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A PNEUMATOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF JOHN HOWARD YODER'S POLITICAL ETHICS

“The Peace Church and the Spirit of Liberation”

DAVID A. MEADE

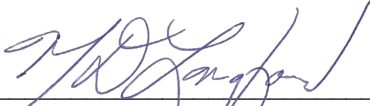
SEATTLE PACIFIC SEMINARY


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A PNEUMATOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF JOHN HOWARD YODER'S POLITICAL ETHICS

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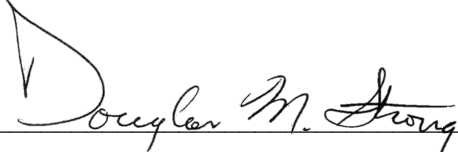
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Introduction:

This thesis began through my personal faith journey, setting the course for the intellectual questions at hand. I encountered the work of John Howard Yoder and the broader Anabaptist peace church tradition in the course of wrestling with my own early Christian formation that I felt had little to do with the ministry and teaching of Jesus. It not only endorsed, but actively sought to participate in and lead, imperialist, racist militarism and its domesticated counterpart of repressive, punitive, and racist violence marketed as “law and order.” In Anabaptism, and especially Yoder’s work, I found a vision of Christianity that seemed to take Jesus much more seriously and provided hope that Christianity, peace, and justice belonged together. However, over time I found the theoretically radical peace church position to be, more often than not, stuck in a kind of loyal dissent. Too often, I sensed that we were reducing our commitment to Christian pacifism to an intellectual assent made in order to dissociate ourselves from violent institutions from which we materially benefit, or worse, to police the methods of those attempting to resist oppression and change a violent status quo. I began to recognize that we were unable to enact our expressed ideals at least in part because our white middle-class milieu insulated us from any substantial proximity to people for whom the violence of poverty and racism were more than concepts. This was not the case for the early Anabaptists but certainly is the case for myself and many Anabaptists in North America and Europe today. In liberation theologies I recognized an important framework toward correcting this issue and began trying to understand more deeply how and why they differed from Anabaptist peace church theologies. This thesis is the result of my hope that contemporary Anabaptists, and those influenced by the Anabaptist vision, can move toward more faithful forms of communal witness through deepened attentiveness to

socially marginalized communities, Christian and otherwise, engaged in concrete struggles for justice.

In pursuing these questions, some readers may wonder why I chose to use the work of John Howard Yoder for this exploration in light of his sexual abuse of women.¹ I have no general argument for the continued use of Yoder's work and understand that readers may have good reason to avoid his work and might take issue with my approach here. My rationale, subject to critique, strictly applies to my own work in this thesis. Ultimately, I do not feel that I can escape the fact that my theological perspective had been deeply influenced and shaped by the writings of John Howard Yoder prior to my learning of his sexual abuse and this formation remains operative in what and how I think whether or not I cite his work directly. While I could reference other, less controversial pacifist theologians to explore the issues in this paper, it was primarily through Yoder's work that I encountered and formed my own convictions regarding Christian pacifism and began to question its relationship to liberation theologies. To hide this reality behind other citations seems to me, in my situation, to be a sort of academic laundering. Additionally, in light of his abusive behavior, approaching Yoder's work demands a hermeneutic of suspicion that exposes his formulation of nonviolence to a more rigorous evaluation than might be applied had his abuse not been made public. This is not to imply that Yoder did not violate his own articulation of Christian ethics through his abuse against women, but rather to recognize that his words cannot be neatly separated from his deeds. There may be areas where abusive tendencies find expression or legitimization in his work. I think this is true less in what Yoder explicitly advocated for in his published works and more true about what he did not

¹ Rachel Waltner Goossen, "Defanging the Beast': Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89.1 (2015): 7-80.

address.² While this thesis is not directly focused on the reception of his work in light of his abuse, there is a connection between his abuse, and the ensuing cover-up, and his limited attention to issues of power dynamics and his insular ecclesial vision. I hope that this paper addresses some of the underlying theological problems in his work that could be used to enable or minimize the significance of such harm.

In this paper I will argue that John Howard Yoder's Christocentric political ethics strongly maintain the church as the subject of a Christian peace witness to the world but, because of an underdeveloped pneumatology, is less effective at establishing the church as the ongoing recipient of revelation. A complementary pneumatological perspective that remains anchored in the work of God in Christ can maintain the distinctive witnessing role of the church while also allowing the discernment of the Holy Spirit's activity in the world to call the church to a more faithful participation in the life of Jesus Christ. This pneumatology enables a synthesis with liberation theologies which emphasize the Holy Spirit's presence and activity in and among poor and oppressed peoples toward the dismantling and redress of unjust and violent structures.

My first section will analyze Yoder's Christology as the foundation of his work. In the second section, I will present a summary of Yoder's peace church political ethics in relation to his Christology. Next, my third section will examine Yoder's pneumatology, acknowledging his positive contributions and critiquing what I perceive to be inadequate. My fourth section will provide a constructive reframing of the Trinitarian relationship between pneumatology and

² For some examples of theologians wrestling with Yoder's theological legacy in light of his abuse, see David Cramer, Jenny Howell, Jonathan Tran, and Paul Martens, "Scandalizing John Howard Yoder," *The Other Journal*, 7 July 2014, <https://theotherjournal.com/2014/07/07/scandalizing-john-howard-yoder/>; Stanley Hauerwas, "In defence of our 'respectable culture': Trying to make sense of John Howard Yoder's sexual abuse," *ABC Religion and Ethics*, 18 October 2017, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/in-defence-of-our-respectable-culture-trying-to-make-sense-of-jo/10095302>.

Christology, leading to a more open and dialogical relationship between the church and the world. Finally, in the fifth section, I will provide a synthesis with liberation theologies that moves through pneumatology, into ecclesiology and ethics, and culminates in a concluding Christological reflection.

1. Yoder's Christological Perspective:

Christology is John Howard Yoder's central concern in his vision for political ethics. If Christian political existence is to be truly Christian, then Jesus Christ must be the foundation. This is the main thrust of Yoder's most well-known text on theological ethics, *The Politics of Jesus*. His primary focus here is not drawing political implications or ethical principles from Christological doctrines but rather deriving a consistent and coherent mode of political engagement from the biblical witness to Jesus of Nazareth.³ Using the method of "biblical realism," Yoder contends that Christian scripture's presentation of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah includes a specific political vision for the Messianic community.

However, Yoder is not interested in reconstructing a more accurate picture of the historical Jesus in contrast to a mythological Christ of dogma. It is this dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith which Yoder rejects.⁴ He argues that it is precisely this Jesus who entered into a certain time and place, as witnessed to in the New Testament, who is normative for Christian theology and ethics. The power of the biblical witness to Jesus is that it never shies away from the historical particularity of Jesus the first century Jew, nor is it ashamed to make ultimate theological claims stemming from faith in this man as the Messiah. Yoder's

³ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

critique of “mainstream” models of Christian theology and ethics is that they have been insufficiently Christian by failing to take Jesus Christ seriously as the norm for belief and practice. Whether by seeking only a historical account of Jesus of Nazareth divorced from divine authority or by elevating an authoritative Christ without a consistent identification with Jesus of Nazareth, a great deal of effort has been spent evading the demands of a specifically Christian political ethic.

Yoder’s attention to the biblical account and Jesus as the Jewish Messiah serves to recover the centrality of the life and teaching of Jesus in relation to Christological claims. Placed in this context, the crucifixion and resurrection are climactic and paradigmatic elements of the Messianic narrative, rather than abstract doctrinal concepts. For Yoder, the problem is not doctrine itself, but that in their historical development and especially in their ethical application, so many theorists “have assumed that the only way to get from the gospel story to ethics, from Bethlehem to Rome or to Washington or Saigon, was to leave the story behind.”⁵ Taking the biblical text and the materiality of Jesus seriously requires looking at his words and deeds within their narrative context and in relation to the surrounding environment.

The cross, in Yoder’s thought, represents the paradigm of Jesus’ way of being in the world. Certainly, the centrality of the cross is not in itself a unique Christological perspective. But for Yoder, the primary significance of the cross is its connection to Jesus’ way of interacting within a certain socio-political scenario. The cross then cannot be a symbol for “any and every kind of suffering, sickness, or tension, the bearing of which is demanded.”⁶ Crucifixion served a particular purpose as a form of capital punishment to be wielded against enemies of the Roman

⁵ Ibid., 13. While his reference is specifically to ethicists here, he makes the implications explicit in reference to systematic theology on p. 56.

⁶ Ibid., 96.

Empire. Nor does the cross be understood merely as a mechanism for atonement which excludes any political and ethical significance.⁷ Jesus did not arrive on a cross separate from either the actions of those who desired his demise or his own agency in response. Rather, the cross is first and foremost “the price of social nonconformity... it is the social reality of representing in an unwilling world the Order to come.”⁸ The cross represents not an isolated incident in which Christ experiences our mortality or demonstrates that the real point of the Incarnation is the balancing of some metaphysical ledger, but rather the climax of a life devoted to embodying the Kingdom of God in the midst of a hostile world. The cross is emblematic of Jesus’ entire ministry devoted to proclaiming the coming of that Kingdom in which God’s will is done and death is no more. On Golgotha, the disjunction between this age and the age to come is most grotesquely demonstrated. Yet the cross also demonstrates that the Kingdom of God is neither an apolitical, inward, spiritual reality – or else Jesus would not have died the death of an insurrectionist – nor is this Kingdom simply a more powerful kingdom after the same pattern as Rome – or else it would not have been Jesus who was crucified.⁹ Yoder says, “The cross is not a detour or a hurdle on the way to the kingdom, nor is it even the way to the kingdom; it is the kingdom come.”¹⁰ The cross then is the paradigm of Jesus Christ’s way of being in the world because the nature of the Kingdom in the world is manifested in this specific event.

Yet if Jesus is not risen then, however admirable, he remains only another failed revolutionary or religious reformer ground under the wheels of the Roman Empire. It is the resurrection that vindicates Jesus as the Messiah, the true agent of the Kingdom, and God with

⁷ Ibid., 36, 98. This does not preclude the significance of the cross for a doctrine of atonement, but such a doctrine should make sense of the cross within this context.

⁸ Ibid., 96.

⁹ Ibid., 105.

¹⁰ Ibid., 51.

us. The resurrection is the victory of God in Christ over death. This is underscored by the inscription in Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus* that reads *Vicit Agnus Noster* – our Lamb has conquered. Even if the cross reveals to us the form of the Kingdom entering the world, we ultimately witness its validity in the power of the resurrection. If the cross is the social reality of representing the Kingdom of God in the fallen world, then the resurrection is the seal of the triumph of God's cause over this world. For Yoder, it is important that the victory of the resurrection does not undo the "defeat" of the cross nor simply serve to unveil the previously hidden divinity of Christ but rather that the victorious One is the Slaughtered Lamb. Yoder writes:

What it means for the Lamb to be slain, of whom then we sing that "he is worthy to receive power," is inseparable from what it meant for Jesus to be executed under the superscription "King of the Jews."¹¹

It is the same Jesus who rejected the option to violently seize the crown and was executed as a threat to Roman hegemony who is the triumphant risen Lord. The resurrection proves the victory of the Kingdom of God but it remains cruciform even in triumph. That is to say that the cross and resurrection are two sides of the same coin – inseparable elements of the Kingdom irrupting in the midst of a world subject to sin and death.

For Yoder, this relationship between cross and resurrection is especially important for understanding the church. Even though the cross is the central symbol for the church called to practice the politics of Jesus, this is because the church is essentially a community of the resurrection. The church is called to a cruciform life not because suffering is inherently

¹¹ Ibid., 234.

redemptive or to be sought out, but because the church is called to be faithful, knowing that righteousness will ultimately be vindicated despite apparent defeat. In Yoder's terms, "[t]he relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection."¹²

This already suggests the relationship between Christology and Christian ethics in Yoder's work. But what is crucial at this point is that the problem with the mainstream Christian ethics which Yoder critiques is fundamentally Christological. Even though his main aim in *The Politics of Jesus* is ethical and his primary method is exegetical, in the background are core questions of doctrinal theology. What is at stake is the integrity of the Incarnation.

What becomes of the meaning of incarnation if Jesus is not normatively human?

If he is human but not normative, is this not the ancient ebionitic heresy? If he is somehow authoritative but not in his humanness, is this not a new gnosticism?¹³

Without openly disavowing Jesus, much of the Christian ethical tradition has effectively set aside the authority of Jesus in one way or another, not by "reading the story and finding in it a different message," but by finding another source of moral authority that bypasses the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁴

In this sense, the ethical consequence, pacifism, is secondary to the Christological question of whether or not Jesus Christ is truly God incarnate as a specific person and so is the one upon whom Christian ethical reasoning ought to be dependent. While some might openly question the genuine divinity or humanity of Jesus, Yoder is most directly confronting those who

¹² Ibid., 232.

¹³ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴ Ibid., 20.

confess the Incarnation but fail to consistently connect this confession to Jesus of Nazareth. The focus of his Christological contribution is insisting on the Incarnation of the Word as the particular person Jesus of Nazareth. Genuine humanity entails interaction within a historical, social, and political context. Especially in *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder argues for a Christian political stance that is dependent on Jesus as a first century Jewish man who did and said specific things, interacted with people and powers in a particular manner, died on a Roman cross which carries a specific meaning, and rose from the grave in victory. It is this same Jesus who is Lord of heaven and earth. It is this Jesus, and no other, who faithfully revealed God's will.¹⁵ By this focus on Jesus' particularity, Yoder guards against allowing the Incarnation to become a generalized principle. God did not become humanity in an abstract way but came to humanity as one human. The Incarnation is not a principle by which God approves all of human nature on its own terms or dissolves revelation into nature. According to Yoder, "The point is just the opposite; that God broke through the borders of our standard definition of what is human, and gave a new, formative definition in Jesus."¹⁶ If this foundational Christological claim is not true, Yoder's entire argument for pacifism falls. Yet this also means that any Christian ethical stance that still makes sense apart from the revelation of God in Jesus has not taken the Incarnation seriously enough.¹⁷

Yoder is not attempting to be novel in his Christology. The whole purpose of attending in detail to the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth is in order to be more faithful to the claims of historic orthodoxy.

¹⁵ Ibid., 233.

¹⁶ Ibid., 99.

¹⁷ Ibid., 237.

The view of Jesus being proposed here is more radically Nicene and Chalcedonian than other views. I do not here advocate an unheard-of modern understanding of Jesus. I ask rather that the implication of what the church has always said about Jesus as Word of the Father, as true God and true Human, be taken more seriously, as relevant to our social problems, than ever before.¹⁸

Although the creeds do not hold definitive dogmatic authority for the Mennonite Yoder, he nonetheless affirms their intention and insists that his argument is more faithful to their claims than the ethical positions of many who grant them official dogmatic authority. In much of Yoder's work, these classical Christological concepts remain assumed but he rarely names them explicitly. In *The Politics of Jesus* they surface only briefly as a parallel argument to the primarily exegetical character of the work. His approach to classical Christological formulations is more explicit in the posthumously published *Preface to Theology*, his closest approximation to a systematic Christology text.

For Yoder, the doctrine of the Trinity, as expressed in the Nicene Creed, is essentially an extension of the doctrine of the Incarnation. In his treatment of the Trinity in *Preface to Theology*, Yoder identifies the goal of the Council of Nicea and the resulting doctrinal statement as securing "the normativity of Jesus as he relates to the uniqueness of God".¹⁹ Rather than a way of describing a god who is revealed only in one third part through the person of Jesus, the doctrine of the Trinity is a way of saying that the one God of the universe is the Holy One of Israel, revealed and Incarnate in the Jewish Christ. In essence, Yoder grants legitimacy to the problem Nicea sought to address without accepting the full authority of the answer it gives.

¹⁸ Ibid., 102.

¹⁹ Yoder, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 204.

Describing the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity, Yoder writes, “[t]he doctrine is not authoritative, but the claims of Jesus who creates the problem are... It is valid because it reflects the serious struggle of people, within their language and culture, with their commitment to an absolute God and to a normative Jesus.”²⁰ Insofar as a doctrinal formulation of the Trinity points us toward the Incarnation of God in the concrete person Jesus of Nazareth, it is legitimate. Otherwise, it is a deviation from the intent of Nicea, a secondary concern, and the revelation of God in Christ remains the primary concern. It is always in defense of this primary concern that Yoder appeals to the doctrine of the Trinity. Trinitarian formulations that are intended to relativize the radical political implications of Jesus, such as the “distributive model” of H. Richard Niebuhr, are making exactly the opposite point of the Nicene tradition.²¹ Yoder claims that Niebuhr treats each Person of the Trinity as a separate, partial revelation of God from which the Christian can attempt to triangulate an approximation of God’s character and will. In this model, Niebuhr can appeal to the Father and the Holy Spirit as different aspects of God that balance out the “extreme” notions one might receive from the Incarnate Son alone. While using orthodox Christian terminology, Yoder sees this as another attempt to evade discipleship. The doctrine of the Trinity does not minimize the authority of Jesus Christ but rather tells us how “[t]he will of God is affirmatively, concretely knowable in the person and ministry of Jesus.”²²

Similarly, Yoder is not strictly committed to the Christological terminology of Chalcedon, but insists that the one person Jesus Christ is truly God and truly human. What is most important to Yoder, however, is ensuring that whatever is said of Christ’s humanity is in

²⁰ Ibid., 205.

²¹ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 17. See also, his “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. with an Introduction by Michael G. Cartwright (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 370-71.

²² Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 233.

reference to the particular human Jesus of Nazareth. While affirming the aims of Chalcedon, he argues that any theology that fails to consistently anchor the hypostatic union of divine nature and human nature in that particular man has failed the Chalcedonian tradition. The hazard of the Chalcedonian language of “natures” is this vulnerability to abstraction. The idea of divine and human natures being joined together has too often supplanted the significance of attributing this union first of all to one specific human. Yoder sees this as the domination of the Alexandrian emphasis, despite the official teaching of Chalcedon.

In Jesus Christ then, according to Alexandrian thought, the *Logos* takes on humanity to redeem the race. He did not become so much the particular man Jesus, but rather identified himself with humanity... It is more important that God entered into humanity than that God was found identified with this particular Jew from Palestine.²³

While Yoder sympathizes with Cyril of Alexandria’s concern to consider Jesus as truly God and not merely another prophet, the result is that “the deity swallows up the humanity,” at least in any of its specificity.²⁴ Yoder prefers the approach of Nestorius’ Antiochene school, which he sees as showing greater regard for the biblical narrative and the historical humanity of Jesus. He argues that the Council of Chalcedon largely affirmed Nestorius’ position in substance but that the mainstream of Christianity “went on being Monophysitic, that is, affirming such a swallowing up of humanity in deity that it did not really matter what kind of man Jesus was.”²⁵ For Yoder, everything hinges on what kind of human Jesus was, precisely because he is God incarnate. Jesus Christ is normatively human and the authoritative revelation of God’s will and

²³ Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 212-13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 216, 218.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

character. Yoder asks only that the church take seriously the implications of what it has always claimed about Jesus Christ.

2. Yoder's Exilic Ethic:

Ultimately, Yoder's Christological work serves to undergird his argument for a Christian political ethic that is thoroughly determined by Jesus Christ. His argument for a distinctive Christian political ethic follows from his desire to consistently apply the implications of these fundamental Christological claims. In this sense, Yoder represents the emphasis of his Anabaptist tradition on orthopraxy as the key measure of orthodoxy. His ethical vision, then, is first and foremost concerned with a distinct form of political life appropriate for the community of disciples, and secondarily with exploring the relationship and relevance of this community to the wider societies in which the church lives. Christians as disciples of Jesus of Nazareth are called to follow their Lord in his teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mount, and his pattern of life which culminated in his crucifixion. Disciples can take up their crosses with hope in Jesus' resurrection. The resurrection reveals the definitive in-breaking of the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed, and so secures the relevance of the Messianic community to all of creation. Yoder's ethical vision starts with maintaining the distinctiveness of the Christian community and moves towards exploring the implications for Christian participation in the broader social order.

Yoder's Christology and its implications for Christian political ethics finds its center in the Lordship of Christ. This New Testament language connotes the affirmation that "Jesus Christ, by His cross, resurrection, ascension, and the pouring out of His Spirit, has triumphed

over the powers.”²⁶ The church’s first politically formative act is to be the unique community which recognizes and proclaims the Lordship of Christ and is thus marked out from the rest of the world. Just as Yoder’s Christological emphasis is the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, so his political ethic focuses on the distinctiveness of the church as the community of his disciples. As the title of his book *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* suggests, the proclamation of the Gospel calls forth a set apart people; so also, the communal life of this people is intended to proclaim the Gospel. In fact, its first duty to the world is to maintain its distinctive identity as the church of Christ as a proclamation of salvation offered to the world. What gives the church its distinct ethic is that “the lordship of Christ is the center which must guide critical value choices,” which entails relativizing or rejecting values that are inconsistent with life and teaching of Jesus Christ.²⁷ Yoder summarizes this vision of the church as a distinct community:

The notion of the royal priesthood or the kingdom of priests echoing all the way from Moses to 1 Peter and the Revelation of John, capsules well that synthesis of apartness and representation, community and authority, whereby the people of God in present history live from and toward the promise of the whole world’s salvation.²⁸

Being a community founded on the saving action and promise of God, the church’s political ethical outlook ought to be formed primarily by faithfulness to its Lord rather than by other calculations of effectiveness. What Yoder describes as the Constantinian model of political ethics is concerned with having control of the reins of society, with finding the handle by which

²⁶ Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2002), 9.

²⁷ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1984), 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

to grab hold of the course of history and move it in the desired direction.²⁹ In attempting to control the right direction of history, the means are determined by the most effective way of ensuring the desired end. Yoder critiques this as a model for Christian social ethics on two fronts. First, he questions the integrity of the logic on its own terms. “It has yet to be demonstrated that history can be moved in the direction in which one claims the duty to cause it to go.”³⁰ In essence, the means which are justified for the sake of a good end are unable to bring about the end which would supposedly justify them. Second, he denies the logic on Christological grounds. It is in opposition to the way of Christ. In assuming that we ought to progress beyond the “naïve” apostolic witness for the sake of historical responsibility, we tacitly reject the Lordship of Christ and his ethical normativity as the Incarnation of God. Yoder claims that Jesus demonstrated a different mode of political engagement. “The choice that he made in rejecting the crown and accepting the cross was the commitment to such a degree of faithfulness to the character of divine love that he was willing for its sake to sacrifice ‘effectiveness.’”³¹ This is not an argument for indifference to the world but for trust that God’s salvation is a more determinative reality than our strategic calculations and attempts at control. It defines a social ethic that is only conceivable if Jesus of Nazareth is truly who the church has always claimed he is.

If this surrender of “effectiveness” is central for the church’s political ethic, it is because, as the community of disciples of Jesus Christ, the church is given its unique character as the representative continuation of the Incarnation on earth. The church as the body of Christ necessarily forms an alternative-polis because it is both a genuine (social) body and one that belongs to Christ. Discipleship is the shared identity of a visible church, not just a matter for

²⁹ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 229.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 230.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 234.

isolated individuals. It is as a community that the church most clearly manifests a living alternative to the political life of the world. Being in some sense an extension of the Incarnation, of Christ's presence in the world, the church's political alternative is tied to the Kingdom of God. As a representative of Christ and of the Order to come, the political witness of the church is also defined by the cross. As such, the church refuses to be apolitical just as it refuses violent means. It exposes and confronts the powers of death without succumbing to their seductive influence. For Yoder, the cross and its associated rejection of violent means is the most obvious element of the church's separation from the world and embodiment of the politics of Jesus. The cross is central to the church as continuation of the Incarnation because it is precisely in this concrete social meaning of the cross that the New Testament locates disciples' imitation of Jesus.³² Yet Yoder's concept of the church as an alternative political body always takes the way of the cross in the light of Christ's resurrection. From this perspective, the church knows the cross as the power and wisdom of God, while the world sees foolishness (or ineffectiveness). Yoder writes, "Only from within the community of resurrection confession is the cruciformity of the cosmos a key rather than a scandal."³³ As the body of Christ in the world, the church in anticipation shares in Christ's resurrection as the first fruits of the new creation.

This focus on the Lordship of Christ over the church as a distinctive community, an alternative-polis, and his own Body essentially frames the church's political ethic as eschatological ecclesiology. Yoder puts it simply: "The alternative community discharges a modeling mission. The church is called to be now what the world is called to be ultimately."³⁴ The church testifies that the Messiah has come and so lives in the light of the eschaton, which in

³² Ibid., 131.

³³ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 36.

³⁴ Ibid., 92.

Christ impinges on the present age. This is what Yoder calls “walking in the resurrection.”³⁵ The peace witness of the church is not reasonable based on deductions from the present age, but “is conceivable only if a new age has begun.”³⁶ As the Messianic community, the church is the part of creation which openly proclaims and lives according to this new age in the midst of the old. However, Yoder is not arguing for an entirely sanctified church as the basis for ethics. His vision is not based on the perfection of each individual Christian. It assumes conversion as a prerequisite and faithful discipleship as a genuine possibility, but it is a communal ethic based on a communal hope. This participation in resurrection life means obedience to Christ that is found and expressed in community. “Solitary obedience is not the Christian ideal. Heroic loneliness in the right is necessary only when God’s people are unfaithful. The norm is a common obedience to a commonly perceived duty.”³⁷ While the resurrection of Christ allows the church to live knowing that the power of death in the present age has been overcome, the disciples’ cross demonstrates that the church lives before the consummation of the Kingdom. Walking in the resurrection in a world unwilling to accept the Order to come means carrying the cross, the price of social nonconformity.³⁸ In this sense the church is called to be holy, set apart, in that it lives a new kind of peacemaking social existence in a world where most people will not live this way.³⁹ The church is an alternative-polis based on the politics of Jesus because it confesses that in Jesus of Nazareth the Messianic age has dawned. In describing this ethical orientation, Yoder says, “The church precedes the world epistemologically. We know more fully from Jesus Christ and in

³⁵ Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity: The 1966 South American Lectures*, ed. Paul Martens et. al (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 34.

³⁶ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 34.

³⁷ Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 43.

³⁸ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 96.

³⁹ Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 37.

the context of the confessed faith than we know in other ways.”⁴⁰ The alternative that the church offers is a political ethic based not on creation or nature but the eschaton.

If the church is an alternative-polis, called to live a radically different political vision based on discipleship to Jesus Christ, does the church have nothing to say to the rest of the world? Is Yoder’s vision of the church sectarian withdrawal? This is certainly not Yoder’s conviction. His argument for a Christocentric church is part and parcel of his argument for the relevance of Christianity to the political realm. His work *The Christian Witness to the State* is devoted to the task of analyzing “whether it is truly the case that a Christian pacifist position rooted not in pragmatic or psychological but in Christological considerations is thereby irrelevant to the social order.”⁴¹ Yoder argues persuasively that such a position is not irrelevant and for this reason seeks to guard Christian particularity throughout the process. Against the pervasive temptation to be “relevant” by appealing to a vague “nature” as a common ground with non-Christians, Yoder argues that “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.”⁴² The Lordship of Christ is a claim made by, but not exclusively for, the church, and as such is the ground not only for the church’s particular political ethic but also for the Christian witness to the world.⁴³

⁴⁰ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 11.

⁴¹ Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, 7.

⁴² Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 44.

⁴³ Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, 12. For more on critical Yoder’s stance on natural theology, see *The Christian Witness to the State*, 33-35. For an extended argument influenced by Yoder’s stance, see Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2001).

With the Lordship of Christ over all creation as the ground for Christian witness, Yoder envisions not sectarian withdrawal but exilic witness. Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong appreciatively summarizes Yoder's paradigm:

I find Yoder's exilic politics of diaspora replete with possibilities for reimagining a post-Christendom theology of culture. I especially appreciate his attempt to hold together the following two commitments: to remain social and political guests – i.e. of “not being in charge” – and thus continuing to embrace the social and cultural margins as normative for followers of Jesus, and to nevertheless “seek the welfare of the city” wherever believers find themselves. For Yoder, the Jewish model of interacting with the dominant culture from out of the specificity and particularity of their experience of Jewishness remains to be emulated today.⁴⁴

While Yoder does not *a priori* deny the possibility of a genuinely faithful Christian statesperson,⁴⁵ he does assume that Christian disciples (as opposed to nominal/cultural Christians) will not only refuse the coercive violence underlying most notions of governance but will almost certainly be a minority within a society.⁴⁶ From this position of distance, the church is called to function as a conscience to society rather than its chaplain.⁴⁷ Without holding the reins of power, the church “seeks the welfare of the city” both by the communal and individual lives of Christians and by calling the rest of society, and the political authorities in particular, to greater faithfulness.

⁴⁴ Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 200.

⁴⁵ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 146.

⁴⁶ Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 4-5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 119-20.

This raises the question: on what grounds ought the church speak to the state if the church consciously adheres to a distinct source of moral authority? The justification and possibility of this witness is grounded in the Lordship of Christ. Christian faith does not posit Jesus Christ as Lord of the church and some other power as Lord over the rest of creation. Rather, Yoder argues, “What believers are called to be is no different from what all humanity is called to. That Jesus Christ is Lord is a statement not about my inner piety or my intellect or ideas but about the cosmos.”⁴⁸ There is no other moral standard for the world than Christ. As we have seen, Yoder argues that Jesus reveals God’s will for humanity: the way of discipleship is what we are made for, and the church lives into the eschatological destiny of creation in the present.⁴⁹ From a Christian perspective, the difference between moral standards for the church and the world is the difference between belief and unbelief. While the church does not expect that those who are not personally committed to the Lordship of Christ to find Jesus’ cruciform pacifism either desirable or feasible, this does not justify a different moral standard for the world. The difference is a matter of response, not independently justified realms or spheres of activity.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, the church can and must acknowledge this moral disjuncture in its witness to the state without thereby granting the state’s moral presuppositions any metaphysical basis and authority apart from Christ.⁵¹

Acknowledging these differing presuppositions is crucial for Yoder’s idea of the Christian witness to the state. Rather than an impediment, Yoder sees this as a hopeful acknowledgement:

⁴⁸ Ibid., 24. Yoder acknowledges his agreement with Karl Barth in this respect.

⁴⁹ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 36.

⁵⁰ Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, 32.

⁵¹ Ibid., 73.

To say that *all* communities of moral insight are provincial, that there exists no nonprovincial general community with clear language, and that therefore we must converse at every border, is in actuality a more optimistic and more fruitful affirmation of the marketplace of ideas than to project a hypothetically general insight which we feel reassured to resort to, when our own particularity embarrasses us, but which is not substantial after all when we seek to define it.⁵²

By accepting the distinctions that exist between the ethical norm of love as rooted in Jesus Christ and the standards of a given social order, the church is able to engage in witness that is not hindered by the illusion of identical moral values or exclusively dependent on Christian conversion.⁵³

Because no particular form of governing authority is permanent or ordained by God, the church has no predetermined message to authorities short of the invitation to discipleship. However, this does not mean that the church is speechless before authorities who are not Christian disciples. Instead, Yoder envisions “middle axioms” as moving targets both for holding the state accountable to its own highest ideals of justice, which the church must discern on Christological grounds, and for influencing the state’s ideals toward a closer approximation of the Gospel.⁵⁴ For example, Christian disciples are called to put down their swords, pick up their crosses, and love their enemies, but without assuming that the governing authorities of their

⁵² Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 41. As an example, Yoder engages at length with the just war tradition (see especially *When War is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-War Thinking*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001) not as legitimate on Christological grounds but as a way to communicate relative limits on violence within the moral language of the Greco-Roman world. Conversely, the just war tradition can also demonstrate Christian moral language being co-opted through the attempted interchange. As Amos Yong points out in *In the Days of Caesar*, pp. 186-7, this kind of concern leads Stanley Hauerwas “to think more in terms of the incommensurability of discourses.”

⁵³ Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, 71-72.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

society aspire to the same standard. Yet these authorities likely give some moral justification for their power and use of violence, such as limiting violence to the principle of retribution. Speaking from its own commitment to renounce retribution, the church still holds these authorities accountable to this lesser commitment. Furthermore, the church may advocate for the state to shift its professed ideals closer to the Gospel ideal. The church may question whether the principle of retribution is able to deliver on its promise of limiting violence. For Yoder, this is the legitimate function of Just War theory. Christians who renounce war completely still ought to be concerned with limiting war carried on by non-Christian authorities through appealing to these authorities' sense of justice and scrutinizing their claims to legitimate force.⁵⁵ The state, insofar as it is based on the appeal to force, is in rebellion against God. Yet in God's sovereignty, the reign of Christ can be expressed in part through allowing violence to put violence in check, preserving as much order and peace as possible.⁵⁶ Thus, the church can use the moral language available to the state in order to advocate for greater good without justifying the state's violence. Yoder speaks of the "legitimate" in terms of the state to express this "qualified acquiescence accorded to the less wrong."⁵⁷ To the extent that the state works for a relative just order, it can be seen as a precursor to the Kingdom.⁵⁸ The church accepts living under an unjust social order without accepting or justifying any specific injustice.⁵⁹ Under whatever order Christians live, they must be concerned for the welfare of their neighbor. Because "the state may either threaten

⁵⁵ Ibid., 49.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 59.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁹ Yoder, *For the Nations*, 116. For Yoder this establishes a position for deeper social critique in sharp contrast to the easy misinterpretation that the church should accept as a just order, one in which a certain class must suffer. The acknowledgment that there is and will be injustice in the world does not imply passivity towards injustice.

or further the welfare of its subjects,” the church is compelled to witness by its own communal life and by middle axioms which seek the greatest accessible good.⁶⁰

In summary, John Howard Yoder’s exilic political ethic is the necessary corollary of his Christology. Because Jesus of Nazareth is Lord, the church proclaims the victory of the risen One by participating in nonviolent witness to the Kingdom of God which is signified by the cross. Following in the steps of the particular human that the church proclaims as the incarnate God of Israel, the church subscribes to a different center of moral authority than the world beyond the church. Yoder’s first concern is to argue for the faithfulness of the church, maintaining the integrity of the body of Christ as a truly alternative – and eschatological – social body. From out of this particularity, the church has a unique social imagination to offer whatever society it inhabits. In this sense, the movement from the church’s identity to relevance is secondary. Yoder presents a strong model of the church as the subject of a Christian peace witness to the world.

3. Yoder and the Holy Spirit:

Given his strong Christocentric ethical perspective, the place of the Holy Spirit is given considerably less space in Yoder’s work. My argument is that a greater focus on pneumatology can complement rather than contradict Yoder’s Christology and political ethics by maintaining the centrality of Jesus Christ for the church’s witness to the world while more clearly accounting for the church as the beneficiary, rather than the benefactor, of revelation.⁶¹ In order to provide

⁶⁰ Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, 14.

⁶¹ Among scholars conversing with Yoder, several have noted the scarcity of pneumatology in his work. See Fernando Enns, *The Peace Church and the Ecumenical Community: Ecclesiology and the Ethics of Nonviolence*, trans. Helmut Harder (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press and WCC Publications, 2007); Glen Stassen, Introduction

such a pneumatological account I will first give attention to the reasons for Yoder's underdeveloped pneumatology, how he presents the Holy Spirit when he does reference the third Person of the Trinity, and how limitations in his ethical model might be addressed by a more robust pneumatology. While this account is intended to affirm Yoder's core theological stance and build upon it, there will necessarily be some aspects of tension and divergence from his work.

It is important to begin with some reasons why Yoder likely gave less attention to the Holy Spirit than to Jesus in his work. Certainly an important factor is the sporadic character of Yoder's theological publications. He intentionally resisted any effort to provide a systematic account of his theology. He rejected the possibility of presenting a non-contextual theological foundation "from scratch," and instead characterized his work as a gathering of occasional writings.⁶² Yoder's work was largely driven by the needs and requests of his denomination, addressing the contemporary issues facing the Mennonite Church internally and in ecumenical conversation.⁶³ Through this episodic approach, Yoder presents his alternative vision in intentional contrast to what he views as a compromised and complacent Western church which justifies its wielding of violent power by relativizing the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. By separating the faith of Christendom from discipleship to Jesus of Nazareth, the church is rendered invisible and its members thereby unaccountable to a consistently Christocentric ethic. In this context, the centrality and particularity of Jesus and the visibility and distinctiveness of

to John Howard Yoder, *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking*, eds. Glen Stassen, et. al. with an Introduction by Glen Stassen (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009); and Stassen's Foreword to *Power and Practices: Engaging the Work of John Howard Yoder*, eds. Jeremy M. Bergen and Anthony G. Siegrist (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2009); Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

⁶² Yoder, *For the Nations*, 9-10.

⁶³ Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, 219.

the church as political witness were his core concerns. While I will argue for the church's discernment of the Holy Spirit in the world beyond the church community, Yoder's contention is that the church has too often claimed divine revelation through a variety of other sources in a way that has diverted attention from Jesus Christ as the authoritative revelation of God and faithful discipleship to this Jesus as constitutive of the church. Fellow Mennonite Fernando Enns notes that out of these concerns, "Yoder rejects all competitive claims to revelation, even those appealing to the activity of the Holy Spirit."⁶⁴ Yoder is concerned that appeals to the Holy Spirit can often mask attempts to undercut the significance of Jesus for a Christian view of God while masking themselves in Christian theological categories.

Here we note the influence of Karl Barth, one of Yoder's teachers at the University of Basel. For both, the priority of God's self-revelation through Christ strongly resists any notion of defining God on humanity's own terms. Yoder often uses phrases such as "other lights" to indicate the sort of competitive revelatory claims to which Enns refers.⁶⁵ Both the concept and the language resonate with Barth's work. In his commentary *The Epistle to the Romans*, Barth decries this as idolatry by which humans worship themselves:

Rather than see in His Light – eternal and which no man can approach unto – the Light, we allow Him to become a light – no doubt the most brilliant and, indeed, immaterial and supernatural – at which we kindle our own lights and then, quite consistently, seek to find in concrete things their own light.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Enns, *The Peace Church and the Ecumenical Community*, 134.

⁶⁵ Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, 186.

⁶⁶ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn Clement Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 47.

Both Barth and Yoder see natural theology as at least suspect, because “[i]n ‘naturalness’ there is always secreted that which is non-natural,”⁶⁷ that is, something against “the grain of the universe” over which Christ is Lord. Similarly, Yoder sees the doctrine of the Holy Spirit being misused to assert claims about God and Christian ethics which do not align with Jesus Christ. Because the Holy Spirit has a less concrete referent than Jesus of Nazareth, pneumatology can be easily deployed to project our self-justifications onto the divine. Attributing movements away from Jesus’ ethical normativity to the leading of the Spirit can be used to “baptize” Christian imperialism. Further affirming his connection to Barth on this point, in an essay entitled “Discerning the Kingdom of God in the World,” Yoder references Article 1 of the Barth-authored Barmen Declaration “We reject the false doctrine that the Church can and must acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, beside and in addition to this one Word of God, other events, powers, forms and truths as the revelation of God.”⁶⁸ Yoder rejects attributing to the Holy Spirit any such “events, powers, forms, and truths.”

In particular, Yoder carries out this argument with H. Richard Niebuhr. As noted in section 1 in reference to the Trinity, Yoder claims that Niebuhr uses the concept of the other Persons of the Trinity to dilute the weight of the Son’s revelation. In addition, and sometimes contradiction, to Christ’s revelation, Niebuhr associates God the Father with moral insight grounded in creation and the Holy Spirit with moral insight rooted in the historic development and experience of the church.⁶⁹ The Spirit then, as a distinct source of revelation, becomes a way to legitimize the church leaving the teaching and example of Jesus behind because the Spirit is

⁶⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁶⁸ Yoder, *For the Nations*, 245.

⁶⁹ Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, 79. He takes up this argument with Niebuhr on multiple occasions, including *The Politics of Jesus*, 17. On footnote 33 Yoder clarifies that the experience of the Spirit in H. R. Niebuhr does not refer to “charismatic” experience but “adjustments made by the churches over the centuries to the intractable constancies of the fallen world”. He returns to this argument again on p. 101.

attributed with leading the church into a new position of “responsible” authority over the world. Yoder also sees a similar dynamic in claims about the Spirit’s apparent movement in the world represented by some liberation theologies. In contrast, Yoder argues that “the Spirit does not blow every which way but only in harmony with the confession of Christ’s lordship.”⁷⁰ Yoder tends to be more concerned with refuting this misuse of the Holy Spirit than to developing a positive alternative account.

Given the occasional nature of his writings, his focus on rebutting Constantinian alliances of church with the violent power of the state, and contemporary appropriations of pneumatology which justify such power arrangements, it is not surprising that Yoder gives more attention to the specificity of Jesus’ nonviolent political posture than to the work of the Spirit. Of course, Yoder by no means rejects the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Nor does he completely ignore pneumatology in his work. Yoder does reference the Holy Spirit, although largely in an apophatic way. Nonetheless, the way he does use language about the Holy Spirit is important to understand in order to offer an expanded view of the Spirit that keeps the positive aspects of Yoder’s Christological peace witness intact.

When referencing the third Person of the Trinity, Yoder frequently uses the titles “Spirit of Christ” or, directly following a reference to Jesus, “His Spirit”.⁷¹ Just as Yoder often includes the proper name “Jesus” alongside or in place of the title “Christ” in order to resist separating a cosmic view of Christ from the particular man Jesus of Nazareth, so his language regarding the Holy Spirit tends to explicitly tie the Spirit to Jesus Christ in order to highlight the Spirit’s “harmony with the confession of Christ’s lordship.”⁷² The Gospel of John chapters 14-16 provide

⁷⁰ Yoder, *For the Nations*, 241.

⁷¹ E.g. Yoder’s essay “Firstfruits: The Paradigmatic Public Role of God’s People” in *For the Nations*, 15-36.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 241.

the key view of the Spirit for Yoder: “the Spirit makes the Son present. The Spirit is not one who reveals things that the Son did not want to say or different things from what the Son said.”⁷³

Yoder treats the identity of the Holy Spirit in *Preface to Theology* only briefly in relation to the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is, he says, “the solution to the word problem we get into when we accept revelation in Jesus, the continuance of *that revelation* in the Holy Spirit, and hold to monotheism at the same time.”⁷⁴ The crucial point for Yoder here is that the Holy Spirit does not bring a different revelation of God than does Jesus. He also emphasizes that Nicea was primarily concerned with the Christological issue of relating Christ to the Father. On the one hand, the Christological center of the doctrine of the Trinity and thus the Holy Spirit is helpful for Yoder. On the other hand, Yoder is also aware that Nicea’s lack of clarity regarding the identity of the Holy Spirit in relation to Christ left the door open for misuse. Reflecting on the question, Yoder says:

Now where does the problem of pneumatology lie? The question of Nicea had been the relation of the Father and the Son. They talked about the Trinity, but there was no real question about the Spirit... Somehow it did not become a theological issue. It would have been if the concept of the Spirit being consubstantial [sic] with the Father and the Son had been taken very seriously.⁷⁵

The fact that the Holy Spirit is somehow distinct from God the Father, but does not have the concrete distinction which the Son has by virtue of the Incarnation, makes the Spirit’s identity a conceptual challenge. Yoder sees this evidenced not only in the controversy around the *filioque*

⁷³ Yoder, *Theology of Mission*, Gayle Gerber Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker eds. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 137. In this passage, once again, Yoder is carrying out his argument against H. Richard Niebuhr.

⁷⁴ Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 204. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 211.

clause but in ongoing debates about the Spirit's presence in relation to Jesus. While Yoder does not take a stance on the *filioque*, he emphasizes the connection of the Spirit to the Son.⁷⁶ Similar to how Yoder is more concerned with affirming the humanity of Christ than his divinity, he is more interested in upholding the Holy Spirit's unity with the Son (and the Son's unity with the Father) than the Spirit's coequal *hypostasis*. He assumes the divinity of Christ and the Spirit but it is the humanity of Jesus and the unity of Spirit and Son which he feels are neglected. For Yoder, the presence and work of the Holy Spirit must always have a Christological reference.

In addition to the Christological connection, Yoder often refers to the Holy Spirit in direct relationship to the church. Following from the New Testament witness, Yoder closely connects the presence of the Holy Spirit to the community of believers. As much as he refutes any notion of the Holy Spirit leading beyond and away from the authority of Jesus, he is equally suspicious of claims to the Holy Spirit's movement in the world and history that is separated from the visible community of the church. "Within the church and the covenant, the Holy Spirit is clearly tied to the church... It would be more like the New Testament to talk about the cosmic lordship of Christ than to talk about the Spirit at work outside the walls of the church."⁷⁷ Yoder's point is not that God has no relationship to the world outside the visible church, but that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not the language for this specific purpose. While Yoder talks about the Lordship of Christ over all creation, he emphasizes the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church as the power which enables the church's active participation in Christ's reign.

The pouring out of the Spirit on the church specifically is part of Christ's victory. While Yoder often focuses on the human possibility of obedience to Christ's call, he also acknowledges

⁷⁶ Ibid., 212.

⁷⁷ Yoder, *Theology of Mission*, 138.

that this is only the case because the Holy Spirit enables the church's faithfulness. In this sense, Yoder attributes the difference between the world and the church not only to unbelief and belief, but to the concomitant vivifying presence of the Holy Spirit in the believing church. While it does not become a prominent theme in his publications, Yoder assumes a pneumatic ecclesiology that allows for the possibility of faithful local congregations that are not guaranteed by an institutional structure but by the action of the Spirit.⁷⁸ Again, Yoder's emphasis is on the Christian community living faithfully as a whole, not on solitary exceptional faithfulness. The pouring out of the Spirit presumes the gathered community because the Spirit is not the possession of individuals.⁷⁹

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the church undergirds the Christian witness to the state. The Holy Spirit provides the church with its distinct voice by making the eschaton present in the midst of the present world. Yoder says:

The seal of the possibility of His will's being done is the presence of the Holy Spirit, given to the church as a foretaste of the eventual consummation of God's kingdom. Thus, although the new aeon is described as coming, it is not only a future quantity. The old has already begun to be superseded by the new, and the focus of that victory is the body of Christ, first the man Christ Jesus, and then derivatively the fellowship of obedient believers.⁸⁰

We also see in this quote that Yoder's concern to maintain the Holy Spirit's connection to the church is fundamentally connected to his desire to maintain the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of

⁷⁸ Gerald W. Schlabach, "Continuity and Sacrament, or Not: Hauerwas, Yoder, and Their Deep Difference," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 27.2 (2007), 182.

⁷⁹ Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, 19.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

Christ. In the Constantinian assumption of violent power, Yoder sees the relativizing of the particular Jewish humanity of Christ as interconnected with rendering the faithful church invisible. Yoder summarizes this idea:

Previously, Christians had known as a fact of experience that the church existed but had to believe against appearances that Christ ruled over the world. After Constantine, one knew as a fact of experience that Christ was ruling over the world, but one had to believe against the evidences that there existed a believing church.⁸¹

Positing the presence of the Holy Spirit primarily in a historical process apart from the church conceptually separates God's salvific work from the Incarnation in Jesus Christ and the continuation of the Incarnation in the community of faithful disciples. Because this community is a visible, clearly identifiable set of people who are publically committed to Christian discipleship in every aspect of life, it can be held accountable to this standard.

In the posthumously published *Theology of Mission*, we see more direct reference to the Holy Spirit in Yoder's treatment of the believing church's interaction with the world beyond. Much of this still takes place in argument with the perspective represented by H. Richard Niebuhr, through which Yoder emphasizes the Spirit as the agent of Christ's will among the community of Christians. Yet in this work it is also possible to see that Yoder does not imagine a static community which contains the Holy Spirit. As the Lordship of Christ over the cosmos indicates the relevance of Christ outside the church, so Yoder sees the Holy Spirit propelling the church in missionary activity for the world. Without saying the Holy Spirit is present outside the

⁸¹ Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 110.

church, Yoder articulates an outward focus for the church through the work of the Spirit: “The Holy Spirit pushes the church beyond itself.”⁸² While Yoder only describes the Holy Spirit working in and through the church, he understands the Spirit’s work to include creating permeability in the community’s boundary, maintaining an ecclesiology that is visible but always transforming as new people and a wider variety of cultures become part of the family.

While pneumatology is not a main focus in Yoder’s writings, there are valuable elements of his treatment of the Holy Spirit that will guide my argument moving forward. First, through his Christocentric approach, Yoder rightly maintains the necessity of interpreting the Holy Spirit’s work in harmony with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Second, Yoder shows the importance biblically and ecclesiological of the church as the focal point of the Holy Spirit’s work in the world. In this way, he highlights the need for a Christological and ecclesiological anchor in order to keep us from attributing the presence of the Holy Spirit to just any spirit. Third, Yoder helpfully points to the work of the Holy Spirit as a dynamic force pushing the church beyond itself.

Keeping these valuable insights in mind, Yoder’s pneumatology is limited. Amos Yong, whose appreciation for Yoder’s exilic paradigm we noted above, recognizes the need to supplement Yoder’s work with a more robust pneumatology in developing his own vision of a Pentecostal political theology. Commenting on Yoder’s focus on the Gospels, specifically Luke in *The Politics of Jesus*, Yong says, “I wish to insert volume two of the Lukan corpus into the discussion in order to develop further what may be called a pneumatological (and ecclesiological) theology of culture.”⁸³ Theological ethicist Glen Stassen, in his introduction to

⁸² Yoder, *Theology of Mission*, 87.

⁸³ Yong, *In the Days of Caesar*, 201.

Yoder's posthumously published *The War of the Lamb*, suggests that the further development of Yoder's theological legacy will be deepened by "special attention to the experience of the Holy Spirit".⁸⁴ Likewise, Fernando Enns analyzes Yoder's contribution to the historic peace churches' ecumenical witness and argues for a more thoroughly Trinitarian perspective with particular emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit which "is not bound exclusively to the ecclesial community."⁸⁵ Each of these authors sees considerable value in Yoder's emphasis on Christology and corresponding vision of a Christian exilic political ethic, yet see further pneumatological development as an important goal.

Yoder's underdeveloped of pneumatology creates both theological and ethical weaknesses. While he helpfully clarifies what the Holy Spirit is *not* – a source of revelation separate from Christ – it is less clear how Yoder accounts for the full identity of the Spirit as divine *hypostasis*. In this way, Yoder's conception of the Trinity is similar to Karl Barth's, so highlighting the centrality of Christ that risks an apparent tendency toward subordination of the Spirit and modalistic view of God.⁸⁶ Commenting on Barth's work in a manner that applies to Yoder as well, theologian John Webster summarizes, "The strength of this Christological definition of the Spirit is that it protects the identity of the Spirit from being generalized into a divine presence suffused throughout creation. The weakness of such an argument is that it may absorb the identity of the Spirit into that of the Son."⁸⁷ As a corollary, the Holy Spirit might be

⁸⁴ Stassen, Introduction, 19. Stassen also explicitly names his own pneumatological focus as an extension of Yoder's emphasis in his Preface to *Power and Practices: Engaging the Work of John Howard Yoder*, eds. Jeremy M. Bergen and Anthony G. Siegrist (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2009), 10.

⁸⁵ Enns, *The Peace Church and the Ecumenical Community*, 238.

⁸⁶ Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 203. Yoder adopts Barth's preference for "mode" over "person" as being closer to the original meaning of *hypostasis* as it relates to God than the modern tendency to think of "persons" as "personalities". This does not make Yoder or Barth modalist in the Sabellian sense, but it does suggest a tendency in this direction.

⁸⁷ John Webster, "The Identity of the Holy Spirit: A Problem in Trinitarian Theology," *Themelios* 9.1 (1983), 6.

understood as limited only to reminding the church of what it has already understood of Jesus' past revelation rather than continuing the ever fresh work of this revelation.

This leads Yoder's vision of the church's witness to the state and world to tend toward a monologue in which the church presents a fully formed understanding of Christ and the world needs to receive it, in part or in full. This creates two problems. First, there is the risk of claiming to know too much about God. Following Barth, Yoder's emphasis on God's self-revelation in Christ is intended to resist conforming God to our own image. Yet in claiming the ability to delineate and interpret this revelation too completely, there is the risk of using Christology and ecclesiology to conceptually enclose God. Certainly this is not Yoder's intention, but as Enns expresses, Yoder does have a tendency to present his interpretation of Jesus and resulting ethical applications as the *one* way to understand Jesus and to live accordingly.⁸⁸ The second problem is that Yoder's vision of the peace church does not clearly account for the church's own need for correction. Enns writes:

According to Yoder, it appears that ambivalences occur only outside the church. He fails to name human vulnerability, doubt and indecision in the face of parallel lines of interpretation, even though these appear stronger than ever in our pluralistic age... Yoder does not address this issue, and leaves us with an idealized, perfectionist picture of the church.⁸⁹

Yoder articulates his vision as a counterpoint to what he sees as an unfaithful church, but his model does not clearly account for the continual need for conversion. In the absence of a fully faithful church, some dismiss Yoder's political ethic as mere utopianism. José Míguez Bonino

⁸⁸ Enns, *The Peace Church and the Ecumenical Community*, 141.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

finds Yoder's position unworkable because "it would still have to face the questions of power and injustice within the community itself!"⁹⁰ The need to account for and repent of the injustice and abuse of power even within a pacifist church is tragically underscored by Yoder's own life.

Yoder's attention to maintaining the church's distinctly Christian identity can unintentionally inhibit more faithful discipleship. I argue that a pneumatological approach that allows for the discernment of the Holy Spirit's activity in the world can help lead the church toward a more faithful response to and participation in the life of Christ.

4. The Holy Spirit and Christology

Having analyzed Yoder's Christology, political ethics, and the weaknesses of his underdeveloped pneumatology, we need a more robust, non-competitive relationship between pneumatology and Christology. The Holy Spirit is neither an "other light" apart from Christ nor eclipsed by Christomonism. Yoder, like much of classical Christology, largely follows the motif from the Gospel of John of "the Word made flesh" in working out the relationship of the divine and human natures in Christ. This is a valid and essential approach. At the same time, both John and the Synoptic Gospels, from which Yoder draws much of his political/ethical content, present Jesus as dependent on the Holy Spirit. Rather than competing with or diverting from the revelation of God in Christ, the Holy Spirit in the perichoretic fellowship of the Trinity is an essential element of that revelation.

⁹⁰ José Míguez Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 36.

Yoder is aware that the Council of Nicea was focused on Christological concerns and not the identity of the Holy Spirit, leaving the implications of the Spirit's hypostatic consubstantiality for future church deliberations. However, Yoder does not address the question further and largely follows the Christological affirmations of Nicea and Chalcedon, while seeking to emphasize the significance of the particular human Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. The weakness of the classical Christological formulations, according to Yoder, is that despite the careful statements of Nicea and Chalcedon regarding persons and natures, they do not sufficiently anchor the church's theological reflection on the life and character of the particular subject, Jesus of Nazareth, as the site of the union between humanity and God. Instead, Yoder believes much of the church has slipped into a form of functional monophysitism in which the presence of deity eclipses the significance of the historical man Jesus.⁹¹ However, I contend that an opportunity that Yoder did not explore is that a theological focus on the Holy Spirit, without denying the essential affirmation of Christ's divinity, is able to highlight the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth in accordance with the witness of the Gospel accounts.

After appreciatively surveying the important contributions of the classical Christology represented by Chalcedon, theologian Alan Spence also points out the neglect of Jesus' relationship to the Spirit as a weak spot in this tradition. Rather than diminishing the authority of Jesus Christ as the Word of God made flesh, attention to the Spirit highlights Jesus Christ as presented in the Gospels as truly human as well as truly God. Spence argues that while technically adhering to Chalcedon's Christological statement, much of the church has struggled to maintain a convincing connection between these Christological formulations and Jesus as

⁹¹ Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 218.

witnessed to in the Gospels, instead reverting to a “subtle form of Apollinarianism.”⁹² This is closely related to Yoder’s charge of monophysitism: in that it sacrifices the confession of Jesus’ full humanity in favor of securing the presence of divinity. In this view, the divine Logos cannot be fully identified with the man Jesus of Nazareth who was dependent on the Holy Spirit. Given the struggle, with the Arians in particular, over the full divinity of Christ it is understandable that orthodox theologians were more concerned with opposing Christological subordinationism or adoptionism than proposing a clear relationship between the Holy Spirit and Jesus. Nonetheless, in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is attributed with the conception of Christ in Mary’s womb, anoints Jesus as the Christ at his baptism, works through Jesus in his miracles and exorcisms, and is credited with Christ’s Resurrection.⁹³

Spence identifies two notable exceptions in the early church who highlighted Jesus’ relationship to the Holy Spirit: Irenaeus of Lyons and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Irenaeus identifies Jesus as the Word of God, but also as a man who shares our weakness and who depends on the Spirit.⁹⁴ For Irenaeus, the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christ not only affirms his full humanity but is also related to how the Spirit works our salvation. As Spence says, “the divine image is renewed in the man Jesus through the Spirit so that in due course it may be restored in our lives.”⁹⁵ Similarly, for Theodore of Mopsuestia the dependence of Jesus on the Holy Spirit affirms the life and experiences of Jesus as truly human while also being the Word, that and our participation in Christ’s life through the Holy Spirit is linked with the Holy Spirit’s empowerment of Christ.⁹⁶ While Yoder is partial toward Theodore’s

⁹² Alan Spence, *Christology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 68.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

Antiochene school for its attention to scripture and the historical humanity of Jesus, he actually shares the anxiety of the Alexandrian school that overdo attention to pneumatology in relation to the life of Jesus may undercut the authority of Christ as the divine Son. However, rather than competing with the authority of Christ as the revelation of God, seeing the Holy Spirit in a non-subordinated relationship with Christ can further support Yoder's goal to highlight the humanity of Jesus Christ and his normativity for Christian life.

Pneumatology also provides valuable insight into another of Yoder's key doctrines – the Lordship of Christ. It is not only on account of his divine nature and resurrection that Christ is recognized as Lord, but particularly in his ascension to glorification. Although Yoder makes occasional reference to the Ascension, like many theologians, he often truncates Christ's glorification into the Resurrection. Certainly, the two should not be disconnected. But to acknowledge that the Jesus story does not end with the Resurrection raises further questions about the ongoing relationship of the Holy Spirit to Christ, to the church, and to the world. In his book, *Ascension and Ecclesia*, theologian Douglas Farrow argues for an understanding of the Ascension which does not set aside the particular humanity of Jesus.⁹⁷ Like Yoder, Farrow is intent on countering any notion of a cosmic Christ that erases the particular humanity of Jesus. This is to say that the Incarnation does not end at the Ascension. Christ did not leave the body of Jesus of Nazareth behind to ascend to the Father, but ascended as the whole, risen person Jesus of Nazareth who is truly human and truly divine. This requires that in some sense, Christ is bodily absent. The distance is eschatological rather than spatial, and thus Christ can also be present. To maintain a doctrine of the Ascension that allows for an absent-yet-present Jesus in

⁹⁷ Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia: On the Significance of the Doctrine of the Ascension for Ecclesiology and Christian Cosmology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 13.

his particularity, Farrow looks, like Spence, to pneumatology, especially as presented in the writings of Irenaeus. The bodily ascension of Jesus:

...cannot admit the reduction of Jesus Christ to a principle or pattern, or the merging of his history with our history in a general synthesis, but instead insists on maintaining his distinct identity even in his departure. On this view 'the divine as it presents itself to us in our time' is the Holy Spirit, who does not in fact present himself but the absent Jesus... The Spirit's work is an infringement on our time, an eschatological reordering of our being to the fellowship of the Father and the Son, and to the new creation.⁹⁸

In this way, we see the significance of the Holy Spirit in mediating between the ascended yet still incarnate Christ, his church, and the new creation. Christ's Lordship is effected through the work of the Spirit.

One implication of this is that the Holy Spirit effects Christ's Lordship in the church. With the Ascension comes Pentecost. Yoder readily affirms, though does not usually elaborate on, the church's dependence on the Spirit to participate in the life of Christ as disciples.⁹⁹ Certainly the Spirit's empowerment of the church as the body of Christ is crucial. But equally important is the distinction this maintains between Christ and the church. Through the Spirit, the church always receives its identity as the body of Christ from beyond itself. This qualifies the notion of the church as the continuation of the Incarnation. As Farrow argues, Jesus Christ continues to be incarnate. The community of disciples does not replace the ascended Jesus of Nazareth as the embodiment of Christ. The church does extend the Incarnation, but in a

⁹⁸ Ibid., 257.

⁹⁹ Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, 9

representative and participatory sense through the Holy Spirit who dwells in and among us as the Spirit dwells in Christ, joining us to the body of Christ. But the church never possesses this identity, usurping Christ's place. That place remains filled by the embodied Christ himself.¹⁰⁰

Farrow's concern here overlaps significantly with Yoder's:

In the fourth century the glory of the ascended one was being attested in such a way as to emphasize his divinity at the expense of his humanity... [I]t left room on the stage of human affairs for an icon of grand proportions, *viz.*, the Christian emperor.¹⁰¹

Turning to the Christology of Eusebius of Caesarea, Farrow notes how the image of the cosmic Christ, once separated from the human Jesus, was easily adapted to support the new alliance of church and empire. The heavenly Christ who has left behind the humbleness of the Nazarene is “the Christ who can be used to sanction imperialism and, within a generation, the use of the sword for the sake of the gospel.”¹⁰² In Eusebius the danger becomes obvious in the “naked correlation of the man Constantine with the divine Logos (whose own humanity is nowhere to be seen).”¹⁰³ Rather than in the Spirit constituted church with the Jewish Jesus of Nazareth as its head, the idea of a disembodied and incarnating Logos finds its body in the militarily constituted empire with the emperor as its head. Farrow shows how, according to this Christology, not only is the particular humanity of Jesus neglected, but this distorted image of Christ then becomes enclosed within the Christian community (empire) as its possession.

¹⁰⁰ Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia*, 259.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 114-5.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 116.

An insufficient pneumatology creates a very different version of this danger in the Anabaptist vision presented by Yoder. The pre-ascended humanity of Jesus is emphasized in contrast to a Constantinian cosmic Christ, and so violent triumphalism is precluded. At the same time, the Anabaptist tendency toward focusing on human nature of Christ risks an over-identification of the church with the person and mission of Jesus of Nazareth, while the divine nature (sometimes identified as the Spirit) is ascended to a separate space.¹⁰⁴ In liturgical terms, focus on the church rather than the sacrament as the real presence of the body of Christ leads to an emphasis on the visible community of disciples. It can also lead to an insular church which is so thoroughly identified as the prolongation of Christ's earthly ministry that the body of Christ is thought to be enclosed in and possessed by the church rather than received as a Spirit-mediated gift from a transcendent God.¹⁰⁵ The image of a community of Spirit-dependent disciples gives way to the image of the church as the exclusive body of Christ. This lack of eschatological tension can lead to what Fernando Enns describes as a conflation of the "believed church" and the "experienced church."¹⁰⁶ While the true church is not invisible, its visible empirical existence is not identical to its eschatological destiny; the descriptive and prescriptive senses of the church are distinct. The church as a visible community remains accountable to its God-given identity, even when we are unfaithful.

¹⁰⁴ John D. Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism: A Study in the Christology of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Dirk Philips* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 37. Early Anabaptist thinkers felt free to conceptualize and divide the human and divine in Christ in ways that did not adhere to the technical definitions of persons and natures in the Nicene and Chalcedonian tradition, seeing as terminological precision did not prevent their opponents from engaging in the decisively anti-Christ activities of hunting, torturing, and executing countless Anabaptists.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 71. In his analysis of Hubmaier's thought, Rempel notes the separation of the human nature, immanent in the church, from the transcendent divine nature which has no participation in the present activity of God which is attributed solely to the Holy Spirit.

¹⁰⁶ Enns, *The Peace Church and the Ecumenical Community*, 80; 240.

Attention to the Holy Spirit helps to clarify, fill out, and even expand the meaning of Christ's Lordship for the church. How might a pneumatological perspective inform an understanding of Christ's Lordship for the world? Yoder is emphatic that Christ is Lord over all creation, not just the church. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the church is the seal of the possibility of God's will being done on earth. In this way, it is the Spirit who enables the realization of Christ's Lordship in the church. Yoder's argument for Christian witness to the state also depends on the possibility of relative approximations of the Kingdom of God in the world. What is unclear in Yoder's work is how Christ's Lordship is enacted in the world, even in limited and ambiguous ways, because he rejects the idea of the Holy Spirit's activity outside the church. While he wants to avoid claims of the Spirit's presence and action apart from Christ, the irony is that, in relation to the world, Yoder accepts the presence of Christ but denies the presence of the Spirit. Here, the subordination of the Spirit threatens rather than defends the unity of Spirit and Son. If the Holy Spirit and Christ are intimately linked and Christ is Lord over the church and the world, why is the Spirit present only in the church? If the Spirit enables the faithfulness of the church and relative approximations of the Kingdom of God are possible in the world, is not the Spirit present there as well? The Lordship of the "Anointed One" cannot be understood apart from the anointing Spirit.

From a pneumatological perspective, we can see the Incarnation as the actualization of the Spirit's universal mission. Clark Pinnock suggests just such a complementarity between "the twin, interdependent missions of Son and Spirit."¹⁰⁷ For Pinnock, the particularity of Jesus and the universality of the Spirit are not in competition but rather clarify each other.¹⁰⁸ The Spirit

¹⁰⁷ Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1996), 192.

¹⁰⁸ This is not to reduce the divine Persons to God's "mode" of being alternately universal or particular. We may also reverse this (as Yoder does) and think of the universality of the Logos and the particularity of the Spirit's dispensation in the church.

does not only point the church back to Jesus, but is also the source of Jesus' conception, baptism, ministry, resurrection, and life in the church. From the beginning, the Spirit has been the giver of life. While Yoder is correct to emphasize the prologue of John as demonstrating the presence and action of the Word of God in creation, the Spirit of God likewise hovers over the waters. Both work together, as One God with the Father, rather than competing. This perspective helps clarify the continuity of creation and redemption. Pinnock describes the creative and eschatological activity of the Spirit:

Spirit is perfecter then, of the creation of which Jesus is the highest expression. Spirit is at work in history, first bringing humankind into existence and then moving it toward the goal of union. Spirit is the power released to bring the divine plans to completion. He is Spirit of creation and new creation, concerned with creating community and bringing about the kingdom. Spirit is the power by which this present age will be transformed into the kingdom and which ever works to bring about ultimate fulfillment.¹⁰⁹

While Yoder seeks to emphasize the continuity between creation and redemption Christologically, his pneumatology is less clear on this point. It is Christ, as revelation of the Father, agent of creation, and firstfruits of the new creation, who demonstrates this continuity as "the grain of the universe."¹¹⁰ In this way, Yoder argues for Christ's Lordship over everything, denying creation any self-sustaining existence apart from God's redemption in Christ. Yet in attributing the Holy Spirit strictly to the church and denying the Spirit's presence in the world, Yoder risks re-establishing a separation between the "order of redemption" as the realm of the

¹⁰⁹ Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 61.

¹¹⁰ Yoder, "Armaments and Eschatology," *Studies in Christian Ethics 1*, no. 1 (1988), 58. Cited from Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, 17.

Spirit's activity and the "order of creation" which must somehow operate apart from the life-giving presence of the Spirit.¹¹¹ The valid concern that the Holy Spirit not be construed as a diffuse divine presence in creation apart from identification with God the Father and God the Son is better addressed by recognizing the Holy Spirit's universal mission eschatologically. The created order does not exist independently of God after creation, such that the Spirit's redemptive work becomes an unplanned response; rather, the Spirit's work in creation and redemption are a unified act of God, *creatio ex nihilo*.¹¹² In this sense, the continuity of creation and new creation is interrupted not by anything inherent in the created order, but by the mysterious intrusion of fallenness. Evil, sin, and death do not exist in the created order but as a parasitic negation within creation. Thus the "Spirit is not only everywhere present but everywhere up against the human negation of God."¹¹³ Working to bring about the new creation in the face of this intrusion, the Spirit is an eschatological, sanctifying presence in creation to whom the church bears witness.

The purifying presence of the Holy Spirit, as theologian Sarah Coakley argues, has a tendency to disrupt human certainty and "transfiguringly interrupt" calcified categories based on fallenness.¹¹⁴ Given the above description of the Spirit's work in the church and the world, Coakley's argument raises at least two important points in relation to Yoder's work. First, the work of the Holy Spirit complicates without obliterating the dichotomy of church and world. Rather than viewing the two either as indistinct from each other or as completely delineated

¹¹¹ For a brief summary of Yoder's analysis of the Luther's two kingdoms model see *The Christian Witness to the State*, 62-64.

¹¹² Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator: Luther's Concept of the Holy Spirit*, trans. John M. Jensen (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1953), 196.

¹¹³ Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 62.

¹¹⁴ Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 56-57.

opposites existing on their own terms, this pneumatological perspective reorients their relationship in terms of their incorporation into the activity of the Triune God. No realm of creation has a truly independent existence apart from God. The Spirit of God is at work in the world not only sustaining life but working for redemption in Christ. The church is not the collection of people who are in full and independent possession of redemption in Christ. Rather, our incorporation into Christ is through the ongoing work of the Spirit apart from whom we cease to be the church. This view of the Holy Spirit complicates a simple church-world dichotomy not by denying the church as a set apart people, but by denying the church an identity which is self-sustained or essentially negative. The church is not the church because it is opposed to an equal and opposite entity called “world,” but because it bears witness to the God who is the source and completion of all. The world then, as the part of humanity which does not publically profess allegiance to Christ,¹¹⁵ is also the field of activity of the Spirit who’s sanctifying work contests all that resists the Kingdom of God. The Spirit moves not only through the church to the world, but may also approach the church through the world.¹¹⁶ The church’s identity and relationship to the world are dynamic, continuously received through the Spirit of God who remains Other. In Yoder’s idiom, the church precedes the world epistemologically because it is an eschatologically oriented community, the firstfruits of the new creation in which there is no more “world” in the sense predicated on fallenness.

Second, Coakley’s work introduces a necessary apophatic element to Yoder’s Christology. While Christ is fully authoritative for the church, including in terms of its political ethics and witness, because he is mediated to it only by the ongoing work of the Spirit, the

¹¹⁵ See section 2 above.

¹¹⁶ This includes, but is not limited to the Spirit’s work in joining new members to the church.

church does not have noetic mastery of Christ. Any static and circumscribed image of Christ is not the Living God but is an idol.¹¹⁷ This is not to deny, as Yoder insists, that Jesus is truly the incarnate self-revelation of God but to remember that this revelation is also mystery. Whatever we say of the Christian God must align with God's revelation in Christ, but we cannot say all there is to say of God. In the person and work of Christ there is revealed particular content of God's character and will. But this revelation is generative rather than exhaustive. In political terms, this means that Jesus Christ is truly the only ethical norm and ought to inspire a particular Christocentric political ethic for the church, but also that there is not only one complete interpretation or implementation of that norm. The Spirit inspires what Yong refers to as "many tongues, many political practices" among faithful disciples of our one Lord.¹¹⁸

How might this pneumatological approach speak to political ethics which maintain the particularity of the Christian community while being genuinely open not only to speaking to the world but also to affirming and learning from other political bodies and movements? Garnering insights from Gavin D'Costa's Trinitarian approach to other religions, I am suggesting a model that might be considered an interreligious approach to politics.¹¹⁹ Like Yoder, D'Costa is concerned with maintaining the distinctiveness of Christian faith over a relativizing universalism while also claiming that this approach can be a path to greater openness to the other because of the work of the Spirit in the world. This means that whatever we say about this proposed pneumatological openness to the world, it is dependent on affirming Yoder's argument for the church as counter-polis which is beholden to the politics of Jesus as disciples of the crucified and risen Lord. Similarly, it means insisting that the Holy Spirit is not an alternative to Christ, but is

¹¹⁷ Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 51. On this pneumatological apophatic element, see also Yong, *In the Days of Caesar*, 210.

¹¹⁸ Yong, *In the Days of Caesar*, 109.

¹¹⁹ Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000).

One God with the Son and the Father.¹²⁰ Affirming the activity of the Holy Spirit outside the church does not imply that the Holy Spirit is a source of an ethical standard different from that of Christ for either the church or the world. Rather, the presence of the Spirit throughout the cosmos highlights the united action of the Spirit and Logos as, in Irenaeus' words, the two hands of the Father. Further, to affirm this unity means that to confess the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world has Christological and ecclesiological implications.¹²¹ The same Holy Spirit which is present in the world is the Spirit of Christ poured out on Pentecost, constituting the church as the Body of Christ. As D'Costa argues,

The Spirit in the church allows for the possible (and extremely complex and difficult) discernment of Christ-like practice in the Other, and in so much as Christ-like activity takes place, then this can also only be through the enabling power of the Spirit.¹²²

While this Christ-like practice may be partial and ambiguous, discerning it makes a claim upon the church as a form of obedience to Christ that it is not currently exhibiting. This presence of Spirit-inspired Christ-likeness outside the church cannot be accepted as a separate and parallel sanctity to that of the church, but rather must be received by the church as a call to new patterns of faithful discipleship.¹²³ It may be a means of repentance. Through the witness of the Spirit in the political practices of non-Christians, the church can learn to recognize the ways in which it has become "ensnared by the powers of darkness."¹²⁴ In this sense, being inattentive to the

¹²⁰ Ibid., 108.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 129.

¹²³ Ibid., 128. While I have correction of Christian unfaithfulness in view here, discernment of Christ-likeness among non-Christians does not only take this form. Faithfulness may take more than one form, leading to new understanding without necessarily correcting a wrong.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 130.

political practices of those outside the church can be a form of idolatry, maintaining a static and constrained image in opposition to the Living God.¹²⁵ The church is called to a distinct social witness, rooted in the politics of Jesus, but it cannot resort to a monologue directed at the world. The church must also learn from many sources, including non-Christians, where it has been unfaithful and how the Holy Spirit may empower the church in new modes of faithfulness.

5. The Peace Church and Liberation Theology:

In this section I will synthesize my analysis and critique of Yoder's theology with liberation theologies, expanding upon the ideas present in Yoder's work to more deeply explore the implications of a Christocentric and ecclesial political ethics that nonetheless takes seriously the activity of the Holy Spirit beyond the church as a call to more faithful discipleship and more truthful Christological confession. My proposed pneumatology, which includes the recognition of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit throughout creation, enables this interaction in the work of Yoder and liberation theologies. Through exploring some of the differences and similarities between Yoder and liberation theologians, I will suggest how the Yoderian peace church model can learn from liberation theologies regarding the significance of the Holy Spirit's presence in the political happenings of the world.

In approaching this synthesis I am not attempting to present an analysis either of liberation theology as if it were a monolith nor the work of a particular theologian associated with the theme of liberation. My goal is not to evaluate and correct liberation theologies, categorically or individually, but to highlight some relevant themes and emphases that

¹²⁵ Ibid., 133.

complement or challenge Yoder's perspective. Through this process, I will suggest some ways this might allow those of us shaped by and still convinced of much of Yoder's thought to preserve many of his contributions while also equipping a peace church model to better address the need for continuing repentance of injustice and of abuse of and alignment with power. I want to reframe the peace church within a liberationist perspective and within the necessary context of solidarity with and centralization of the poor as a theological locus both within and beyond the church.

Liberation theologies and Yoder's peace church theology share a number of core concerns that facilitate a synthesis while also exhibiting some divergences in methodology and emphasis that can be fruitful for dialogue. Yoder himself thought it appropriate that some critics understood his *The Politics of Jesus* as an expression of liberation theology while others viewed it as a critique of that movement.¹²⁶ José Míguez Bonino also notes the similar atmosphere shared by Anabaptist and liberation theologies with both originating in the context of peasant movements,¹²⁷ highlighting the Beatitudes as an epistemological key, emphasizing Christian discipleship as the necessary context and condition for Christian theology, and resisting any division of faith and works.¹²⁸ With this in mind, it is significant to note that Yoder's concerns with or criticisms of liberation theologies land precisely on "the points at which it is not original;" conversely, he claims that "the places where it is more worthy of support are the places where it is more original."¹²⁹ Likewise, while there are few instances where liberation

¹²⁶Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 15 (footnote 23).

¹²⁷ On contemporary Anabaptism's significant drift from this context see Drew Hart "Anabaptism: Following Jesus the Liberator and Peacemaker in the 21st Century" in *A Living Alternative: Anabaptist Christianity in a Post-Christendom World*, eds. Joanna Harader and A.O. Green (New York: Etneloc, 2014), 203-217.

¹²⁸ José Míguez Bonino, "On Discipleship, Justice and Power" in *Freedom and Discipleship: Liberation Theology in an Anabaptist Perspective*, ed. Daniel S. Schipani (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 131-133.

¹²⁹ Yoder, *Christian Attitudes*, 390. Yoder is specifically interacting with Latin American liberation theologies here.

theologians respond directly to Yoder, their divergence from and critique of Yoder generally apply to points where he does not diverge from dominant white European/American theology.¹³⁰ I suggest that this can lead to a fruitful dialogue and provide the opportunity to build on many of the core elements of Yoder's work, while addressing some of the areas where he retains features of the Constantinianism that he sought to resist but which may have provided ideological cover for the kind of abuse he carried out. First, I will look at some themes and perspectives that liberation theologies offer for pneumatology, address some of Yoder's concerns and counterpoints, and propose a synthesis. Second, I will consider some emphases within the connection of ecclesiology and political ethics in liberation theologies, address some important aspects of Yoder's stance on the topic, and offer a synthesis. Finally, I will conclude with Christology, arguing that the syntheses in pneumatology and ecclesiology/ethics do not compromise Christocentrism but follow from and lead to renewed Christological reflection.

Pneumatology:

Liberation theologies, in contrast to Yoder, tend to emphasize the Holy Spirit's activity in history beyond the church and especially in political movements and processes.¹³¹ Injustice and oppression are ultimately caused by sin, and the Spirit who brings us into communion with God

¹³⁰ E.g. Miguel A. De La Torre, *The Politics of Jesús: A Hispanic Political Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), 1-19; José Míguez Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 36; See also James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 30-64. This chapter does not mention Yoder but is Cone's reflection on and criticism of Reinhold Niebuhr, a frequent target of Yoder's work. Cone and Yoder are both sharply critical of Niebuhr but at different points. Cone criticizes Niebuhr's lack of action and sustained theological and ethical reflection on white supremacy; this critique substantially applies to Yoder, especially when one considers that Yoder's deep criticism of Niebuhr never landed directly on this point. Conversely, while Cone specifically celebrates the influence of Niebuhr's political realism Yoder would likely recognize this as the reason why Niebuhr could both recognize the monstrous evil of white supremacy and accommodate it. While Cone sees this as an inconsistency, Yoder sees the disjuncture between recognizing and resisting sin as the core of Niebuhr's realism.

¹³¹ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 55.

and one another through Christ overcomes sin. This does not mean that the work of the Spirit can simply be identified with any historical embodiment of liberation, much less any individual, group, or movement which claims to offer liberation. But anywhere that sin and the consequences of sin are being resisted and overcome, there is evidence of the Spirit's work.¹³²

Theologian José Comblin writes:

The Spirit does not act in the church or through the church alone. While the world produces works of self-aggrandizement that have nothing to do with the power of the Spirit, it also contains forces working to build up humanity and restore it: everything that works for salvation and liberation in the world is also inspired by the Holy Spirit¹³³

The Spirit as agent of the Kingdom of God brings real salvation and authentic liberation within history as “signs of” and “advance payments on” the fullness of salvation in the Kingdom.¹³⁴ The Holy Spirit is present everywhere working for the redemption of creation. Liberation theologies give particular emphasis to the Holy Spirit's work against violence in its institutional manifestations, that is, to the networks of power relations which impoverish, marginalize, and kill.¹³⁵

However, liberation theologies focus not merely on the idea that God works in history but that the Holy Spirit dwells especially with the poor and oppressed and takes their side in the struggle for life.¹³⁶ Political processes and movements are complex and often ambiguous. They

¹³² Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 15.

¹³³ José Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation*, trans. Paul Burns (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 71.

¹³⁴ Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 40. Also, Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*. Trans. and eds. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 104.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³⁶ Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 55.

may contain elements which point to the Kingdom of God as well as elements which resist God's will, but it is among movements emerging from the "underside" of history – from the world of the poor – that Christians ought to recognize the greatest resonance with the Gospel of the Kingdom.¹³⁷ For that reason, while the Kingdom may not be identified with any particular human construction, neither is it equidistant from all political positions. Precisely because the Kingdom represents a genuinely alternative political reality the work of the Spirit is not bound to a false neutrality among human political options which serves to legitimize the status quo, but takes sides with the oppressed and against oppressors within the real world of complex political processes.¹³⁸

The Spirit's presence is not just for the benefit of the poor, working through paternalistic benefactors, but is preferentially present with and active among and through the poor and oppressed. Rather than romanticizing peoples who are oppressed, this pneumatological emphasis in liberation theologies means prioritizing the poor and oppressed as theological subjects.¹³⁹ Not everything in the world of the poor is of God, but God is closest to the world of the poor.¹⁴⁰ Theologian James Cone makes this distinction sharply, arguing that the Kingdom of God belongs to the poor and not the rich so "only the poor and the weak have the axiological grid necessary for the hearing and the doing of the divine will disclosed in their midst."¹⁴¹

Given this emphasis on the theological subjectivity of the poor, liberation theologians insist on the need to understand Christian life and do theology from within their own contexts rather than accepting a version of Christian tradition imposed through European and white

¹³⁷ Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 113-116.

¹³⁸ Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976), 90-94.

¹³⁹ Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 27; 48.

¹⁴⁰ Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 115.

¹⁴¹ James Cone, *The God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 85.

American frameworks. This is part of the meaning of Gustavo Gutiérrez's book title, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*.¹⁴² Where dominant culture theologies have failed to testify to the Gospel of the Kingdom, liberation theologies are often less focused on correcting these theologies from within than on insisting that the Living Water of the Spirit must be found in their own wells. To use another biblical metaphor, they reject transplanting a tree grown in foreign soil and instead seek to allow the mustard seed of the Kingdom to grow as it will in their own soil.

As we've seen, Yoder is concerned about the ambiguity of identifying the Spirit with the movement of history. For Yoder, this is one of the points at which liberation theologies are not original. Theologian Daniel Castelo summarizes this perspective:

The reality that exists for the poor... drives liberationists to want to ameliorate the situation in a manner that is in conformity with much of Western Christian history, for the attempt to interpret history in order to change it to fit a predetermined agenda is a mode of acting that the Church has been struggling with for centuries.¹⁴³

Similarly, Yoder would likely also be concerned that the focus on the poor or oppressed as the locus of the Spirit could undermine the centrality of the covenant community as the sign and sacrament of the new creation. He would question the appropriateness of assuming the whole of a society as the sphere for Christian political thought, highlighting instead the primacy of the community of committed disciples empowered by the Spirit within a larger society as microcosm of the world's eschatological destiny.¹⁴⁴ This point is highlighted by the different thematic

¹⁴² Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984).

¹⁴³ Daniel Castelo, "A Yoderian Appraisal of Latin American Liberation Theology," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 58.1 (2003), 28.

¹⁴⁴ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 92.

emphases Yoder and liberation theologians tend to place on the Exodus narrative. While liberation theologies highlight the Exodus narrative as emblematic of God's action in history enabling freedom for the enslaved and oppressed, Yoder claims that the Exodus does not constitute a revolution within Egypt but a withdrawal from it, pointing to the identity of Israel as the covenant community as a presupposition for the Exodus.¹⁴⁵

Finally, while the context of horrific poverty and oppression demands serious consideration, Yoder would insist that the context is not self-interpreting – the Gospel does not emerge from any particular context, even if always received in particular contexts.¹⁴⁶ He is primarily addressing the context of a white Western church that has acquiesced to aspects of a culture hostile to authentic Christianity. Working from within a dissenting Western Christian tradition, one might say that Yoder is trying to address the pollution in this well rather than drinking from another well. To turn again to the mustard seed metaphor, Yoder isn't as much worried about transplanting a tree from foreign soil as he is about whether the tree in question is in fact a mustard tree. His concern is that those seeking to tend the seed of the Kingdom in their own soil might tend a seed from the false mustard tree of Christendom. Arguably, this concern leads him to expect every true seed of the Kingdom to grow identically.

Having recognized that the Holy Spirit is neither a diffuse amorphous presence nor confined to the visible church, we can better recognize the contributions liberation theologies might make to peace church theologies. Liberation theologies can give a greater degree of clarity on the character of the Holy Spirit's activity in the world. As the agent of the Kingdom, the Holy Spirit is at work everywhere but finds its center of gravity in the church; yet it finds a sort of

¹⁴⁵ Castelo, "A Yoderian Appraisal of Latin American Liberation Theology", 30.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

second center among the poor and oppressed both within and without the visible church community. The Holy Spirit may be at work and calling the church to repentance anywhere, but Christians should particularly expect to discern this presence with and among those who are being marginalized. This understanding of the theological subjectivity of the poor can also lead to a deeper understanding of the violence Christians are called to reject. As liberation theologies emphasize, the Spirit of Life resists the power of death manifest in systemic and institutional violence, not just in direct wielding of the sword.¹⁴⁷ Addressing and resisting these forms of violence requires accountability to and privileging of the voices of those who are most impacted. The identity and witness of the church are not jeopardized by accounting for injustice and violence within the community, but rather by allowing its theology to be twisted so that it serves to insulate the church and those holding power within the community from that accountability. It also reminds us that this kind of accountability and call to repentance does not necessarily focus on the state as the outside arbiter of justice, but instead centers those who are likely to be victims of state-sanctioned marginalization and violence.

Ecclesiology/Ethics:

These pneumatological emphases imply the distinctive contributions of liberation theologies to ecclesiology and political ethics. The dominant ecclesiological theme of liberation theologies is that the church is the church of the poor based on God's election of the oppressed. While each theologian works out the relationship between the church and the poor in nuanced ways, liberation theologies often use statements equating the church and the poor for polemical purposes before complicating that identity.¹⁴⁸ They tend to bridge the empirical gap between the

¹⁴⁷ Bonino, "On Discipleship, Justice and Power", 137.

¹⁴⁸ E.g. Jon Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008) and Cone, *God of the Oppressed*.

community of professed Christians and the community of the poor by recognizing the centrality of poor believers to the life of the church and pointing toward the calling of the entire church to become a church of the poor. Gutiérrez describes the people with whom his theology is formed as, “a people at once Christian and oppressed.”¹⁴⁹ Centralizing the poor within the church is connected to receiving the gift of the Spirit through the poor outside the church, all together transforming the church toward its calling. As Leonardo and Clodovis Boff write, “The best way of evangelizing the poor consists in allowing the poor themselves to become the church and help the whole church to become a truly poor church and a church of the poor.”¹⁵⁰ The ecclesiological key here is found in the social location of the people Jesus gathered around himself. Solidarity among and with those at the margins of systems of domination is central to the identity and political practice of Jesus and his followers. In this sense, liberation theologies see the church becoming a church of the poor as part and parcel of the church becoming a visible community of disciples.¹⁵¹ Liberation theologies tend to see this form of human solidarity as a key resources for the church to become an authentic communion in history. Writing from a quite different context, former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams explains this idea lucidly:

[W]here the interdependence of human life shows the radical quality of Christ’s responsibility and representation, where familial, political or cultural action realizes a more and more unqualified degree of being-for-the-other, it becomes a manifestation of Christ’s underlying and ongoing agency.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 23.

¹⁵⁰ Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 59.

¹⁵¹ Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 7.

¹⁵² Rowan Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018), 204.

Liberation theologies emphasize this action-in-interdependence as the work of the Holy Spirit particularly in the oppressed organizing for their liberation. Comblin notes that “the new communities are springing up from among the poor; in rich circles they are virtually unthinkable and they are difficult enough in middle-class circles.”¹⁵³ While some might see this as elevating solidarity among a particular class or racialized group over the communion of believers, liberation theologians see themselves as responding to a state of ecclesiological crisis, not creating it.¹⁵⁴ True fellowship in the Spirit cannot necessarily be linked to the institutional church in the face of the absurdity of white colonial Christianity. That Cone finds greater common cause and spiritual connection with Black non-Christians than with white Christians is thus not an ecclesiological conundrum his work is creating but is rather the result of a horrific reality his work is addressing.¹⁵⁵

With this view of ecclesiology in mind, liberation theologies tend to emphasize Christian political ethics as praxis in solidarity. Christian political ethics as discipleship is therefore derived less from the content of actions that Jesus taught or exemplified, and more from the context of solidarity with the “crucified,” or poor, and therefore will include its own sort of poverty and oppression.¹⁵⁶ The cross of discipleship is understood as the result primarily of proximity to people who are subject to the kind of repression symbolized by crucifixion, rather than the provocative nonviolence witness theorized by Yoder. This point is expressed in the words of Archbishop Oscar Romero:

¹⁵³ Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation*, 73.

¹⁵⁴ Liberation theologians do not necessarily equate the church with all poor and oppressed people, but neither do they have a uniform approach to differentiate the two. Each theologian addresses the relationship of Christian confession and practice to the poor and oppressed in different ways and to varying depths.

¹⁵⁵ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 32-33.

¹⁵⁶ This context of solidarity might be characterized as participation in Christ while emphasis on Christ’s teaching and example of pacifism, for instance, might be characterized as overly literal imitation.

Real persecution has been directed against the poor, the body of Christ in history today. They, like Jesus, are the crucified, the persecuted servant of Yahweh. They are the ones who make up in their own bodies that which is lacking in the passion of Christ. And for that reason when the church has organized and united itself around the hopes and the anxieties of the poor it has incurred the same fate as that of Jesus and of the poor: persecution.¹⁵⁷

Jesus, as God incarnate as a poor man among poor people, provides more the necessary context for working out political ethics than the content of a political program.¹⁵⁸ While arguing for the political relevance and specificity of Christianity, liberation theologians often understand the political sphere as having a degree of independence from the demands of the Gospel.¹⁵⁹ Discipleship leads one to enter into the political fray in solidarity with the poor, but the independent logic of the political sphere leads one to make choices not necessarily governed by the example and teaching of Jesus. Liberation theologians are intent on exposing and limiting violence in human relations but may or may not completely exclude the use of violence from Christian political engagement. Generally, violence is legitimated to the extent to which Christian life is thought to include elements not subject to the ethical guidance of Jesus' life and teachings.¹⁶⁰ As one example, Roman Catholic liberation theologians generally assume that participation in any form of violence is clearly excluded for the clergy and members of religious orders, while it may be legitimate for the laity acting outside the ecclesial sphere.¹⁶¹ Emphasizing

¹⁵⁷ Oscar Romero, "The Political Dimension of Faith from the Perspective of the Option for the Poor" in *Voice of the Voiceless: The Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements*, trans. Michael J. Walsh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 182.

¹⁵⁸ Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 43; 64.

¹⁵⁹ Bonino, *Toward A Christian Political Ethics*, 36.

¹⁶⁰ See sections 1 & 2 above.

¹⁶¹ Yoder, *Christian Attitudes*, 130-136.

the agency and human dignity of the poor, liberation theologies reject any special obligation of the oppressed to behave nonviolently. For James Cone, this paternalistic white liberal nonviolence glorifies and demands the nonviolence of those it exploits and oppresses, and thus itself constitutes a form of dehumanization.¹⁶² The poor are not uniquely called to nonviolence as an aspect of their inherent inferiority; they have any right to individual and collective self-defense possessed by others and greater justification for exercising this right.

Yoder is reacting to this same state of ecclesiological absurdity, though from a different angle. He is calling on the largely privileged, complacent, and compromised white American church to repent of its violence and worship God alone. His counter-polis ecclesiology is theorized in opposition to the reality of the church around him. Yoder's work focuses on presenting an idealized, and reformed vision of the church rather than describing the empirical church. Approaching from this angle, Yoder would be concerned that an emphasis on a particular social class follows too closely the Constantinian unity of church and nation and so minimizes the new kind of social order the church is called to manifest.¹⁶³ Insisting on the visibility of the church keeps real people directly accountable to Christian faithfulness. Yoder is unequivocal that the ethical normativity of Jesus is all encompassing, providing not just the impetus to a radical political commitment but also concrete guidance for the forms of political activity. He recognizes the hypocrisy of non-pacifists criticizing liberation theologies as uniquely supportive of violence when in his analysis, non-pacifist liberation theologies tend to be more discerning and critical concerning questions of violence than non-liberationist non-pacifists; and some liberationists are explicitly pacifist.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, while Yoder is concerned that the weight given to Marx and

¹⁶² Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 56; Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, xv-xvi.

¹⁶³ Yoder, *Christian Attitudes*, 382.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 389; Yoder, "The Wider Setting of 'Liberation Theology,'" *The Review of Politics* 52.2 (1990), 287. Cited from Castelo, "A Yoderian Appraisal", 33 note 4.

social sciences may impinge on the centrality of Jesus Christ, he recognizes that this is a space most critics of liberation theologies have been happy to yield to the likes of Aristotle or Milton Friedman.¹⁶⁵ Finally, as we have noted above, Yoder argues that Jesus represents and presents a real and coherent mode of political engagement that is the shared life of the church as community of witness to the Kingdom.¹⁶⁶ With these concerns in mind, Yoder approvingly highlights figures like Archbishop Hélder Câmara and Adolfo Perez Esquivel who “have held that violence is always inappropriate for the disciple of Jesus Christ, and yet affirm revolution or liberation as the purpose of God for the world.”¹⁶⁷ This is compatible with Yoder’s understanding of Just War theory as a way for the pacifist church to communicate with a non-Christian society.¹⁶⁸

The emphases of liberation theologies offer valuable opportunities for constructive synthesis with Yoder’s Anabaptist. Reframing peace church theology within a liberationist framework can support key elements of Yoder’s ecclesiology and political ethics while also correcting some problems. I remain convinced of the significance of Yoder’s model of the visible church as counter-polis and his argument for pacifism as a core element of discipleship. Yoder helpfully emphasizes the particularity of Christian discipleship as representing a real political alternative in the world, as a call not merely to radical political commitment but to a unique form of political being. This is emphasized in his understanding of the cross as “the price of social nonconformity... the social reality of representing in an unwilling world the Order to

¹⁶⁵ Yoder, *The War of the Lamb*, 171.

¹⁶⁶ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 13.

¹⁶⁷ Yoder, *Christian Attitudes*, 388.

¹⁶⁸ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 41.

come.”¹⁶⁹ But this must be joined with Romero’s understanding of the cross as the result of identification with the poor. Bonino expresses his hope for such a synthesis:

But I believe that refusing to separate Jesus’ sternness in calling to totally committed discipleship and his identification with and embracing of the poor, the despised, the *ochlos* will lead us to a deeper understanding both of the church and of the Gospel.¹⁷⁰

Yoder’s perspective highlights the conversion of the individual out of social forms characterized as “the world” and into a new social form centered on Christ. The emphasis is on the fundamental discontinuity of social location for the Christian. The disciple must move out of the old and into the new. The liberation perspective highlights the conversion of a *group* from a social form characterized by “the world” toward a social form centered on Christ. The emphasis here is on the continuity of those social forms which are taken up and transfigured by the Spirit to move the community from being “the world” to “the church.” Both theological perspectives are necessary and complement the other. Christian conversion involves a real discontinuity and brings the disciple into the peculiar social body that is the church. At the same time, there is a continuity with those social forms and political practices which are resonant with the Gospel and allow the church to live in both faithful and varied ways. Liberation theologies enhance peace church theologies, enabling a more robust ecclesiology that can recognize different forms of the church while still holding to the counter-polis model; the true mustard seed of the Kingdom may grow into a tree of differing dimensions. As theologian M. Shawn Copeland says, “Christian identity

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 96.

¹⁷⁰ Bonino, “On Discipleship, Justice and Power,” 135.

or self-understanding and Christian belief, while intending what is true and normative, may be expressed in diverse or plural ways.”¹⁷¹

The visible church counter-polis model is also important in unequivocally stating that one cannot participate in the abuse and oppression of other Christians (and by extension non-Christians) and remain in the communion of Christ. While liberation theologians often speak with clarity about people “at once Christian and oppressed,”¹⁷² they are not always as clear about the fact that their oppressors also often think of themselves as Christian.¹⁷³ The ambiguity regarding the independence of the political sphere from discipleship ethics reflects an inherited understanding of the invisibility of the church. This ecclesiology allows Christians to imagine the church as an abstract mystical communion that does not extend to the physical bodies of its members.¹⁷⁴ Theologian William Cavanaugh describes this situation in terms of a shift in understanding regarding the true – or visible – body of Christ and the mystical – or hidden – body of Christ. While the true body of Christ originally meant the visible ecclesial community and the mystical body referred to the hidden presence of Christ in the Eucharist, around the twelfth century this understanding was reversed in the Roman church. Now the Eucharist was understood to be the visible presence of Christ’s body, while the presence of Christ in the ecclesial community is a hidden, mystical presence.¹⁷⁵ Cavanaugh contrasts these two understandings through two twentieth century Catholics, Pope Pius XII and Dorothy Day. While Pius XII represents the later understanding of the church as mystical communion, Catholic

¹⁷¹ M. Shawn Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2018), 155. This also sheds light on Amos Yong’s phrase, “many tongues, many political practices” in Yong, *In the Days of Caesar*, 109.

¹⁷² Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 23.

¹⁷³ Cone is particularly clear in this delineation: “Therefore, when the master and the slave spoke of God, they could not possibly be referring to the same reality.” *God of the Oppressed*, 10.

¹⁷⁴ William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 170-180.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 212.

Worker Dorothy Day retains the earlier claim for the visibility of the church, understanding the mystical body as the hidden presence of Christ not only in the Eucharist but also outside the visible ecclesial communion. Following St. Augustine, Day recognizes that all people are members or potential members in the mystical body of Christ and in this way the Christian meets Christ hidden in the stranger.¹⁷⁶ Cavanaugh then applies these two understandings of the mystical body of Christ to their respective responses to World War II.

For Pius XII the doctrine of the mystical body unites in soul those Christians opposed in mortal combat on behalf of their respective countries; for Day the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ would render Christian participation in the carnage simply inconceivable. In the theology of the Catholic Worker, the mystical body of Christ does not hover above national boundaries but dissolves them, making possible Christian resistance to the nation-state's violent designs.¹⁷⁷

The visibility of the church, which Yoder maintains, insists that communion in the body of Christ involves genuine flesh and blood – Christ's and our own. As such, one can separate oneself from this communion through actions which assault its bodily integrity. Cavanaugh therefore argues, “[e]xcommunication, therefore, is not the expulsion of the sinner from the church, but a recognition that the sinner has *already excluded himself* from communion in the body of Christ by his own actions.”¹⁷⁸ For the church to be visible we must acknowledge that which is clearly antithetical to the body of Christ. A torturer, to follow Cavanaugh's example, cannot assault the flesh of siblings in Christ while maintaining a mystical communion with them, but rather is excluding themselves off from this communion by assaulting the very flesh of

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 221.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 243.

Christ. Acknowledging this separation from communion “makes, however temporarily and faintly, the true church visible as an alternative society of peace and justice where torture has no place.”¹⁷⁹

While it is important to clarify the anti-Christian activity of oppressors, Yoder’s perspective needs the corrective influence of liberation theologies regarding the Holy Spirit’s preferential presence with those on the underside of these oppressive hierarchies. This includes adopting liberation theologies’ deeper analysis of systemic violence, so that Christian pacifism is not based merely on renouncing social positions that involve overt violence but is also willing to confront the complex ways Christians may be invested in and materially benefit from an economic, social, and political system rooted in violence. In the words of the Christian pacifist A.J. Muste, “In a world built on violence, one must be a revolutionary before one can be a pacifist.”¹⁸⁰ This is not minimizing Christian pacifism as the church’s form of revolutionary witness, but rather framing it in proper context. Yoder is right to recognize that this witness is directed not only to those who understand themselves as Christians, but can legitimately seek to influence non-Christian governing authorities toward a greater degree of relative justice and peace without personal Christian conversion. But it is insufficient to witness to the powerful without centralizing the subjectivity of those who have been marginalized. The church ought not to witness in the mode of a detached third party, but with and among the disinherited. It is not just a matter of the church advocating for the poor and oppressed but recognizing that the poor and oppressed – many of whom are part of the church – by the gift of the Holy Spirit, possess the means for the church’s conversion. Yoder goes as far as to consider the position of liberationists

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 117.

¹⁸⁰ A. J. Muste, “Pacifism and Class War” in *The Essays of A. J. Muste*, ed. Nat Hentoff (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1967), 179-185. Cited from Noam Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 160.

who are willing to support non-pacifist liberation movements while remaining Christian pacifists themselves. But it must go further than that. Pacifism is not a prerequisite for the church to listen to oppressed peoples nor is it sufficient to find liberation movements which align with our image of the church. It is not that we are free to simply throw out important theological convictions in order to appear “relevant,” but rather that the political practices of those outside the church – or outside our model of the church – may contain prophetic elements through which the Spirit seeks to sanctify the church and bring it closer to Christ. Thus seeking out relationships of mutuality with the oppressed is first of all a *theological* exercise, not just a political one. The repentance of the more privileged sectors of the church cannot be about self-correcting according to our own image of Christ, but being converted to the true Christ who centralizes the marginalized.

It is certainly important that the church as a visible community must address injustices, such as racism, internally if it can have anything to say to the world.¹⁸¹ Yet systems of oppression often intersects both the church and the wider society which means that seeking transformation within the church already entails, as theologian Nekeisha Alexis-Baker argues, making efforts to transform the social order that makes continued oppression possible.¹⁸² Alexis-Baker shifts from Yoder’s emphasis on what the church might say to the state to the church’s natural solidarity and shared action with those outside the church who are also seeking to transform an oppressive social order. Cone gives the example of the Black Power movement which, though not exclusively “Christian” in nature, can reorient the church toward essential elements of Christianity: “If the work of Christ is that of liberating men from alien loyalties, and if racism is, as George Kelsey says, an alien faith, then there must be some correlation between

¹⁸¹ Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, 21.

¹⁸² Nekeisha Alexis-Baker, “Freedom of the Cross: John Howard Yoder and Womanist Theologies in Conversation” in *Power and Practices: Engaging the Work of John Howard Yoder*, eds. Jeremy M. Bergen and Anthony G. Siegrist (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2009), 93.

Black Power and Christianity.”¹⁸³ Through this solidarity with those seeking liberation from oppression the visible church receives its identity as the body of Christ not through the historical continuity of a particular group of people but through Holy Spirit enacting the Kingdom in our midst.¹⁸⁴ And while the gift of the Spirit when received through those beyond the church necessarily turns the church toward Christ, the resulting conversion of the ecclesial community is not a return to a predetermined model of the church but, as the work of the Spirit, is rather a formation into something that cannot be wholly anticipated.¹⁸⁵

Yoder’s Christocentric ecclesial political ethic emphasizes the disciple as a representative of Christ, but it is complemented by the equally biblical assertion that the disciple is the one who receives Christ in the other, particularly the socially defined “least,” including those outside the church. Here the Anabaptist “peace church” model and the liberationist “church of the poor” can work together to temper the tendency to absolutize either the church/world dichotomy on the one hand or the oppressed/oppressor dichotomy on the other. While both are meaningful distinctions that should not be discarded, they are not static categories. For example, theologian Dolores S. Williams helpfully draws out the complexity of oppressive social structures and Christian identity in her critique of and challenge to James Cone to draw as clear a line against racialized sexist oppression of black women as he does against racism against black men.¹⁸⁶ Her point is not to discredit the significance of Cone’s work, but it does illuminate ways in which the line between oppressed and oppressor may run through individuals and communities as well as between them. As another example, while recognizing the gifts of the peace church and

¹⁸³ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 39.

¹⁸⁴ Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 270.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 251.

¹⁸⁶ Dolores S. Williams, “James Cone’s Liberation Twenty Years Later” in James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 185-195.

liberationist prophetic emphases, Mennonite theologian Gayle Gerber-Koontz also warns that they risk leading to immobilizing guilt because none of us “can be ‘prophetic’ enough, righteous enough, comprehensive enough, to be free from further prophetic judgment.”¹⁸⁷ Neither committed disciples nor the poor nor any person bearing the image of God is a replacement for Christ – yet by grace through the Holy Spirit they may participate in the life of Christ.

Christological Conclusion:

If liberation theologies can help a Yoderian peace church perspective expand its pneumatology to be more attentive to the Holy Spirit’s activity outside the church in such a way as to inform the church’s communal life and witness, this must spring from and lead to renewed Christological reflection. By proposing some ways to adjust Yoder’s pneumatology and its implications for ecclesiology and ethics, I have not been suggesting a move away from Yoder’s Christocentric approach but rather have been seeking to articulate theologically a means by which the church might recalibrate its Christology to more truly worship God. Problems arise not only from simply failing to live consistently according to our Christology, but also from living consistently with a distorted image of Christ. Liberation theologies offer a Yoderian peace church model different perspectives of and emphases concerning Jesus Christ, but most importantly bring to the fore the significance of who “is included in one’s community of theological reflection.”¹⁸⁸ Yoder has a tendency to absolutize his interpretations and while his Christology in many ways challenges the norms of white American Christianity, he is not immune from projecting his own image onto his work.¹⁸⁹ In fact, his intention to exorcise the

¹⁸⁷ Gayle Gerber Koontz, “Freedom, Discipleship and Theological Reflection” in *Freedom and Discipleship*, 173-174.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁸⁹ Miguel A. De La Torre, *The Politics of Jesús*, 1.

Constantinian Christ would be best served by doing theology with those best positioned to see how Constantinian Christianity has paved the way for the image of a white Jesus. Drew Hart argues:

In the same way that Anabaptism has offered an alternative to the violent politics of Constantinian Christendom, so too have Christian traditions, like the Black Church, been able to point to a Christian formation, practice, and language that is not captivated by, or blind to, the operation of Whiteness as a construct and social pivot around which everything else revolves. Instead... the white male body in the center is displaced by the body of Christ.¹⁹⁰

This presence of Christ in the midst of the church is precisely what Yoder would want.

Hart goes on:

And since Black theology flowed from a community that resembled much more of that Anabaptist posture in the world than Mennonites did themselves... then Mennonites ought to look to Black theology and Black people for a recovery of that vision.¹⁹¹

By following this lead, we may learn to more faithfully worship Jesus Christ the Liberator and Peacemaker by living our discipleship in solidarity with those on the margins, hearing the One Word of God ever anew.

¹⁹⁰ Drew Hart, "Anablacktivism", 208.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 213.

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