow foreign domination and become masters of their own fate.

Gandhi thoroughly absorbed the teachings of Jesus and was described by Louis Fischer as “one of the most Christlike men in history.”<sup>6</sup> Dorothy Day paid great tribute to Gandhi in a eulogy at the time of his death. “There is no public figure who has more conformed his life to the life of Jesus Christ than Gandhi, there is no man who has carried about him more consistently the aura of divinized humanity,” she wrote. He was assassinated by a Hindu nationalist extremist “because he insisted that there be no hatred, that Hindu and Moslem live together in peace.” She described him as a “pacifist martyr.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Gandhi and Christian Social Ethics**

Gandhi’s philosophy and method had a profound influence on American Christian pacifists, including Mennonites. The message of nonviolent social action came most directly through Dr. King and the example of the Civil Rights Movement, which were inspired in part by Gandhi. The traditional Anabaptist approach of avoiding conflict and withdrawing from social engagement began to erode in the 20th century as urbanization encroached upon rural Mennonite communities. Many Anabaptists began to feel increasingly uncomfortable and inadequate standing apart from titanic social struggles against war, tyranny, and racial injustice. After World War II these feelings became increasingly widespread and acute. In the 1950s and ’60s a growing number of Mennonites began to yearn for an approach that would allow them to resist social evil while remaining true to principles of Christian pacifism. A pioneer in this quest was J. Lawrence Burkholder, a theologian at Harvard Divinity School and later president of Goshen College. Burkholder questioned the pursuit of perfectionism in an imperfect world and argued that Mennonite ethics “had failed to come to grips with social reality.”<sup>8</sup> Yoder was deeply influenced by and participated in this debate, and he devoted much of his writing to an argument for the relevance of Christian pacifism and the need for a social commitment to overcoming

injustice and war.

The point of Christian social ethics is not perfectionism, Yoder argued, but a less imperfect world. He acknowledged Reinhold Niebuhr's critique of "immoral society," but insisted that this is not an argument for failing to apply Christian ethics to social challenges. The Christian demands not a condition of perfection, Yoder wrote, but a social order that encourages good and restrains evil, and that makes an imperfect world more tolerable. The purpose of Christian ethics in reference to the state is not to achieve impossible utopias but to strive for what Yoder termed "progress in tolerability."<sup>9</sup> By denouncing particular evils and devising remedies for social problems, we can help to create a more just world that can please God and improve the well-being of other humans. As Yoder wrote: "Sin is vanquished every time a Christian in the power of God chooses the better instead of the good . . . love instead of compromise. . . . That this triumph over sin is incomplete changes in no way the fact that it is possible."<sup>10</sup>

Yoder rejected Niebuhr's Christian realism but accepted his views on the importance of discriminate judgment and action to achieve relative justice. Yoder believed that a rigorous application of Niebuhr's ethical framework "would lead in our day to a pragmatic . . . pacifism and to the advocacy of nonviolent means of struggle."<sup>11</sup> Niebuhr was deeply impressed by Gandhi and considered his nonviolent action methods to be morally superior means of exerting coercive pressure to achieve justice. The key to the effectiveness of the Gandhian method, Niebuhr wrote, is its ability to break the cycle of hatred and mutual recrimination that flows from the use of violence. The nonviolent method "reduces these animosities to a minimum and therefore preserves a certain objectivity in analyzing the issues of the dispute." This form of struggle offers greater opportunities for harmonizing the moral and rational factors of social life.<sup>12</sup>

Niebuhr concluded his analysis of Gandhi by appealing to the religious community: "There is no problem of political life to which the religious imagination can make a larger contribution than this problem of developing nonviolent resistance." Niebuhr himself never returned to the subject of nonviolent action, but the religious communities to which he appealed gradually took up the call and over the decades have done much to develop and apply the methods of Gandhian nonviolence. Mennonite

theologians have been especially faithful, led by Yoder, and have made great strides in elaborating the rationale and the methodology of nonviolent resistance.

### **Catholic Peacemaking**

The call to nonviolent action has also gained resonance within the Catholic community, initially within pacifist circles but increasingly in mainstream Catholic social teaching as well. Speaking to a mostly Catholic audience in Warsaw, Yoder devoted a major portion of his lectures to elaborating the multiple varieties of Catholic peacemaking and the rich contributions of Catholic writers and activists to the strengthening of nonviolent principles and practices.

Yoder pays special tribute to Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement, which he describes as “a holistic unfolding of the virtues of faith, hope, love, meekness, and the peacemaking and hunger for righteousness to which Jesus’ beatitudes pointed” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 115). The Catholic Worker movement combines hospitality for the poor with activism for social justice. Day was an absolute pacifist who rejected any resort to armed force or form of military service. She retained her pacifist commitment even during World War II, which cost the *Catholic Worker* newspaper many subscriptions and made her the object of widespread misunderstanding and hatred. She was not indifferent to the plight of the Jews or the struggle against Nazism, however. She campaigned against anti-Semitism, especially among Catholics such as the influential Father Charles Coughlin, and she pressured the Roosevelt administration to allow larger quotas for Jewish immigrants fleeing persecution in Europe.

Day was one of the earliest opponents of nuclear weapons, organizing public acts of civil disobedience against air raid drills in New York in the 1950s. Her protests were mocked at first, but antinuclear resistance steadily gained support, helping to spark a mass disarmament movement by the late 1950s, embodied in the founding of organizations such as Women Strike for Peace and SANE. Day and her colleagues were also early opponents of the Vietnam War. Day opposed all war but she was particularly appalled by the massive US military attack against that peasant nation. She felt a special responsibility to speak out because of the role of Catholic leaders

such as New York's Francis Cardinal Spellman in advocating "total victory" in Vietnam, and because of the manipulation of sympathy for persecuted Catholics in North Vietnam as a justification for US intervention. Day and her colleagues formed the Catholic Peace Fellowship in the 1960s to organize support for conscientious objection and resistance to war.

Yoder devotes special attention in the Warsaw lectures to the spread of pacifist influence and peacemaking commitments within mainstream Catholicism. He acknowledges the landmark influence of the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s and praises John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. This groundbreaking document was addressed to all people of good will, not just Catholics. It linked the quest for peace to the defense of human rights and the pursuit of justice and greater equality among nations. It called for recognition of the "universal common good" and greater acknowledgement of the interdependence of nations. The well-being of one nation, the document proclaimed, is linked to that of all others. The encyclical was unequivocal in condemning the nuclear arms race, and it called for reducing military spending and banning nuclear weapons.

In Warsaw Yoder pays special attention to the 1983 pastoral letter of the US Catholic Conference of Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace*, which was just being released at the time. The letter called for a halt to the nuclear arms race, condemned many of the nuclear weapons programs being developed by the Reagan administration, and urged world leaders to move toward progressive disarmament. In declaring that any use of nuclear weapons is morally unacceptable, even in retaliation, the bishops adopted a nuclear pacifist position directly at odds with the core assumptions of US and international security policy. In so doing, Yoder declared in Warsaw, American Catholicism "entered a new phase of civil courage and pastoral responsibility" (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 132).

Former senior diplomat George Kennan called the bishops' letter "the most profound and searching inquiry yet conducted by any responsible collective body" into the relations of nuclear weaponry and modern war.<sup>13</sup> The pastoral document had a powerful influence on public opinion and helped to inspire and legitimize widespread public activism against nuclear weapons. The role of the Catholic Church and other religious bodies in speaking out against the nuclear danger cast a mantle of respectability over

antinuclear activism and gave a decisive boost to the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign and the growth of SANE during the 1980s.

The commitment of the Catholic Church to peace and disarmament continues today. The Church condemned the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and has played a significant role in recent years in lobbying against new nuclear weapons and supporting further nuclear reductions. The peace witness of the Church has become so deeply rooted that some conservative Catholic writers complain of *de facto* pacifism at the Vatican. The official position of the Church is the just war doctrine, not pacifism, but in practice the Vatican and the US bishops have adopted a quasi-pacifist interpretation of the doctrine. In the Warsaw lectures Yoder praises these developments within Catholicism and the deeper commitment to peacemaking among Christians in general. These are signs of great hope, a “restoration of original Christianity . . . such as has not been the case with the same breadth or depth since the age of Francis. That is the privilege of living in our age” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 120).

### **From Just War to Pragmatic Pacifism**

Perhaps the most significant of the Warsaw lectures is Yoder’s analysis of the evolution of just war doctrine; he provocatively entitles chapter 4 as “The Fall and Rise of the Just War Tradition.” Yoder analyzes the evolution of just war teaching, from its origins as a moral constraint on the conduct of war, through its decline into the age of world war and mass bombing, to the recent revival of ethical concerns for restraining war and reducing nuclear weapons. He expresses respect for the just war position as an ethical framework for deciding if and how military force should be used. “When held to honestly,” he asserts, the just war tradition rejects cynical realism and “articulates restraints which must be observed” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 53).

At Notre Dame during the 1990s Yoder gave occasional lectures on the relationship between pacifism and just war doctrine. I attended one of those presentations and remember vividly the way in which he demonstrated that a rigorous application of just war standards – just cause, right authority, last resort, probability of success, proportionality, discrimination – would make war extremely rare. It would forbid any use of nuclear weapons or other means of mass destruction, and would rule out all forms of large-scale



unilateral military intervention. An honest application of just war criteria reinforces the presumption against war and establishes a moral standard that is very close to pacifism.

Yoder's intention in these Notre Dame presentations was to limit the moral tolerance for armed violence and constrict the space in which war could be considered ethically permissible. He drew a rectangle on the blackboard, representing the space within which military action is rationalized, and then moved the sides of the box inward to illustrate how a vigorous application of the standards steadily compresses the space in which war could be considered permissible. By the end of the presentation only a tiny space remained, a point so small and improbable that it could be considered almost nonexistent. A genuinely just war would be no war at all. Just war and pacifism would merge, or almost so.

In the Warsaw lecture Yoder speaks of a "new paradigm" in which just war standards are taken seriously to arrive at a position close to that of pacifism. He illustrates the point by describing pressures from above and below, which together are narrowing the space in which war could be considered justifiable. The imperative for the new paradigm results from "the convergence of two different limits."

The top limit of justifiable war, the threshold beyond which destructiveness is so great that its use could never be justified, is increasingly pressing in upon us because of the escalation of the destructiveness, the number of weapons, and the difficulty of their control. The lower threshold of "last resort" is rising, so to speak, in view of the increasing availability of international means of mediation and adjudication and in view of greater awareness of the potential of nonviolent means of struggle. (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 61)

Pressure builds from the top because of the increasing destructiveness of modern weaponry and the rising human cost of war. The existence of nuclear weapons and the ever-increasing lethality of weapons technology make war almost inconceivable. Retired British General Rupert Smith flatly asserts that the old paradigm of industrial interstate war among the major powers "no longer exists," rendered obsolete by the extreme lethality of all weapons, nuclear and non-nuclear.<sup>14</sup>

Pressure is building from below because of the emergence of nonviolent action as a viable tool for addressing challenges of injustice and oppression. “Gandhi and King have brought to the fore a whole range of new possible instruments of social policy, tools and the struggle for social justice or other morally desirable goals” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 60). New techniques have emerged for resolving the problems of oppression and exploitation that war was supposedly intended to address. Greater knowledge is available for understanding conflict and resolving political and social disputes without recourse to violence. These social and political trends make war less necessary, while emerging technological trends make war less viable. The result is the ‘new paradigm’ in which just war doctrine and pacifism move closer together.

The options for protecting the innocent and pursuing justice are very much wider than conventional political and moral reasoning assume. The growing destructiveness of war has made the use of force increasingly dysfunctional. Nonviolent means have proven to much more effective than many skeptics assume. Together, these trends reduce the space available for “just war” and open up new arenas for constructive social action and effective public policy for resolving disputes without recourse to military means.

### **The Success of Nonviolent Action**

When Yoder lectured in 1983, nonviolent action had already shown its effectiveness in numerous settings, most significantly in the success of the movement for independence in India and in the triumph of the US Civil Rights Movement over racial segregation in the South. Yet political realists still tend to dismiss nonviolence as naïve and unworkable. Nonviolence has been tried and found wanting, they claim. Writer and nonviolent activist Barbara Deming argued to the contrary: “It has not been tried. We have hardly begun to try [nonviolence]. The people who dismiss it . . . do not understand what it could be.”<sup>15</sup> Gandhi said at the end of his life that the “technique of unconquerable nonviolence of the strong has not been discovered as yet.”<sup>16</sup>

Organized nonviolence is a new phenomenon in history. Only at the beginning of the 20th century, with Gandhi’s disobedience campaigns in South Africa and India, did mass nonviolent action begin to emerge as a

viable means of political and social change. While examples of nonviolent action can be found throughout history, as Gene Sharp documents, only in the last century has nonviolent action made significant contributions to political change.<sup>17</sup> In recent decades the Gandhian method of strategic nonviolent action has been applied and enlarged upon in a growing number of countries.

Examples of major nonviolent successes are many. The power of nonviolent resistance was displayed dramatically in early 2011 in the unarmed revolutions of Tunisia and Egypt, as millions of people poured into the streets to overthrow entrenched dictatorships. The “velvet revolution” of Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s brought down the Berlin Wall and swept away communist regimes across the region. The “people power” movement of the Philippines ended the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. Nonviolent resistance was decisive in the latter stages of the South African freedom movement that ended apartheid. Nonviolent movements swept through Latin America in recent decades, ending military dictatorship in Chile and democratizing governments throughout the continent. Nonviolent power led to the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia in 2000 and was felt in the Rose, Orange, and Tulip “revolutions” of Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in 2003-2005. Mass civil disobedience in Nepal ended the monarchy and restored democracy in 2006. The methods of nonviolent resistance have brought about significant political change and social transformation on every continent.

Recent empirical studies confirm the superiority of nonviolent action as a method of achieving significant social change. A study published in 2008 in *International Security* reviewed 323 historical examples of resistance campaigns over a span of more than one hundred years to determine whether violent or nonviolent methods work better in achieving political change.<sup>18</sup> Each case involved an intensive conflict, sometimes lasting several years, in which major sociopolitical movements struggled to gain specific concessions from government adversaries. The study by Maria J. Stephan and Erica Chenoweth employed the most rigorous scholarly methods to examine systematically the strategic impact of violent and nonviolent methods of political struggle. The results decisively validated the greater effectiveness of nonviolent action. The findings show that nonviolent

methods were twice as effective as violent means in achieving success in major resistance campaigns. In the cases examined, nonviolent means were successful 53 per cent of the time, compared to a 26 per cent success rate when violence was employed.

The key factor in explaining this result, according to Stephan and Chenoweth, is that nonviolent campaigns are better able to withstand the repression that inevitably confronts major resistance campaigns, and may even turn such repression to their advantage. When the adversary violently represses a disciplined nonviolent campaign, the nonviolent resisters may benefit politically. This is what César Chávez identified as the “strange chemistry” of nonviolent action. Whenever the adversary commits an unjust act against nonviolent protesters, said Chávez, “we get tenfold paid back in benefits.”<sup>19</sup> Deming described this as the “special genius” of nonviolent action.<sup>20</sup> Unjustified repression against disciplined nonviolent action can spark a sympathetic reaction among third parties and in the ranks of the adversary. This may spark loyalty shifts and increase support for the nonviolent campaigners, while undermining the legitimacy of the adversary.

Reinhold Niebuhr wrote that unjustified brutality against nonviolent action “robs the opponent of the moral conceit” that identifies his interest with the larger good of society. He describes this as the “most important of all the imponderables in a social struggle.”<sup>21</sup> The willingness of nonviolent campaigners to risk and accept repression without retaliation is fundamental to the political success of the Gandhian method. It alters political dynamics, and tips the balance of sympathy and political support against the adversary and toward the nonviolent movement.

Loyalty shifts are a key mechanism of nonviolent change, according to Stephan and Chenoweth, occurring in more than half the successful nonviolent campaigns studied.<sup>22</sup> Hierarchical power systems depend upon the obedience and loyalty of followers. When that loyalty falters, the oppressive power of the command system begins to erode. Resistance movements that generate disaffection in the ranks of the opponent greatly increase their chances of political success.

### A Spiritual Discipline?

To withstand pressure and gain sympathy and political support in the face of repression, a nonviolent movement must have iron discipline. No matter how fierce the repression imposed by the adversary, Gandhi emphasized, activists must remain strictly nonviolent. They must not respond with any kind of physical force or even express anger or resentment. The nonviolent campaigner must be willing to suffer for the cause, to take a blow, perhaps many blows, even to face possible injury or death, yet remain resolutely nonviolent. Courage and a willingness to sacrifice are essential, he wrote. Only by overcoming the fear of retaliation can we be free of the power of oppression. The ability to shed fear is the key to gaining freedom.

Yoder asserts in the Warsaw lectures that this fearlessness and willingness to sacrifice require “a religious community discipline so that action will be common and consistent” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 41). In so doing he weighs into a debate among scholars of nonviolent action that continues to this day. Is nonviolence based primarily on principle or pragmatism? Does it require a spiritual and moral commitment, or is it merely a matter of practical choice? Most scholars agree that the willingness to sacrifice is central to the meaning and effect of nonviolent action, but fewer believe that a religious foundation is necessary for nonviolent discipline. Gene Sharp argues that nonviolent action has nothing to do with religious or moral principles. It is simply a preferable form of political action with important pragmatic advantages. It works better than violence and is a more effective and less costly way of achieving social change. Sharp acknowledges the importance of discipline and a willingness to sacrifice. He recognizes that suffering can be a means of overcoming indifference and rationalization, but he rejects the contention that religious principles of pacifism are necessary ingredients of effective nonviolent action.

Yoder gives no indication of having engaged Sharp’s writings on the subject, published initially in his 1971 three-volume study, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. Yoder’s approach to the question seems overly didactic. He simply asserts that the willingness of people to sacrifice and incur risk “can only be rooted in a religious vision of the congruence between suffering and the purposes of God.” He believes that nonviolence must be rooted in a religious vision of history: “[B]efore it is a social strategy,

nonviolence is a moral commitment; before it is a moral commitment, it is a distinctive spirituality. . . . It is more a faith than it is a theory, although it is both” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 43).

The modern history of nonviolent action suggests otherwise. As resistance movements have spread and become more prevalent in recent years in multiple settings, they have not displayed the “distinctive spirituality” Yoder considers necessary. Most practitioners of nonviolent action are not motivated primarily by religious discipline. The youth who led the unarmed revolution in Egypt shouted “peaceful, peaceful” as a means of winning the support of the majority population, not as a spiritual commitment. In 1989 the millions of people who poured into the streets of Prague, Berlin, Leipzig, and other European cities were mostly secular. A few activists were religiously inspired, particularly in East Germany, but the vast majority was not. Religious motivations were not evident among the millions who resisted authoritarian rule in Belgrade, Kiev, Katmandu, and many other settings of mass nonviolent action in recent years. Nonviolent discipline was effectively achieved in all these successful struggles, but it arose principally through pragmatic political calculation. Leaders of the resistance movements knew that any resort to the use of violence would have meant certain military and political defeat. They did not wish to give their violent adversaries an excuse to spill more blood and intensify repression. They wanted nothing to do with armed struggle.

The nonviolent revolutionaries of Eastern Europe were particularly clear on this. Having lived through police-state dictatorships with an ever-present threat of violence, they utterly rejected any threat or use of armed force. They were determined to bring about social change in a radically new way. They sought to expand human freedom, not create new structures of oppression. They rejected violence, Václav Havel wrote, not because it was too radical “but on the contrary, because it [did] not seem radical enough.” They believed that “a future secured by violence might actually be worse than what exists now . . . [and] would be fatally stigmatized by the very means used to secure it.” Havel described the dissident movement as an “existential revolution” that would provide hope for the “moral reconstitution of society . . . [and] the rehabilitation of values like trust, openness, responsibility, solidarity, love.”<sup>23</sup> These were moral ideals, but they were understood and applied in a thoroughly secular, pragmatic context.

### The “Science” of Conflict Prevention

The growing viability of nonviolent alternatives to war is rooted in the emergence of new possibilities for resolving and transforming conflict. Yoder speaks of “the realism of the message of reconciliation” made possible by the rise of a new “science of conflict” and mediation. A “new set of sciences” is evolving in the discipline of peace and conflict studies, with programs taking root in public and private universities and research institutes around the world. The Kroc Institute is a prime example of this development and is now home to the pioneering Mennonite peace practitioner and theorist of conflict transformation, John Paul Lederach. The development of techniques of conflict management, Yoder declares, provides new opportunities for addressing injustices. It transcends and invalidates past assumptions that violence is the only recourse for resolving intractable differences.

The development of new knowledge and practice for the prevention of deadly conflict necessitates a broadened interpretation of the just war category of “last resort.” If alternative means of resolving differences and avoiding violence are available, this alters the moral calculus of war and eliminates the justification for resorting to armed conflict in almost every circumstance. The emerging mechanisms of conflict transformation and strategic peacebuilding indicate that parties to a conflict can find a means of resolving differences if they are really interested. As John Lennon famously declared, “war is over if you want it.” Yoder captures the same message in theological terms: “The criteria of just intention and last resort . . . interlock. If both parties really want peace, there will be no war” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 60-61).

Social science validates Yoder’s insights about the growing contributions of peace and conflict studies toward resolving armed conflict. We now know a great deal about the causes and cures of war. Democratic peace theory has been validated by empirical studies showing a strong correlation between democracy and peace. Mature democratic societies almost never wage war on one another. As Bruce Russett and others have indicated, strategies to advance genuine democracy can help to prevent war.<sup>24</sup> Empirical studies also confirm the link between peace and economic interdependence: heightened trade flows between nations are associated with reduced frequency of war.<sup>25</sup> Solid empirical evidence also shows that states

participating together in international institutions—the European Union being the best example—are less likely to engage in military hostilities toward one another.

International institutions not only encourage cooperation among participating states but engage in a wide range of peacemaking efforts in global trouble spots. The United Nations is most active in this regard, and its engagement on behalf of conflict prevention and peacemaking has multiplied greatly since the end of the cold war. Since 1990, according to a study by the Human Security Centre, UN preventive diplomacy missions have expanded sixfold, peacekeeping operations have quadrupled, and the use of targeted sanctions has increased sharply.<sup>26</sup> A RAND Corporation study found that many of these UN peace building missions are successful.<sup>27</sup> Nongovernmental groups and civil society organizations also engage in a wide range of peacebuilding activities, usually from a bottom-up perspective. Together, these many efforts at multiple levels to prevent conflict are helping to reduce the incidence and intensity of war. Press reports focus on the many failures of international peacemaking, but there are also many successes. The absence of mass killing often means there is no news, which in this context is good news. International institutions and organizations are learning more about what works in preventing armed violence, and their increased engagement in crises around the world has helped to ameliorate and prevent many conflicts.

Social science has also elucidated the links between the empowerment of women and peace. Recent empirical studies indicate that the political, economic, and social empowerment of women is positively correlated with a reduced tendency to utilize military force. A 2001 study in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* found that countries in which women are relatively empowered, as measured by education, professional employment, and participation in government, are less likely to use military force in international relations.<sup>28</sup> Many other recent studies have shown that gender equality is a significant factor in reducing the likelihood of armed conflict and improving the effectiveness of peacemaking. Working to empower women is a way to reduce the likelihood of armed conflict.

These and many other empirical studies and accumulated knowledge from decades of international peacebuilding confirm Yoder's optimistic



assessment of the possibilities for preventing armed violence. The emerging science of peacebuilding is showing great promise, although, like the application of nonviolent action, it is still in its infancy. If sustained and developed into the future, the study and practice of peacebuilding promise to teach lessons and develop techniques that will further enhance the realism of alternatives to violence. It is a “theologically sober projection,” Yoder declares, that over the long run we will learn how the values and interests previously defended through military force can be “more economically and less destructively defended through nonviolent instruments” and that violent means of gaining relative advantage will be recognized as increasingly destructive and counterproductive (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 69).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Loving Your Enemies,” A. J. Muste Memorial Institute Essay Series No. 1, n.d. Sermon delivered at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, 1957.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), 84, 333.

<sup>3</sup> S. Radharkrishnan, ed., *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on His Life and Work* (Bombay: Jaico, 1956), 126.

<sup>4</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Writings on Civil Disobedience and Nonviolence* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1987), 46.

<sup>5</sup> Leo Tolstoy, preface, “Letter to a Hindoo,” November 19, 1909. Quoted in Raghavan Iyer, ed., *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), 74.

<sup>6</sup> Fischer, *Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, 334.

<sup>7</sup> Dorothy Day, “We Mourn Death of Gandhi, Nonviolent Revolutionary,” *Catholic Worker* (February 1948): 1.

<sup>8</sup> J. Lawrence Burkholder, “The Limits of Perfection: Autobiographical Reflections,” in *The Limits of Perfection: A Conversation with J. Lawrence Burkholder*, ed. Rodney J. Sawatsky and Scott Holland (Waterloo, ON: Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, Conrad Grebel College, 1993), 32-33.

<sup>9</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Peace without Eschatology?” in John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 160.

<sup>10</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 29.2 (April 1955): 116.

<sup>11</sup> Yoder, “Peace without Eschatology?,” 166.

<sup>12</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932, 1960), 248, 250-51.

- <sup>13</sup> George F. Kennan, "The Bishops' letter," *New York Times*, May 1, 1983, sec. 4, 21.
- <sup>14</sup> Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 1-2.
- <sup>15</sup> Barbara Deming, "On Revolution and Equilibrium," in *Revolution and Equilibrium* (New York: Grossman, 1971), 199.
- <sup>16</sup> Quoted in Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1989), 375.
- <sup>17</sup> See in particular Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston, MA: Porter Sargent, 1973) and *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential* (Boston, MA: Porter Sargent, 2005).
- <sup>18</sup> Maria J. Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict," *International Security* 33.1 (Summer 2008): 20.
- <sup>19</sup> Quoted in Susan Ferris and Ricardo Sandoval, *The Flight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement*, ed. Diana Hembree (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997), 114.
- <sup>20</sup> Deming, "On Revolution and Equilibrium," 211.
- <sup>21</sup> Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 250.
- <sup>22</sup> Stephan and Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works," 21.
- <sup>23</sup> Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," in *Without Force or Lies: Voices from the Revolution of Central Europe in 1989-90*, ed. William Brinton and Alan Rinzler (San Francisco, CA: Mercury House, 1990), 99, 123.
- <sup>24</sup> Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993).
- <sup>25</sup> Louis Kriesberg, *Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 141, 144, 152.
- <sup>26</sup> Human Security Center, *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005).
- <sup>27</sup> James Dobbins, et al., *The UN's Role in Nation-Building: From the Congo to Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005), xv-xxxviii.
- <sup>28</sup> See Mary Caprioli and Mark A. Boyer, "Gender, Violence, and International Crisis," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45.4 (August 2001): 503-18.

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# **The “Ecumenical” and “Cosmopolitan” Yoder: A Critical Engagement with *Nonviolence – A Brief History* and Its Editors**

*Mark Thiessen Nation*

## **I**

This review essay attempts to situate the lectures contained in *Nonviolence – A Brief History: The Warsaw Lectures* within John Howard Yoder’s overall project. More specifically, it engages the provocative thesis put forward by one of the editors, Paul Martens. In an essay published a year earlier than the present book, Martens claimed that in Yoder’s writings we see a “gradual evolution from articulating a strong Jesus-centered ethic towards an articulation of a less-than-particularly Christian social ethic rooted in a construal of universal history.”<sup>1</sup> Though Martens’s essay does not reference the lectures published in the volume under review, given that these lectures were presented in 1983 they serve as an example of the “gradual evolution” away from a particularly Christian social ethic that Martens is naming.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the editors signal this shift in some of their comments in the Introduction to the present volume. However, I question whether such a shift occurred in Yoder’s writings during the last two decades of his life, and whether such a shift is evidenced in these present lectures.

In this essay I will first lay out the basic argument of Martens regarding the “gradual evolution” he sees in Yoder’s theology by engaging with his 2009 essay, “Universal History and a Not-Particularly Christian Particularity.” This argument, second, provides a fuller context for discussing the brief, suggestive, and parallel comments in the Introduction to the present volume. Then, third, I will relate this argument to the lectures by Yoder published there.

Martens sees Yoder’s evolution from Christian particularity manifested in several shifts in Yoder’s language and thus his theology.

(1) There is a shift from seeing a discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. In earlier language Yoder spoke of a “new aeon” being inaugurated in Christ, with a new Jesus-centered ethic arising. Later he

placed more emphasis on the continuities between the testaments. In some writings the emphasis is especially on theologically significant sociological configurations. This is perhaps clearest in Yoder's 1995 lecture on Jeremiah, in which he asserted that "Jesus' impact in the first century added more and deeper authentically Jewish reasons, and reinforced and further validated the already expressed Jewish reasons for the already well established ethos of not being in charge and not considering any local state structure to be the primary bearer of the movement of history."<sup>3</sup>

(2) Yoder's earlier writings used the language of eschatology; later writings tend to use the language of doxology, with a significant shift in meaning. Thus, on the one hand, in the 1954 essay, "Peace Without Eschatology?," Yoder "argued for a view of reality that 'defines a present position in terms of the yet unseen goal which gives it meaning,' and for this reason, 'peace' was not something that described external results of one's behavior but the character and goal of one's action performed with confidence in divine sovereignty."<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Yoder's 1988 lecture, "To Serve God and to Rule the World," illustrates the later shift. This lecture "moves toward addressing external results of behavior, and seeing that 'reality' now entails the demand that one is 'obligated to discern, down through the centuries, which historical developments can be welcomed as progress in the light of the Rule of the Lamb.'"<sup>5</sup>

(3) In early writings Yoder was clear about the centrality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the particularity of the Christian community. In later writings he has shifted to universal history and in the process elides particularity. At the end of his 1992 book, *Body Politics*, Yoder asks, for instance, the rhetorical question "'Why should it not be the case that God's purpose for the world would pursue an organic logic through history and across the agenda of the pilgrim people's social existence with such reliable rhythm as we have here observed?'"<sup>6</sup> Martens comments, "Notice what is said: organic logic through history, pilgrim people, reliable rhythm, what can be observed. Notice what is absent in this question: reference to Jesus? Christianity? the church? The key is a pilgrim people's social existence, the original gospel revolution, whether they be Christian or not."<sup>7</sup> Martens follows this with a quotation from a 1992 lecture in which Yoder suggests that the claim "'that the oppressed are the bearers of the meaning of history

is not poetry but serious social science.”<sup>8</sup> Certainly by this last set of moves, so Martens argues, Yoder has come to embrace a “social gospel” not unlike that of Walter Rauschenbusch. In his later writings the emphasis is on social (progressive) processes being in service to humanity. That is, for the later Yoder Christian theological language is instrumentalist and thus Christian theological particularity is optional. For Martens, these shifts are not seen positively (as for others they would be).

To their credit, the editors did not provide a full-blown critical introduction to *Nonviolence – A Brief History* similar to what I’ve just summarized. However, to those who have read Martens’s essays that are critical of Yoder, the brief comments on pages 8-12 of the Introduction can be seen as in the same vein.<sup>9</sup> There the editors claim that “by 1983,” when the Warsaw lectures were written and presented, “Yoder is casting a vision that is both ecumenical and cosmopolitan.”<sup>10</sup> Using these terms, they seem to suggest that by 1983 Yoder has re-framed his writing in light of theological shifts that happened precisely because of deeper or broader ecumenical engagement which perhaps led him to be “cosmopolitan” in ways he hadn’t been earlier. The editors say this specifically means that Yoder “is no longer directly challenging his Mennonite mentors, he is no longer merely preoccupied with criticizing the Niebuhr brothers, and he is no longer involved solely in intra-free church discussions.”<sup>11</sup>

If by “cosmopolitan” one means that Yoder was, by 1983, fully in touch with global politics, a variety of cultures, and many and varied peoples (with various theologies), then indeed he had been cosmopolitan a good while before 1983. In fact it would not be difficult to argue that by the 1950s or certainly the end of the 1960s – by which time Yoder was fluent in four languages and had travelled extensively – he was both cosmopolitan and ecumenical. However, if one means, as I think the editors do, that Yoder had abandoned some of his earlier theological commitments because of a newly acquired “cosmopolitanism,” then their characterizations do not stand up to scrutiny.

“For many years prior to these lectures,” say the editors, “Yoder had been concerned with interpreting Christianity as a communal disposition, a communal minority position vis-à-vis an established political and religious authority.”<sup>12</sup> That is, earlier Yoder had been committed to particularistic

Christian convictions. In those days when he used what appeared to be distinct Christian theological language, we knew what he meant. Later, however, language that seems similar is functioning differently. Now what appears to be theological language is simply functional, instrumental language to call us to engage and change the world. For instance, in his 1982 essay, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” Yoder refers to worship as “the alternative construction of society and history.”<sup>13</sup> This leads the editors to pose a rhetorical question: “[I]s *all* alternative construction of society and history worship? Or, perhaps to rephrase, what content might there be to worship other than the alternative construction of society and history?”<sup>14</sup> As one looks at the Warsaw lectures, it is easy to conclude, so the editors suggest, that Yoder (apparently) mutes the distinctions between Christianity and Hinduism, King and Gandhi, Jesus and Vishnu – because what ultimately matters is whether they measure up to the norm of nonviolence by which we re-shape society into a better place. “For Yoder,” with his newly acquired cosmopolitanism, “the ‘real world,’ the ‘larger pattern’ of reality stands behind all of these, revealing itself to those who have eyes to see: ‘the progress of history is carried by the common people who suffer.’”<sup>15</sup>

I am puzzled by such comments. The editors ignore counter evidence, some of which is close at hand. I pose the matter this way because, in addition to quoting from the text of Yoder’s 1983 Warsaw lectures, they root the above criticisms in a quotation from “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” an essay in Yoder’s 1984 book, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*. This book includes essays that as clearly as any refute the editors’ claims. In fact this is true even for the very essay from which they quote. But let me begin with the most obvious essay, the one following “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood.”

The second essay in *The Priestly Kingdom* is “‘But We Do See Jesus’: The Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth.”<sup>16</sup> This is one of Yoder’s few philosophical essays. It is written in a certain postmodern vein, arguing against the supposed superiority of some “view from nowhere” that would claim to be cosmopolitan in a way that is not simply another particular standpoint. Yoder begins by listing nine critiques of supposed “parochial” understandings of knowledge. He devotes the rest of the essay to reflecting on the two parts of the subtitle, in effect responding

to the challenges to “parochial” ways of knowing. He argues that every approach to knowledge is particularistic. To imagine there is an alternative to particularity is a myth. By the end of the essay it is also clear that Yoder believes that, in the face of current modernist understandings of universal rationality as well as skeptical postmodern notions, there is no reason to be embarrassed by the (universal) truth claims entailed by the confession that the Word of God became flesh in (the human) Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>17</sup> There have been and will continue to be “challenges to a specifically Christian witness.”<sup>18</sup> “The real issue,” then and now, says Yoder, “is not whether Jesus can make sense in a world far from Galilee, but whether – when he meets us in our world, as he does in fact – we want to follow him.”<sup>19</sup>

If one reads *The Priestly Kingdom* carefully, three things seem obvious. Actually these things are already obvious in the Introduction. First, this is a set of conceptual essays that is basically a companion to *The Politics of Jesus*. Yoder’s reflections in the introduction indicate that in these essays he is articulating (for an ecumenical audience) significant elements of his own radical reformation views.

Second, central to these views are the following stated presuppositions: [T]he church precedes the world epistemologically. We know more fully from Jesus Christ and in the context of the confessed faith than we know in other ways. The meaning and validity and limits of concepts like “nature” or “science” are best seen not when looked at alone but in light of the confession of the lordship of Christ. The church precedes the world as well axiologically, in that the lordship of Christ is the center which must guide critical value choices, so that we may be called to subordinate or even to reject those values which contradict Jesus.<sup>20</sup>

Third, one way of characterizing most, if not all, the essays is that they try to situate Yoder’s particularistic Anabaptist convictions in various larger conversations – to demonstrate how he is simultaneously Anabaptist, ecumenical (catholic and evangelical), and cosmopolitan. I have no idea what these essays mean, collected about the same time as the Warsaw lectures were written, if they are not affirming the same Christian – especially ecclesiological and Christological – particularity that Yoder had affirmed for decades.

Toward the end of his essay, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,”

Yoder speaks of “a missionary ethic of incarnation.”<sup>21</sup> He warns against the temptation, in our work as Christians in the world, to try to “transcend the vulnerability of belief.” We may imagine that we can “discover some ‘neutral’ or ‘common’ or ‘higher’ ground,” so that we can avoid our differences with others, and work with a common language and a common vision toward a common cause. But our instinct here is wrong, says Yoder. Our missional work is generated and shaped by our peculiar identity. Thus, “Christians will never meet this challenge better by seeking to be less specifically Christian. They will meet it better if they take it on faith that Christ is Lord over the powers, that Creation is not independent of Redemption.”<sup>22</sup> Then, when we work together with others, each with our own distinct identities, we discern and note conflicting as well as overlapping convictions and ethics as all of us with our “provincial visions” (sometimes) work toward common enterprises.

Earlier in the essay, picking up emphases of his friends Stanley Hauerwas and Jim McClendon, Yoder had affirmed the recent focus on narrative. But then he warned against the temptation (for Christians) to make the *notion* of narrative more important than the particular narratives “of Abraham and Samuel, Jeremiah and Jesus,” imagining that the particulars of our faith are reducible to “a new kind of universals, namely narrative forms.”<sup>23</sup>

It is not difficult to find Yoder saying similar or consistent things elsewhere, in writings either from around the same period or later. In 1986 he wrote a foreword for *The Mystery of Peace* by Arthur C. Cochrane. There Yoder challenges the way in which too much Western theology makes “God language” instrumentalist. “‘God talk,’” he says, “is ‘instrumental’ in that what people say about God can be reduced to meaningful statements about men and women, institutions and historical movements. This means that the reference to ‘God’ is but a symbolic or ‘mythical’ superstructure, adding texture but not substance to what could be said on ordinary ‘public’ grounds.” He commends Cochrane for renewing “the classical commitment to God as both the object and the subject of theological discourse. He talks and writes not of God the cipher or the symbol, but of God the Father of Jesus Christ. His God is the covenant initiator in creation and redemption, to whom, as the Reformation tradition at its best has been saying, we can only adequately



give witness if we stand by the Reformation watchword ‘by Grace alone.’”<sup>24</sup> Given the focus of Cochrane’s book, of course Yoder is specifically and most substantially referring to how Cochrane writes about peace theology. But what he decided to emphasize in his foreword is noteworthy.

We might also note a comment Yoder made on a subject that was a recurring theme in his writings from the 1950s to the 1990s, namely eschatology. In an essay on eschatology published in 1990 he offered a critical comment on a writing by biblical scholar John J. Collins on eschatology. “To say simply, as Collins does, that ‘apocalypse is validated by the ethics it sustains’ would be a wrongly reductionistic horizontalism. It would be self-defeating, since the vision will only support the ethos if the seer considers God and the revelation to be real.”<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps more immediately related to the present book is Yoder’s lecture, “The Lessons of Nonviolent Experience,” taken from his course on Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution, informally published by him in the same year that he presented the Warsaw lectures.<sup>26</sup> In this lecture he reflects on various practitioners of nonviolence, especially Gandhi and King. But he also considers writings by William Miller and James Douglass on nonviolence. His comments on Douglass are particularly germane. He finds him too optimistic about the effectiveness of nonviolent strategies. Yoder believes that some of Douglass’s language seems overly committed to effectiveness per se. As one reads through Yoder’s critiques of Douglass it seems obvious that they are rooted in clear theological convictions regarding sin, evil, and human incapacity. As Yoder puts it at the outset of his articulation of a “third possibility,” if Christ is Lord, “then we do not try to prove our hope. To attempt to prove our hope is logically and theologically illegitimate, because to prove it, we would have to subject it to – or locate it with reference to – some other more fundamental, visible, or sure standard. That, however, would mean giving our loyalty to another Lord.”<sup>27</sup>

Before I discuss the Warsaw lectures themselves, let me comment directly on the editors’ critical “social gospel” way of reading Yoder’s provocative claim that “worship is the communal cultivation of an alternative construction of society and history.” The caption under which this statement appears is “the unity of worship and morality,” not the reduction of worship to morality. Given that Yoder argued against “instrumentalizing” theology,

against “reductionistic horizontalism,” and against imagining we can be more effective in our efforts in the world by “seeking to be less specifically Christian,” then perhaps there is another, more consistent, way to understand Yoder’s claims. And in a sense it is obvious. After all, Yoder has been known as the proponent of *The Politics of Jesus*. What some social gospellers who imagine themselves standing on the shoulders of Yoder have missed is that for Yoder this always included seeing “the church as *polis*.”<sup>28</sup> From the mid-1970s forward, he was attempting to name more fully what this claim means.

On the one hand, for Yoder, it meant a steadfast commitment to the particularity of the church and its narrative identity.<sup>29</sup> It meant, still in 1980, the “offensive” affirmation that “biblically the meaning of history is carried first of all, and on behalf of all others, by the believing community.”<sup>30</sup> This is consistent with Yoder’s longstanding belief – distinguishing him from social gospellers – that “the church’s responsibility to and for the world is first and always to be the church.” In fact, claimed Yoder, “the short-circuited means used to ‘Christianize’ ‘responsibly’ the world in some easier way than by the gospel [has] had the effect of dechristianizing the Occident and demonizing paganism.”<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, following the success of his 1972 book, *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder felt compelled to address his “cultured despisers” who saw him as a sectarian. How is it that the body of Christ is used by God to accomplish his redemptive purposes in the world? How is it that the people of God have a social role that is relevant to the larger world? What does this look like? So, first, Yoder is attempting to name more fully what it means that the church is truly “a new social datum,” a community that can be used to change the world.<sup>32</sup> He is simply amplifying one of his central claims, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ – including its social shape – cannot finally be separated from the church. This distinguishes his approach to these matters from that of the social gospel. Second, he attempts to frame this in ways that are compelling to (mostly Christian) cultured skeptics regarding such a claim. In saying that “worship is the communal cultivation of an alternative construction of society and history,” he is using sociology of knowledge language.<sup>33</sup> More frequently in the last two decades of his life he drew upon Karl Barth for the same purposes.<sup>34</sup>

## II

Referring to the lectures now published as *Nonviolence – A Brief History: The Warsaw Lectures*, Yoder said in a June 23, 1983 letter that they were “the product of very hasty preparation,” and that if publication was anticipated he wanted to do some re-writing.<sup>35</sup> So far as I know, he never did such revision.<sup>36</sup> So, three things should be kept in mind as we read these lectures. First, they were put together quickly (in the midst of a very busy life), without fresh research but by someone who had taught on this subject matter for a number of years. Second, they were deliberately brief and relatively simple, because Yoder knew they were to be delivered to a general audience and he needed to leave time for translation into Polish. Third, he would have done some polishing, nuancing, and annotating if he had prepared them for publication. Critics should be aware of such matters as they engage the lectures brought together in this book.

Although, as the editors say, Yoder did not reference the specifics of the situation in Poland in 1983 in his lectures, he was certainly aware of the Solidarity Movement and the potential for resisting communism nonviolently. He was well aware of the contexts of Poland as he wrote. Thus, I imagine he saw it as his task to help the Christians who would hear him to see nonviolent ways of engaging in resistance as making sense and also as biblically mandated.<sup>37</sup>

He begins in the first three lectures by attempting to show in real-life struggles how Gandhi and King in two significantly different situations used nonviolent means to resist injustice. This is partly to make nonviolent ways of engaging difficult circumstances more thinkable. But of course his choice of Tolstoy, Gandhi, and King is not accidental. They mostly fit with his own (Mennonite) Christian theology. In the first lecture he shows how both Tolstoy and Gandhi have roots in the Gospel. He mentions that Tolstoy’s reductionist way of naming the Gospel is “debatable” but that nonetheless his way of identifying the “key” to the Scriptural message at least in some fashion “restores the link between the work of Christ and human obedience which had been forgotten or destroyed through the centuries” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 21). In brief discussions of Gandhi, Yoder shows that the latter’s views have roots in a reading of the Gospels and Tolstoy’s reading

of the same, while also reflecting critically on how Gandhi's views differ from Christian views. What Yoder seems most to want to point to is that "Gandhi has added to Tolstoy's spiritual diagnosis both philosophical clarity and organizational genius" (ibid., 25).

In the second lecture Yoder shows the connection between Gandhi and King but also shows how the Baptist, King, added Christian theological specifics to his witness to the power of nonviolent direct action. Which is not to say Yoder would offer no criticisms of King. In a more nuanced lecture of 1981, Yoder distinguishes his own approach from that of Gandhi and King. Having discussed Gandhi briefly, he says that "not all of the meaning of the cross in the Christian message is rendered adequately by stating it in terms that sound like those of Gandhi."<sup>38</sup> Later, in relation to King, he asks how Christians can continue to affirm the sovereignty of God when it looks as though they are losing – and may continue losing. Yoder says the answer to this question is Christological. He then suggests that this is not how King put it, at least in public discourse.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, one can see nuanced discussion and critique of Tolstoy, Gandhi, and King in Yoder's more detailed 1983 lecture, "The Political Meaning of Hope."<sup>40</sup>

In all these places and in varying ways Yoder is consistent with his commitment to particularity.<sup>41</sup> He chooses the exemplars carefully, thinking there is significant overlap with them and their commitments and with him and his (Mennonite) Christian commitments. The particular elements he chooses to name are not random; they serve his purposes for different contexts. He then cites similarities and differences between their particular views (leading to practices) and his – with the critiques almost always obviously related to his own theological commitments. The critiques are more substantial in the longer, more nuanced lectures (and thus less pronounced in the Warsaw lectures).

The next chapter in the book is on the Just War theory. Yoder knows that not everyone will accept the call to nonviolence. Thus he still wants those listeners to be informed that there is a tradition within Christianity of attempting to be disciplined, restrained, and carefully deliberative in discerning when, whether, and how to use violence. So, he presented this lecture.

Yoder was one of the first theologians to pay attention to "the science of conflict," the sub-discipline of social science that studies the dynamics of

conflict and methods of resolving or transforming it. Chapter 5 is devoted to that. He would make it clear in various writings around this time that it is Jesus Christ with all the theological ramifications entailed in a robust Christology by which he reflects critically on the subject matter in this chapter. More specifically, he would in various places echo the sentiments expressed in *Nevertheless* that his own position “includes the practical concern of the programmatic views . . . without placing its hope there.”<sup>42</sup> The way Yoder opens the chapter with a paragraph of theological framing reflects his effort to be particularistic, in this case to name the overlap and intersections between Christian convictions and the social scientific study of conflict.

The next three chapters, 6 through 8, are, I am convinced, the core of this lecture series as Yoder saw it. These are the biblical lectures on the Old Testament, Jesus in the Gospels, and a Christian cosmology. The first of these lectures, “From the Wars of Joshua to Jewish Pacifism,” opens in a way that sets up the vital importance of all three. Yoder begins by saying that too often Christians presume that “little is to be gained from the text of the Bible itself.” Because of this belief, we “continue to see the Bible used as a mine for general slogans about the broad peacemaking purposes of God – which have their place in celebrations and sermons – but we no longer assume that serious and specific moral guidance could be found in the Scriptures” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 73).<sup>43</sup> These three lectures seek to show why “[t]his assumption is mistaken.” These lectures would be familiar to any serious Yoder students; there is nothing new here.

In this lecture Yoder – a Mennonite pacifist – once again tries to show the positive links between the Old Testament and the New. He acknowledges the temptation to reject much or all of the OT because of its violence, claiming that those who do so “relativize all of the Hebrew backgrounds of the Christian faith.” This is the wrong move, for “[t]hen we will have a smaller Bible to guide us, and we shall be permanently embarrassed by the fact that the New Testament itself generally assumes rather than rejects the authority of the Old” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 74). Thus in this brief lecture Yoder mostly draws positive connections between OT and NT themes and attempts to confirm his reading of the OT by showing streams of Jewish readings of the Hebrew Scriptures that have seen the same things in

them. But of course his reading of the OT is Christologically informed.<sup>44</sup>

Chapter 7, “Jesus and Nonviolent Liberation,” is mostly a re-statement of the portions of *The Politics of Jesus* that are on the Gospels, including a discussion of reasons often given for setting Jesus aside in relation to social ethics. Thus Yoder underscores the centrality of Jesus while offering signals regarding the church as *polis*. Chapter 8, “Early Christian Cosmology and Nonviolence,” restates Yoder’s reflections on the principalities and powers within *The Politics of Jesus* as well as apocalyptic as a biblical category – again showing their relevance for thinking about social ethics and institutions.

Finally, Yoder knew when he accepted the assignment to speak in Poland that he was traveling to a mostly Catholic country. Thus within that context he elected to conclude with three lectures on Catholic Peace Theology: nonviolent spirituality, professors and pastors, and Latin American models. Everything he presented in these lectures is intended to show that what he is naming is also for Catholics. Indeed, he ends the third lecture with a remarkable three-page quotation from “a charter of nonviolence in Latin America,” adopted in Bogotá, Colombia, in December 1977. This moving theological and practical statement comes close to summarizing what Yoder has said throughout the lectures. Or, put differently, since it comes close to his own theological views, it serves as a powerful way to end on an unmistakable theological note.

The Warsaw lectures, as do most of Yoder’s writings, display his ecumenical and cosmopolitan sensibilities. They were intended to speak to a broad Christian audience. Over the years I have come to believe that Yoder should have heeded more fully the warnings about apologetics from his teacher, Karl Barth. For it appears to me that some of his (perhaps) infelicitous ways of putting things – several of which understandably led Paul Martens to wonder about the particularity of his Christian convictions – mostly arise out of his attempts to do apologetics for pacifism and “the politics of Jesus.” However, mostly, I continue to marvel at Yoder’s ability to do this sort of articulation while never really abandoning his own particularistic, radically reformed, Christologically and ecclesialogically centered ethics – which he saw as simply catholic and evangelical (perhaps as better substitutes for ecumenical and cosmopolitan).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Paul Martens, “Universal History and a Not-Particularly Christian Particularity: Jeremiah and John Howard Yoder’s Social Gospel,” in *Power and Practices: Engaging the Work of John Howard Yoder*, ed. Jeremy M. Bergen and Anthony G. Siegrist (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2009), 131-46, here 131-32.

<sup>2</sup> One of the issues that needs clarification is chronology. Martens is not clear about when significant shifts began happening in Yoder’s theology. However, he seems to suggest that by 1983 some of these shifts have been manifested. Because chronology is important in relation to Martens’s argument, I often give dates connected to the various writings I mention by Yoder.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Martens, “Universal History,” 140.

<sup>4</sup> Martens, “Universal History,” 137.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Martens, “Universal History,” 142.

<sup>7</sup> Martens, “Universal History,” 142.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Martens, “Universal History,” 142. Martens does note immediately after this quotation that Yoder might have had in mind Barth’s claim that “the calling of the people of God is thus no different from the calling of humanity.”

<sup>9</sup> In addition to the essay already mentioned, see Paul Martens, “What Common Ground?: Re-examining John Howard Yoder’s Indebtedness to Rabbi Steven Schwartzchild.” Unpublished lecture, Society of Christian Ethics, January 2009; and Paul Martens, “The Problematic Development of the Sacraments in the Thought of John Howard Yoder,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 24.3 (Fall 2006): 65-77. For a critique of this latter essay see Branson Parlor, “Spinning the Liturgical Turn: Why John Howard Yoder Is Not an Ethicist,” in *Radical Ecumenicity: Pursuing Unity and Continuity after John Howard Yoder*, ed. John C. Nugent (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian Univ. Press, 2010), 173-91.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Martens, Matthew Porter, and Myles Werntz, “Introduction” to *Nonviolence – A Brief History: The Warsaw Lectures* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2010), 8.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 8. These assertions are the sort of caricatures that suggest shifts across decades. Yoder was never “merely” preoccupied with the Niebuhr brothers, and Yoder’s major critique of H. Richard Niebuhr was published in the 1990s. Yoder was never involved “solely” in “intra-free church discussions” and was actively involved in such discussions until the end of his life.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Martens et al., “Introduction,” 10.

<sup>14</sup> Martens et al., “Introduction,” 10.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>16</sup> Yoder, “‘But We Do See Jesus’: The Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth,” in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: The Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 46-62.

<sup>17</sup> Also see Yoder, “On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation,” *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (July 1992): 285-300.

<sup>18</sup> Yoder, “‘But We Do See Jesus,’” 46.



<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>20</sup> Yoder, "Introduction," in *The Priestly Kingdom*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood," in *The Priestly Kingdom*, 44.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>24</sup> Yoder, "Foreword," in Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Mystery of Peace* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1986), viii.

<sup>25</sup> Yoder, "Ethics and Eschatology," *Ex Auditu* 6 (1990): 119-28, here 126. I have offered further reflections on Yoder's emphases on eschatology and resurrection in Mark Thiessen Nation, "The Politics of Yoder Regarding *The Politics of Jesus*: Recovering the Implicit in Yoder's Holistic Theology for Pacifism," in *Radical Ecumenicity: Pursuing Unity and Continuity after John Howard Yoder*, 37-56, here 42-44.

<sup>26</sup> The title of this lecture is almost identical to chapter three in the book under discussion. However, the two lectures are very different.

<sup>27</sup> Yoder, "The Lessons of Nonviolent Experience," in *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, ed. Theodore J. Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 360. I have compared this edited version with the original 1983 version; there are no substantial differences.

<sup>28</sup> The earliest reference I have noticed to this is in Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (North Newton, KS: Faith & Life Press, 1964; reprinted Herald Press, 2002), 17-18. It is interesting that in the 1994 reprint of his 1954 essay, "Peace Without Eschatology?" Yoder mentioned a shift in his way of speaking of *polis* in this regard. This is where we can document a shift in his language. See Yoder, "Peace Without Eschatology?," in *The Royal Priesthood*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994; reprinted Herald Press, 1998), 147, fn 3. In fact, as someone who was an advisor to Yoder in collecting these essays I would say it is important to note where he felt compelled to add editorial footnotes to older essays in 1994 and where he didn't.

<sup>29</sup> This is affirmed in Yoder's 1980 "Stone Lecture." See Yoder, "Why Ecclesiology Is Social Ethics: Gospel Ethics Versus the Wider Wisdom," in *The Royal Priesthood*, 110. On page 110 Yoder concedes that the particularity rooted in Jesus and the gospel in relation to social ethics may be seen as a scandal; he is nonetheless committed to it. Later in the same essay (page 116), he mentions spiritual resources – such as regeneration and the "guidance of the Holy Spirit" – that are also inherent in the particular identity of the church.

<sup>30</sup> Yoder, "Why Ecclesiology Is Social Ethics," 118.

<sup>31</sup> Yoder, "The Otherness of the Church," in *The Royal Priesthood*, 53-64, here 61. I acknowledge that this is a 1960 essay. But Yoder chose to include it in a 1994 collection. Moreover, as I am suggesting, the basic thrust of these quotations fits with his 1980 Stone Lecture.

<sup>32</sup> This is Yoder's way of putting it in 1971, and again in 1992 in describing his own position in Yoder, *Nevertheless* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 136. The original 1971 edition says the same thing at this point.

<sup>33</sup> Yoder comments on this at some length in "The Believers Church and the Arms Race," in *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997; reprint



Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock), 148-61, here 153-55.

<sup>34</sup> See: Mark Thiessen Nation, “The Politics of Yoder Regarding *The Politics of Jesus*,” esp. 46-51 and accompanying footnotes. That he drew so frequently on Barth would, I suggest, affirm my reading that he continued wanting to emphasize specifically Christian theological social ethics.

<sup>35</sup> Letter to Dr. Witold Benedyktowicz, June 23, 1983. This concern was reiterated three years later in a letter of May 1, 1986, also to Benedyktowicz. Archives of the Mennonite Church, Hist. MSS 1-48, Box 142.

<sup>36</sup> The exception would be for the few lectures also included in the collection, *The War of the Lamb*, which Yoder was preparing for publication.

<sup>37</sup> Yoder often assumed that his audience or readers were self-described as Christians. This made a difference in how he shaped his arguments.

<sup>38</sup> Yoder, “The Power Equation, the Place of Jesus, and the Politics of King,” in *For the Nations*, 125-47, here 127.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>40</sup> Yoder, “The Political Meaning of Hope,” in *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking*, ed. Glen Stassen, Mark Thiessen Nation, and Matt Hamsher (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 53-65.

<sup>41</sup> For a brief rationale for the following see Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” 44.

<sup>42</sup> Yoder, *Nevertheless*, 137. See also Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 169-88.

<sup>43</sup> Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

<sup>44</sup> For a brilliant interpretation of Yoder’s use of the Old Testament, see John C. Nugent, *The Politics of Yahweh: John Howard Yoder and the Narrative Trajectory of the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, forthcoming).

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## Nonviolence and Shabbat

*Peter Ochs*

It is wonderful to greet this posthumous publication of John Howard Yoder's Warsaw lectures on nonviolence. Thanks to the good efforts of Paul Martens, Matthew Porter, and Myles Werntz, and of Baylor University Press, Yoder's sharply drawn and clearly written history of nonviolent social action and resistance is now ready at hand for research, teaching, and social action. Several years ago, Michael Cartwright asked me to help him publish another posthumous work of Yoder's, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore all the more meaningful for me to see this new work and to be asked to offer a response to it.

After each chapter of *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, I appended brief commentaries on what I called "the wonders and the burdens" of Yoder's approach to Judaism.<sup>2</sup> By "wonders" I referred to Yoder's pioneering a non-supersessionist Christian theology of both ancient Israel's covenant with God and rabbinic Judaism's continuing place in that covenant. By "burdens" I meant his unintended perpetuation of another kind of non-non-supersessionism. I claimed that, by seeking to identify the "essence" of Israelite and rabbinic religion – and to critique alternative forms of Jewish and Christian religion – he introduced another form of replacement theology: replacing the historically evolving character of Jewish religion with one of his own conception (no matter how ingenious and generous).

In two subsequent writings on Yoder, I explained that I was attracted to the aspects of his work that were consistent with the Yoder I saw through the writings of Stanley Hauerwas.<sup>3</sup> This was a Yoder whose commitments – his "pacifism," his non-supersessionism, and the many other commitments he also illustrates in *Nonviolence – a Brief History* – were another name for how he would act in the direct presence of the Jesus Christ of the Gospel. These commitments reflected what I saw as consistent alternatives to "modernist" forms of Christian religion that Hauerwas criticized in ways paralleling my own criticisms of modernist Judaism and "liberal" or "conservative" efforts to identify such a religion with a set of conceptually defined principles,

dogmas, or essences. I considered these efforts misguided because they sought to identify the divine presence or divine Word with a humanly constructed set of concepts.<sup>4</sup> I didn't mind the use of human conceptions, only any effort to mistake them for clear-and-distinct representations of "ultimate," "universal," "infallible" or – in this way – "divine" truths, values, or imperatives. I learned from Hauerwas – and later from Cartwright and then a good number of Mennonite theologians – to turn to Yoder as a reliable critic of such representations and a reliable resource for alternatives. I commented on the "wonders" of his writing when I found him reliable in this way (most of the time) and on the "burdens" of his writing when I did not.

My review of Yoder's *Nonviolence – A Brief History* will extend and, I hope, refine my previous commentaries. This time, rather than survey wonders and burdens, I want to focus on one of the major strengths I see in this volume and one area of concern. I will laud his example of how to act, socially and politically, in the presence of God. I will express concerns about his tendencies to let conceptual constructions (like "nonviolence" and "pacifism") stand in as representatives of that presence, and I will explain how my previously expressed thoughts about "Yoder and the Jews" were meant as tests of his freedom (or not) from modernism, *not* about "what's good for the Jews."<sup>5</sup> I shall then express new concerns about the non-nonviolence of conceptual universalism, whether or not one sees literal bloodshed. I shall conclude by reflecting on the difference between acting "nonviolently" and acting "for God's sake," in *imitatio Christi*, or "for the sake of *shabbat* [the Sabbath]."

### A Major Strength and an Area of Concern

Yoder offers a prototype for what I term "following after God" (His presence and Word) in a way that includes disciplined reasoning as a matter of course, while avoiding both liberal and conservative types of "modernism." (By "liberal modernism," I mean the efforts of humanists to tell us, once and for all, what is good and true for all humanity; by "conservative modernism," I mean the efforts of religious traditionalists to tell us, once and for all, what God really wants all of us to do and to believe.) Yoder offers a prototype for apprehending God's presence and in some way comprehending His will

for us, especially in regard to our dealings with society and world. I am attracted to the unapologetic character of Yoder's commitment to following after God: his presuming that God's directing hand lies directly upon us, that the consequence is immediate for our public and private lives, and that the discipline of living after the will and manner of God is a discipline of reasoning. For me, the impact of Yoder's words is as if he declared "of course we include reasoning, scientific reasoning too, for how else would God have us clarify our perceptions of who suffers or who causes what suffering, of what aid or witness or resistance we have to offer, and of what consequences follow our actions?" I read Yoder, moreover, because he seeks God's presence and Word in scripture and also in direct encounter,<sup>6</sup> and because he recognizes that neither politics nor science "scares" the divine word away (as it may seem to those concerned to protect the "inner" life from the "outer" one).

But I also have concerns about Yoder's seeming lack of worry about the divisive force of efforts to discern the divine will and Word by way of conceptually distinct definitions and principles. Without risk of idolatry, these cannot substitute for the divine or act as its direct agents. If they are adopted this way, the problem is not simply that some pious folks will declare them "idols" but that, over enough time, their employment will establish patterns of actions and institutions that will kill – that is, damage the human psyche and spirit, encourage totalizing thinking and building, and leave in their wake broken relations, social structures, and human bodies. This fear is the source of my only critical comment about Yoder's writing and thus the basis for my offering something other than a word of thanks and a "carry on!"

The reader can rightfully expect me to explain the basis of my fear, the evidence I have for imagining that defining one's religious ethics clearly is a bad and not a good thing. Without such evidence, my claims about "broken relations . . . and bodies" would seem hyperbolic at best and my critical comments a form of crying wolf. But I do not have space here to provide such evidence and also attend in detail to this new Yoder volume. Instead, I shall outline the main assumptions underlying my fear and the main sources of evidence, drawing on the vast literature of postmodernism, along with "post-liberal" or scripturally grounded forms of Christian and Jewish postmodern-like criticism, and recollections of 20th-century secular

totalitarianism:

- The vast projects of modern western civilization – Enlightenment, capitalism, nationalism, colonialism – are inseparable from a particular epistemological conviction: that the human mind has the power to perceive universal truths that can be articulated in clear-and-distinct propositions and that apply to all human beings regardless of context.
- This epistemology warrants an ethical conviction as well: that a universal truth corresponds to a universal moral imperative.
- Each of these epistemological and ethical claims both asserts *and* denies something about all humanity. So, if it is asserted that “all humans do and ought to belong to a nation,” then it is also implied that those who do not belong to a nation are either non-human or else live their lives in ways that contradict the moral and natural orders.<sup>7</sup>
- To assert these universal truths is to assert the falsity of contradictory truth claims. Efforts to embody these truths are, by implication even when not by intention, efforts to inhibit the embodiment of contradictory truths. That is, the vast projects of modernity operate according to a zero-sum game.
- This modern epistemology and ethics integrates heterogeneous assumptions and tendencies from certain (not all!) ancient Greco-Roman and Biblical intellectual and moral traditions.<sup>8</sup> There are Greco-Roman assumptions that the universe is a finite cosmos whose unchanging elemental order is also the order of reason, and that the practice of reason conforms to a propositional logic (as described in Note 7 and as articulated by Aristotle). There are Biblical assumptions that the universe is spoken by an infinite and ultimately unknowable creator, and is subject to the creator’s will; that humans are created in the image of this creator, by whose grace humanity acquires fallible knowledge of the universe and of the creator’s will; and that this

knowledge will be completed in (and only in) the coming end of time. The modern projects assimilate one set of assumptions to the other, generating several unstable assumptions: e.g., that human reason comprehends the infinite, so that human knowledge of what is true and good extends potentially beyond any finite cosmos; and that the creator's work also obeys the laws of propositional logic.

- A vast series of critics has argued convincingly that the modern projects have displayed their potential for both good (e.g., generating models of human rights and equality, human liberty, and social justice) and evil (e.g., generating totalizing models of reason and truth that have, when put into socio-political practice, unintentionally or intentionally engendered vastly oppressive social, political, and economic institutions. The latter include varieties of nationalist polities, colonialist adventures, unlimited capitalist ventures, and totalitarian governments.)<sup>9</sup>

My worries about Yoder's projects of nonviolence are all linked to my assumption that modernity's presumably well-intentioned pursuits of universal truth and human welfare tended over time to generate as much evil as good. My interest in Yoder stems from my attraction to his critique of these modern pursuits and to his scripturally-grounded alternatives. My worries arise whenever his writing and his students' writing unintentionally reproduce some errant modern tendencies even in promoting alternatives.

I assume in this essay that the reliable ground of Yoder's alternative is the recognition that God alone, creator and redeemer, is truth, and that no proposition of human knowledge or belief is adequate to that truth. I assume therefore that no phrase in natural language can be trusted as ultimately equal to the task of disclosing that truth. On the basis of both Jewish and Christian accounts of what is "good news," I also assume that this God draws us into intimate relation to this truth and that we bring human reason with us into that relation. I assume, therefore, that natural and social science, as well as scriptural study, contribute to what we do within that intimate relation.

But I revisit my worries whenever Yoder's writing or anyone else's begins to assimilate the discourses of science and of scripture to each other, either by forcing scriptural study into clear-and-distinct propositions that remain instruments of science<sup>10</sup> or by attributing to scientific claims the universal truth and intrinsic value attributable only to divine speech (which does not lend itself to propositional definition). For the following discussion, I introduce two terms as a means of articulating what is wonderful or worrisome in Yoder's writing. I refer to his study of divine speech as "theocentric" and to his study of human-only or scientific discourse as "anthropocentric." I applaud both sides of his study and his efforts to draw one into relation to the other. But I am consistently worried when he *overdraws* this relation, rendering the theocentric clear-and-distinct and the anthropocentric universally true.

Reading Yoder's *Nonviolence – A Brief History*, I am thus worried when his theocentric writing treats nonviolence as if it were another name for a divine attribute or for what we should achieve by way of *imitatio Christi*. In this case, "nonviolence" should, like the divine name itself or like Hebrew terms in the Bible, remain semantically vague, so that we could neither offer a general definition of it nor say before the fact what specific human behavior it implies in a given situation. For each situation, there are guidelines for forming judgments, but we cannot predict what the results would be. *The Politics of Jesus* best illustrates this approach. It is less powerfully presented in *Nonviolence – A Brief History*, but is nevertheless suggested in places. For instance, when discussing Paul's reference to *exousiae*, or "powers," Yoder criticizes those who seek to restrict the meaning of the term to specific entities. Instead, he has "proceeded, as does Paul, without specifying what kinds of entities he is talking about" (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 100). They refer to a general or vague reality that appears differently in different occasions, resulting in "a social vision which is both pessimistic and optimistic" (*ibid.*, 102). When things are not under human control, they cannot be predefined.

I am also worried when Yoder's anthropocentric writing treats the universal truth of "nonviolence" as if it referred to what it means within our everyday uses of natural language: in one case, specifically not supporting state-supported warfare; in another, no bloodshed; in yet another, patience

in response to all confrontations; in still another, community organizing to nurture the agency of those suffering oppression so that their concerted efforts will, without the use of body-on-body force, move the polity to change its policies. Here, “nonviolence” refers to a specific, clearly defined set of actions like these, not to some real but vague activity or disposition that makes itself known in different ways on different occasions.

### **Illustrating a Major Strength and an Area of Concern**

The overall structure of the Warsaw lectures suggests the second, anthropocentric approach. I will consider here just a few illustrations. In chapter 1, “The Heritage of Nonviolent Thought and Action,” Yoder writes,

One of the most original cultural products of our century is awareness of the power of organized nonviolent resistance as an instrument in the struggle for justice. . . . [Its] operation is often informal and decentralized. . . . The secular historian will be interested in such phenomena from the purely scientific perspective of their occasional efficacy and novelty. The Christian historian will see in these experiences two further interlocked dimensions. On the level of moral theology, there is a debate going on among Christians since the fourth century concerning the moral legitimacy of violence in war or revolution. . . . There is also a broader theological perspective, which these considerations do not set aside or exhaust – but confirm. If it makes sense to understand the God of the Bible as having made himself known with a particular set of characteristics and purposes, then the interpretation of that nature and those purposes, with regard specifically to the shape of human conflict and liberation, is an exercise in far more than only ethics. It has to do with a doxological view of history as a whole, as the continuing liberating work of YHWH of Hosts, as the subject for Christian thanksgiving, prophecy, and hope. (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 17-18)

He then begins the “brief history” that characterizes this volume as a whole. In the first chapter, his subjects are Tolstoy and Gandhi, from



whom he identifies a spiritual and organizational insight into nonviolent social organizing. In Gandhi's version, it has a "social basis in a communal [center]," the use of "traditional religious forms," "a thoroughly popular form of journalism," "appeal to the positive values of Anglo-Saxon law," and six more characteristics.

In this way, chapter 1 integrates both the theocentric and anthropocentric approaches. One might expect that, as a rabbinic philosopher, I should understand this. For the rabbis, "divine law" is earthbound and visible in its effects, so that, for every case, we can talk at once about God's scriptural discourse and about the character of pots and pans and oxen, all in a manner that is fully theocentric and fully anthropocentric. The rabbis do not universalize or absolutize their accounts of the anthropocentric side. If Yoder followed suit, then I would laud his writing as wholly rabbinic-like, which for me is a good thing. But let us see how it goes.

Yoder's moral judgments appear forcefully first in chapter 3, "The Lessons of the Nonviolent Experience." Yoder notes that, unlike the acts of faithfulness described in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the acts that he narrated in chapters 1 and 2 were not "models to be slavishly imitated" (a happily contingent claim). He adds, however, that these contingent cases do serve as "prototypes" for us, "corroborated by the later 'cloud of witnesses,'" in which he includes "the thousands of American young men who refuse their call to military service in the Vietnam War" (page 31) and many others. Here, the moral voice begins. To the certainty that I applaud about our capacity for direct encounter with God, Yoder adds a certainty about when a worldly action simply is the right thing, period.

How could I object to the latter certainty without making my interest in "direct encounter" rather trivial, as if we had some innerly direct experience but had to fumble around as mere relativists in the outer world? Have I not already praised Yoder for recognizing the outer as well as the inner as the place of God's word and will? My reply is that, in the rabbinic view I seek to follow, the character of our outer experience is worthy of full-hearted commitment in spirit, but it is also semantically imprecise, incompletely defined until after the action is passed and questions of intention become irrelevant or at least secondary. I do not believe Yoder is convinced that unwavering moral commitment can have a semantically imprecise action as

its object. In this chapter, therefore, his narrative about specific, nonviolent actions begins to display the co-presence of clear and distinct accounts of both their empirical settings and their moral weight. I would be satisfied if either one of these accounts was clear and the other probabilistic or indefinite. Yoder's apparent hope, however, is to uncover a history whose retelling would warrant clarity in both accounts. This may appear to him to be a triumph of the good, but I fear it would appear instead to be a triumph of the will: not that Yoder himself would be guilty of the latter, but he incautiously uses language that could be adopted in that way. Consider, for example, this passage:

The unity of religious rootage and ethical strategy is not merely intellectual. . . . [B]efore it is a social strategy, nonviolence is a moral commitment; before it is a moral commitment, it is a distinctive spirituality. It presupposes and fosters a distinctive way of seeing oneself and one's neighbor under God. That "way of seeing things" is more like prayer than it is like shrewd social strategy, although it is both. It is more a faith than it is a theory, although it is both. (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 43)

Because Yoder is working to overcome a Christian heritage of spiritualism, of separating matters of body and spirit, he may not yet have noticed when he overstates the cure. This is a matter that rabbinic Judaism understands well because of its long heritage of religious law. The nonviolence Yoder advocates is, in rabbinic terms, a piece of Christian religious law. In the rabbinic system, an overall structure of moral certainty – that God has revealed his will and we have specific instructions that follow from this will – has been integrated over time with practices of inductive reasoning and of moral decision-making. Inductive reasoning seeks to collect evidence about both the immediate situation and how it compares with previous situations described in the long tradition of rabbinic case law. Time-specific moral actions can be made only in light of the inductive evidence, and I simply cannot locate an experienced and legal decisor (a *posek*, a rabbinic legal decision-maker) who would offer doubly clear and distinct accounts of both the results of induction and the process of decision-making.

I therefore cannot fully imagine Yoder's account fully rendered as

if it were practical, Christian religious law. When rabbinic religious law is enacted in the outer world, undivided moral commitment is embodied in an environment of probabilistic reasoning that I take to mean going “according to the grain of the universe.” Accounts of this world simply have to be probabilistic or vague, because that is how the world runs. Yoder’s pursuit of worldly certainty thus suggests, at times, either a not-yet-worldly religious law or else something like Enlightenment empiricism. By the latter, I mean the work of reasoners whose admirable passion for life in this world is served by rules of reasoning that retain an earlier rationalist and spiritualist’s canon of logic. My overall sense is not that Yoder intends to generate totalizing paradigms of morality but that, like these empiricists, his work generates a totalizing effect against his intention.

In the sentences I have quoted, the potential for such an effect is exhibited in Yoder’s vision of a causal chain, or at least genealogical lineage, that links a “distinctive” word of God’s to a distinctive “social strategy,” where “distinctive” refers to what can be apprehended in a clear and distinct way. For this reason, Yoder can conclude that “for the most convinced agents of nonviolent resistance, part of their motivation is a religious vision, but this does not mean that secular social science analysis could not interpret what is going on in purely secular categories” (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 44). I appreciate Yoder’s effort to overcome dualisms that divide divine voice and scientific discourse. But non-division does not mean non-difference. Once this false division is repaired, newly refined tools of inquiry must be introduced to redescribe the actual relationship that both links and distinguishes divine and human voices.

As in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, Yoder’s treatment of Judaism in *Nonviolence – A Brief History* introduces such hopeful, new tools of inquiry, but it also reuses the “older” tools in ways that do not fulfill my hopes for the new. In chapter 6, Yoder turns his gaze from more general histories and sciences of nonviolence to the Bible. He argues that some judge, wrongly, that because it “teaches a kind of nationalism” the Old Testament is not a resource for peacemaking. In a voice recalling *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, he appeals to scholars, from von Rad on, who argue that narratives about “YHWH’s wars” introduced something remarkable into the ancient Near East: the claim that YHWH, not the armies

of Israel, won this people's battles. The lesson, says Yoder, is not to fight, *per se*, but to trust God. If this account changes after the installation of King David, so does the role of God, who now tends to "take the other side." If Jesus preached in light of such a narrative, then his hearers heard the opposite of Marcion's lesson: Jesus came not to redeem Israel from her God but to draw her forward to her God, to trust fully and see fully "the salvation of YHWH." Thus,

Holy wars and divinely sponsored kingship are the beginning and not the end of the Jewish national story. That story moves ahead so that, by the time of the writing of Chronicles, the model is nonviolent salvation after the style of the stories of Jehoshaphat. (*Nonviolence – A Brief History*, 79)

I profoundly appreciate these words, and much of what follows when Yoder traces what he considers the unfolding process of late Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism embrace of the politics of nonviolence. Here, his anthropocentric and theocentric histories meet in a single, redeeming point: the practice of nonviolent relations. And here we see the fruits of his efforts to overcome spirit-world dualism. Theological and scientific inquiry find that their two worlds of observation, analysis, discovery, and inference meet in a single end of history – that is, "end" as both purpose and resolution. The end is nonviolence, and that is also the fulfillment of "Old Testament" as well as of Gospel religion.

But Yoder's words also leave me with some concerns, even anguish. This single end is not the plain sense of the Bible as *Tanakh*, except when that Bible is read through the lens of Gospel. And, even then – if I read this correctly, and I cannot be sure – except when the Gospel is read through a lens reading the name of Jesus Christ as also the name "nonviolence." This returns me to my starting point: a wariness about substituting words of natural language for divine names and divine attributes, finite words for the infinite, clear ones for the *mysterium*. As the editors of the new volume remind me, Yoder's Christianity supersedes all things, not only Jewish self-understanding. I object to that only when "Christianity" is made clear, as I believe Yoder seeks to do; then supersessionism is another name for conceptual totalization, as in the fashion of modern reason.

In sum, while my voice may sound primarily critical, I continue to

move closer to the content of Yoder's position. Does that mean closer to his doctrine of "nonviolence?" I cannot answer in precise terms. What I trust in Yoder are not the English phrases he uses or the precise definitions he provides for them, but rather a pattern of conduct that, after some years of reading, I have come to perceive behind these phrases. It is not just the phrases, of course, but the fact that I have been studying them increasingly in the company of Mennonites, particularly at Eastern Mennonite Seminary and also elsewhere. Among many of these now-significant colleagues, I have observed the same strengths and areas of concern that I read in Yoder's work and also the same broader patterns of conduct that I admire. My concluding section addresses another way of describing these patterns.

### **Conclusion: Nonviolence or *Shabbat*?**

I have hope in, and for, Yoder's teaching, because I do not believe it must be made clear-and-distinct, as he tries to make it, in order to uphold his commitment to worldly action. One strong reason for my hope is the taste of *shabbat*. This is the Biblical name of the seventh day, the day of the completion of creation, a time that is rest (not as no-action but as no-creating action), a time that is lived, at once, *both* as fully present *and* as the end of ends, the final future. Within rabbinic teaching and poetry and prayer, *shabbat* is also a name of God's "queen," (*malkhut*, or "queenliness," but anthropomorphized as the Sabbath bride), the *shekhinah* or presence of God in the now and present within which we taste what is Eden before and touch what is paradise at the end.

For the religious Jew "observing" *shabbat*, there is no cutting, dividing, instruments of taking apart and building up, leaving a mark, striking; for some even no overturning a stone, killing a fly, going or coming very far. But there is eating, smelling, tasting, enjoying, praying, studying words of scripture and of joy, and conversing (how else do you study?); there is hand in hand, arm on shoulder, eye to eye, and there is playing, and lovemaking, and sleeping. Some write that wondrous acts filling each day of the week are also of the character of *shabbat*, such as certain moments in prayer, moments of loving, moments of compassion and caring. So *shabbat* may be much more than maximally one-seventh of time. In the end, all is *shabbat*, and life lived for that end shares in it (to some degree, of course, since this

is not yet the end).

Are there all these things clearly and distinctly? Certainly *shabbat* has meanings as a word, and the meanings are clear in that we know for sure that we behold them. But I could not say they are also distinct in that we know for sure where one stops and the other begins. Thus we know for sure that scripture commands observance of *shabbat* and that observance entails “doing no manner of work.” But precisely what is included in “work” and what not, and when, and in what circumstances? What if certain new circumstances arise? Each question of this kind marks a limit of distinctness and stimulates rabbinic and later Jewish legal interpreters to search for answers, case by case. There appears to be no end to new cases, as long as there is no end to new events of space and time.

*Shabbat* gives me hope in Yoder’s teaching, because the pattern I observe behind his words recalls patterns I observe (in an indistinct way) in *shabbat*. I trust I could say of *shabbat* that it is not violence; I could say that what we tend to mean by “violence” is not of *shabbat*, in that sense “not permitted” *on shabbat*. But I could not say this with the definiteness Yoder might ask of me. I could, going in one direction of his “brief history,” find value in tracing histories of *shabbat* observance, even histories of *shabbat*-like observances. I could find value in some empirical studies of the detailed actions and non-actions of *shabbat* observance, more broadly (although we could manage only the smallest sample) of the actions and non-actions of those who live for *shabbat* as the end of time and life and, more, of those who take on obligations to bring the end time as much as possible into everyday time: to act without limit in ways that are caring, loving, acting-not-acting. I could find value in scientific studies of the neurological, biochemical, ecological, economic, and socio-political significance and consequences of *shabbat* lived in this world. But I could not suppose that the one line of inquiry (the religious *doing* of *shabbat*, along quite secondarily with theological reflection on that doing) would meet the other (the empirical, historical, scientific) in a single, distinct point of truth, knowing, trust, and commitment. There is no such *totum simul*. To seek one would, I fear, do violence to *shabbat*.

That would be another, rather long study: to reflect on how a conceptual inquiry, a sorting out of ideas, reasoning, and argument about *shabbat* could

possibly do *violence* to *shabbat*. I would guess that either there is nothing here to study, or else we might also reflect on how a conceptual inquiry, or writing and teaching and arguing, about nonviolence could possibly *do* violence. I do not mean to imply some deeper suspicion about the project of *Nonviolence – A Brief History*. If I could, I would ask Yoder if any teaching (reasoning, showing, persuading) – Enlightenment or other – could do violence: and, if not, why we criticize this or that teaching in favor of another; or, if so, what we can do to lessen the potential in our own teaching, even when we are teaching about matters of ultimate value.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, edited with an introduction and commentaries by Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> A number of readers were dismayed to see so many of our words in the volume; they would have preferred an uninterrupted volume of Yoder's own words. I take this opportunity to apologize and to offer an explanation. The volume appeared in the series *Radical Traditions: Theology in a Postliberal Key*, edited by Stanley Hauerwas and me for Eerdmans. This series provides a venue where books can be published by scholars in any Abrahamic tradition without being measured by standards imposed by strictly secular traditions of inquiry or by another Abrahamic tradition. Reading the book as in part non-nonsupersessionist, I feared that, if we published it without commentary, the series could be accused of publishing books about Judaism that, without explanation, permitted the imposition of standards of another Abrahamic tradition. I now believe our commentaries take up too much space, but I remain concerned about a degree of non-nonsupersessionism in the book.

<sup>3</sup> See Peter Ochs, *The Free Church and Israel's Covenant* (Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite Univ. Press, 2010), and "The Limits of Postliberalism in John Howard Yoder's American Mennonite Church," in *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> There is no need to burden the reader with the technical terminology I sometimes use, for example labeling the position I favor on these matters "postliberal." Those labels sometimes help in grouping theologians for the sake of analysis, but not for better understanding!

<sup>5</sup> In their Introduction, the editors of *Nonviolence – A Brief History* note my concern about Yoder's essentializing Judaism. Their response is to say that Yoder holds up to his Anabaptist measure not only Judaism but all other traditions. While they may have meant to console me, they more likely meant to defend Yoder as not worrying about particularisms but worrying about the universe and humanity as a whole. Privileging only the latter is precisely what concerns me.

<sup>6</sup> For him as for Hauerwas, I take this to mean encountering Jesus Christ and His spirit. I learn from this, although for me that direct presence is by way of prayer and of the spirit and

patterns of the people of Israel's covenantal life with God through time, and that of humanity and that of all creatures.

<sup>7</sup> Technically, we would say the propositions are constructed according to the principles of identity, non-contradiction, and excluded middle, implying, for one, that if "A is x" and x is not-y, then "A is not-y" and "if y, then not A."

<sup>8</sup> For the most part without intention.

<sup>9</sup> Among sources for this viewpoint are the Jewish philosophers Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, and Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas has offered a well-known critique of the modern west's addiction to "la totalité." Additional resources include "postliberal" Christian theologians, such as Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, Robert Jenson, Stanley Hauerwas, Kendall Soulen, and also John Howard Yoder (in his postliberal dimension). There are the postliberal-like genealogists of the West, including Alasdair MacIntyre and John Milbank, the pragmatist-genealogists John Dewey and Richard Rorty, and the many postmodern critics such as François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Luc Marion. There are also many historians and social interpreters of the Holocaust who offer inferences like those I have just offered, such as Zygmunt Bauman, Max Horkheimer, Ira Katznelson, Theodore Adorno, Edith Wyschogrod, and others.

<sup>10</sup> But only instruments! Contemporary natural and social sciences tend, appropriately, to employ such propositions only in the service of more generally probabilistic and fallible modes of inquiry.

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Anne Krabill Hershberger, ed. *Sexuality: God's Gift*. Second edition. Scottdale, PA/Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2010.

Given that contemporary theology has seen a renewed interest in the significance of embodiment, the second edition of *Sexuality: God's Gift* is a timely addition to Anabaptist-Mennonite pastoral theology. According to editor Anne Krabill Hershberger, the book aims "to put in accessible form some topics on sexuality which have special meaning for Christians and to interpret them from a Christian, Anabaptist, biblical perspective" (13). With its 16 chapters tracing issues related to sexuality from childhood through old age, this volume is an updated, more comprehensive version of the first edition, and is sure to be useful in congregational, small group, and individual settings.

*Sexuality: God's Gift* draws from the wisdom and experience of a number of authors without attempting to harmonize their views, giving the book an interdisciplinary and intergenerational flavor. Hershberger and Willard S. Krabill begin the collection by framing sexuality in terms of a divine gift, in contrast to the negativity about sexuality and indeed about embodiment itself in the history of the Christian tradition (19). Sexuality is further understood as broader than genital sex, encompassing gender as well; thus the authors state that "[a]lways, from birth to death, we are all sexual beings" (18). This is followed by a thorough and realistic look at biblical depictions of sexuality by Keith Graber Miller that concludes, not with a simplistic appeal to so-called 'biblical marriage' or 'family values,' but with an appeal to emulate sexuality at its "biblical best" (50). After Krabill places sexuality within the broader category of human intimacy, the discussion turns to sexuality at different life stages.

While the first edition addressed youth and children in a single chapter, the second edition distinguishes between the two age groups, resulting in James H. Ritchie Jr.'s chapter on "The Gift and Its Youngest Recipients" and Barbara J. Meyer's "The Gift and Nurturing Adolescents." In "The Gift and Singleness," Julie Nash writes candidly of her experience of singleness, followed by Krabill's chapters on marriage, same-sex orientation, and "Cross-Gender Friendships." Miller and Hershberger discuss sexuality and aging, and Rachel Nafziger Hartzler discusses sexuality "After Losing

a Spouse.” The final essays explore sensuality (Hershberger), the arts (Lauren Friesen), celibacy (Sue L. Conrad), the “misuse” of sexuality (Krabill and Hershberger), and its “restoration” (Delores Histan Friesen), and offer resources for further reading compiled by Histan Friesen and Hershberger.

Many chapters are compelling and well-researched, drawing from well-known scholars in Christian sexual ethics such as James B. Nelson and Lisa Sowle Cahill. Still, several chapters stand out. Meyer provides a sensitive account of sexuality and the complexities of adolescence that encourages and challenges youth pastors and parents to discuss sexual ethics openly with youth. Krabill’s take on same-sex orientation is likewise nuanced and hospitable, an appropriate tone given the still-charged nature of the subject in many congregations. Both Friesen’s discussion of sexuality in the arts and Conrad’s artful and quite theological portrayal of celibacy deepen the definition of sexuality beyond sex or marriage to include broader aspects of church and community life.

I was less drawn to Krabill’s discussion of marriage, which focuses more on the downfalls of pre-marital sex than on the positive values of healthy marriage relationships. Since same-sex marriage is not a possibility in many contexts, there are hints here of a possible double standard regarding acceptance and hospitality: those who identify as gay or lesbian are welcomed without judgment, while heterosexuals remain accountable to a cut-and-dried sexual ethic. This distance is troubling and requires further reflection. The emphasis on the legal aspect of marriage was also somewhat puzzling, as Anabaptist-Mennonite marriages have historically relied primarily on the church community, not the state, for legitimation. Krabill’s look at “cross-gender friendships,” among other chapters, made several generalizations about gender that reveal an area the authors could have researched further. Consultation with feminist and womanist theologies, and with theologies of gender and embodiment could have strengthened the discussion significantly.

This edition of *Sexuality: God’s Gift* delves deeper into the controversies of sexual ethics than its predecessor, tackling singleness and celibacy, widowhood, and divorce, in addition to same-sex orientation and various kinds of abuse. Though readers looking for a more sustained

Anabaptist-Mennonite theology of embodiment and sexuality will have to look elsewhere, this volume provides a fitting introduction for Mennonite and other congregations who have yet to begin the conversation on sexuality.

*Susanne Guenther Loewen*, doctoral student, Toronto School of Theology

John D. Roth. *Teaching that Transforms: Why Anabaptist-Mennonite Education Matters*. Scottdale, PA/Waterloo, ON: Herald, 2011.

Commissioned by Mennonite Education Agency to articulate a cogent Mennonite philosophy of education, John Roth offers a proposal for why Anabaptist-Mennonite education is important for young people, the church, and the community. For many years, this faith tradition saw education as something that was more caught than taught, more implicit than explicit. Through *Teaching that Transforms*, the author seeks to make explicit the philosophical, theological, and pedagogical assumptions implicit in Mennonite communities. The philosophy of education he puts forth is focused on common Mennonite theological emphases, pedagogical practice informed by Mennonite convictions, and educational outcomes that reflect the distinctives of Mennonite communities.

Roth begins with an introduction offering brief foundational information about Mennonite education. He speaks of the current state of Anabaptist-Mennonite education, addresses key aspects of a philosophy of education in this Christian tradition, and notes challenges and limitations of his book. Chapter 1 provides a background to the contemporary context, giving a historical overview of developments in North American education as well as Mennonite responses and alternatives to public schooling. Chapter 2 guides readers through a proposal for a theological foundation for Mennonite education. Arguing that the identities of Mennonite schools must be informed by “conscious engagement with a theological tradition,” Roth states that education that is Mennonite rests on a theology of the incarnation infused into every aspect of education – from the content studied to the student doing the studying, from pedagogy and outcomes to the ways community is fostered.

Next, Roth addresses the ethos and pedagogy of Mennonite education. The ethos is formed through a focus on worship, attentiveness to tradition, and a community of diversity committed to addressing complexity and conflict through peacefulness. Roth argues that at least five pedagogical themes are consistent with a theology of the incarnation and enveloped within this ethos: curiosity, reason, joy, patience, and love.

Chapter 4 addresses educational outcomes. “By what criteria should we measure educational success?” he asks, and “Can true educational success even be quantified?” (127). Mennonite schools should have six common goals: the ability to perceive details within larger contexts and through a moral framework; an education that is practical, embodied, and engaging; an attitude of discernment; the development of respect and empathy; the search for one’s calling; and a consistent quest for sensing the Spirit.

Chapter 5 discusses “tough questions” for parents, ministers, congregations, board members, school administrators, and the Mennonite Education Agency. The final chapter focuses on key challenges to contemporary Mennonite education, a topic that would end the book on a harsh note had Roth not rounded it out with discussing new opportunities and visions for a future that is progressive and vibrant.

Readers with an understanding of education, pedagogy, and curriculum theory may find Roth’s use of educational theory somewhat limited. Additionally, his implicit views of the nature of childhood remain undeveloped and his theology tends to express a low view of children. Both of these points, however, are consistent with theologies of childhood and views of education common in Mennonite communities. Against this backdrop, Roth’s quest for a Mennonite theology of education is timely and admirable.

Although the author is clear that diversity is a growing challenge in Mennonite schools, he does not address the entire spectrum of diversity. He tends to overlook conversations surrounding differences of ability and his discussions about class difference remain somewhat shallow. Without attending to these matters, a philosophy of education remains rooted in and committed to the healthy development and education of middle-class, able-bodied students but neglects children who don’t seem to fit this mold.

Despite these limitations, *Teaching that Transforms* represents a milestone in thinking and writing about Mennonite education. Roth turns

implicit assumptions into an explicit and accessible Mennonite philosophy of education for contemporary schools. He not only reminds readers why Anabaptist-Mennonite education matters; his persuasive philosophical framework offers a catalyst for transforming how Mennonites take up the task of educating the young people in their care.

This volume is a timely resource for all sorts of people with ties to Mennonite education. With personal stories and a firm grasp of Mennonite theology, Roth has made it accessible to those who may have never read a book about theology or education. Yet accessibility is not synonymous with simplicity. He does not shy away from complex and challenging issues, like how to make room for diversity without compromising Mennonite identity. Though not the definitive word on the subject, this book offers a framework for Anabaptist-Mennonite education and would be an interesting study guide for groups of parents, teachers, or administrators. It deserves to be studied by people involved in Mennonite education at all levels.

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J. Nelson Kraybill. *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010.

Nelson Kraybill, New Testament scholar, former missionary in Europe, former president of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, and currently pastor at Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Indiana, has written a fine book that displays abilities honed in each of his roles just mentioned. *Apocalypse and Allegiance* combines solid scholarship, an accessible style, theological depth, spiritual encouragement, and social critique. Kraybill packs an impressive amount of content in a relatively small space, addressing both general readers and scholars with a refreshing perspective on the book of Revelation.

Kraybill's scholarly strength is his understanding of the historical setting for the book of Revelation and his particular expertise in political

and economic dynamics. So we get information and visuals that put us back into Revelation's first-century environment. In particular, Kraybill does an excellent job in presenting Revelation as resistance literature that challenges the imperial ambitions of Rome with a vision of a humane, peaceable alternative politics. And, to the reader's benefit, he does not simply describe a fascinating ancient document but also makes perceptive applications to the present day.

Kraybill keeps his two feet solidly in both the New Testament scholarship and the peace church arenas. This latter arena is clearly more central for his concerns, but he pursues his ecclesial agenda without compromising his commitment to sound scholarship. While not a full-scale commentary, this volume does survey the entire book of Revelation. Hence, it will work well in classroom and Bible study contexts.

A special appeal of Kraybill's approach is how the author provides contextual details amid looking at the book's content, heightening the interest and accessibility of those details. Kraybill differs from many writers on Revelation who, like him, read it as an anti-imperial polemic by emphasizing what he calls "devotion." He sees worship as one the book's most important emphases. So, this biblical book *is* about politics, but politics of a distinctive sort, politics embodied most of all in the life of worshipping communities.

Another dimension of *Apocalypse and Allegiance* that deserves appreciation, even if it is not a central focus, is how Kraybill presents a winsome antidote to the futuristic (and violent) readings of Revelation that have exerted such influence among North American Christians. Perhaps he could have said a bit more overtly to contrast the meaning of worship for the faithful communities in Revelation with the meaning of worship for all too many North American Christians who are quite comfortable amidst their empire. However, the implications of the differences are not hard to draw based on the information Kraybill does provide.

I appreciate, as part of the author's aim to bring the message of Revelation into the present, that the end of each chapter includes a short vignette describing current efforts to embody the way of the Lamb. But perhaps a little more thought could have been devoted to using stories with more obvious links to the content of the corresponding chapter.

The book of Revelation, while still obscure for many Christians and all too clear (in problematic ways) for many other Christians, has stimulated an encouraging and enlightening literature. Since the publication of George B. Caird's still highly recommended commentary, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, in 1966, a regular stream of useful books presenting Revelation as peace literature has emerged. Kraybill's book complements these others, but still makes its unique contribution.

Nonetheless, there are differences of emphases among these writers. A way that my own approach differs from Kraybill's is to focus more on the narrative of the book of Revelation as a whole. Kraybill picks up on important themes throughout Revelation, but does so in a kind of scattered fashion – jumping from chapter 1 to chapters 12 and 13, and then back to 4 through 11, then to 15 through 19, and then back to 2 and 3, and ending with 20 through 22. This approach, while allowing him to lift up what he sees as the book's central themes, might also be disorienting and deprive the reader of an important element of John's thought grasped only by reading the book as a self-conscious narrative structured in a particular way.

All in all, *Apocalypse and Allegiance* is an excellent volume, making a most useful contribution to present-day Christian faithfulness to the way of Jesus.

*Ted Grimsrud*, Professor of Theology and Peace Studies, Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Virginia

Leonora Tisdale Tubbs. *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

Most preachers know intuitively that over the long haul the prophetic and the pastoral go together. An effective word of challenge to the faithful will gain traction only if those who voice such a challenge are trusted and respected, and list themselves among the gathered sinners. But beyond the intuition that challenge and nurture somehow go together, preachers have

basic questions about the how, what, why, and when of prophetic preaching and about how it is related to the more comfortable pastoral role.

Tisdale Tubbs, an experienced preacher and teacher of preaching, offers a short work (it can be read in a day or less) that will inspire and clarify prophetic preaching. To be clear: it is the prophetic that is the focus in this work and not the pastoral, even though the subtitle may suggest otherwise. She does not weave the pastoral and the prophetic but offers a practical study of the prophetic with a nod to the importance of the pastoral.

This volume stays close to the issues at hand for preachers who are curious about prophetic preaching. What is prophetic preaching, why do we shun it, what do we do with the flack that results, and what forms are best suited to this kind of preaching? These questions are explored with biblical and theological depth, actual sermons, and stories from the lives of preachers and churches. The wisdom here is clarifying, energizing, and easy to apply to one's next sermon.

After carefully summarizing different streams (for example, social gospel, biblical, liberationist) that have come together in the current era under the umbrella of prophetic preaching, the author works with several "hallmarks" of prophetic preaching. Prophetic preaching is rooted in the biblical witness; it is countercultural; it is concerned with and names individual and social evil; it offers hope and encouragement in light of God's passion for justice; and it gives courage to, and empowers, the church to change the social order. The prophetic preacher is one who is imaginative, honest, humble, and always a pastor.

While Tisdale Tubbs works with several hallmarks of prophetic preaching – making it appear that her definition is broad – this work is rooted in a (narrow?) liberal American Protestant understanding of the prophetic. Anecdotes from the American civil rights era abound. We also hear much from Riverside Baptist Church in New York, where a certain kind of prophetic preaching and theology is highlighted. The prophetic topics that come to the fore are racism, sexism, problematic distributions of wealth, and speaking truth to power. While the American Civil Rights Movement and current American issues identified by one branch of Christianity are good and worthy of prophetic reflection for all preachers, I wonder what other topics (or evils) – both individual and social – might help to clarify and



expand prophetic preaching. For instance, what might prophetic preaching sound like in Canada, which has a quite different civil rights history?

Tisdale Tubbs has spent a lifetime thinking not only about prophetic preaching but also about prophetic churches, and about how preaching can contribute to the creation of such communities. In her second chapter she calls for a “spirituality of prophetic witness.” She examines strategies for both the preacher and the church that connect solitude and speech, the lives of the privileged and the lives of those who suffer, the individual and the social, as well as prayer and prophetic witness. The prophet is not a lone ranger who stands against the church. The prophet is one who prays, preaches, worships, and lives a life of pastorally connecting both God’s heartbreak and God’s sure promises among God’s people.

*Allan Rudy-Froese*, Assistant Professor of Christian Proclamation,  
Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana

CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT

# Mennonite/s Writing VI

Eastern Mennonite University  
1200 Park Road  
Harrisonburg, Virginia 22802-2462

March 29 - April 1, 2012

The sixth in a series of conferences on Mennonite writing in the U.S., Canada, and beyond, this conference will both celebrate and examine this rapidly developing literature across borders on the North American continent and as it is developing world wide. Papers are expected to address the relationship of the artist and communities – solos and harmonies – in ethical and aesthetic dimensions. Papers and creative work read at the conference will be considered for publication in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, *The Conrad Grebel Review*, and *The Journal of the Center for Mennonite Writing*.

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***The Conrad Grebel Review*** is an interdisciplinary journal of Christian inquiry devoted to thoughtful, sustained discussion of spirituality, ethics, theology and culture from a broadly-based Mennonite perspective. Published three times a year, each issue usually contains refereed scholarly articles, responses to articles, informal reflections and essays, and book reviews. The Review occasionally publishes conference proceedings as well. Submissions are sought which, in subject and approach, will be accessible and of interest to specialists and general readers.

### ***Articles***

Articles are original works of scholarship engaged in conversation with the relevant disciplinary literature, and written in a lively style appealing to the educated, non-specialist reader. Articles must be properly referenced, using endnotes, and should not exceed 7,500 words. The Review follows the Chicago Manual of Style.

Manuscripts are sent in blind copy to two peer reviewers. Some exceptions to this may apply, as in the case of conference papers. Evaluation is based on subject matter, relevance, observance of standards of evidence and argumentation, and readability.

### ***Reflections***

Reflections are thoughtful and/or provocative pieces that draw on an author's expertise and experience. These submissions may be homilies, speeches, or topical essays, for instance. Manuscripts should be about 3,000 words.

### ***Responses and Literary Refractions***

Responses and literary refractions are solicited by the managing editor and literary editor respectively.

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