THE POLITICS OF JESUS

Jesus had radical social ethics and so should his followers

A simplified summary of John H. Yoder's classic book

by Nathan Hobby with James Patton

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INTRODUCTION

The 'politics of Jesus' is an offensive or dangerous phrase for most evangelicals. This is part of the reason for its importance as a title both of Yoder's book, and this summary of it. Yoder presents us (paradoxically) with a pacifist Jesus who did not come to bring 'peace' (in the sense of unity in compromise) but a 'sword' (of truth and justice). *The Politics of Jesus* is an incendiary, revolutionary book which brought me face to face with Jesus Christ and left me wanting more people to have the same experience. It is an uncategorisable classic that, in some senses, covers all of theology in laying out the social ethics of Jesus, their pre-emption in the Old Testament and their lived reality in the early church.

While Yoder's book was mainly addressed to liberals and moderates in the context of academic theology, this summary is written with the disenchanted or progressive lay evangelical in mind, who has a decent general knowledge and has been around churches for a while, but hasn't necessarily done any specialised study or read any theology books before. This, of course, has meant a change in emphasis and detail for some of what Yoder wrote. It also means that at times Yoder's discussion is irrelevant or incomprehensible to the lay evangelical.

I have generally kept Yoder's original headings and structure. I have omitted a couple of his most complicated and least important arguments.

The revision restores the last few paragraphs of Chapter 3, which were accidentally omitted in the first edition. It also corrects numerous small errors, while undoubtedly leaving others, and clarifies some of the arguments. The appendix of other resources has been updated, as has of course this introduction.

James Patton (chapter 11) and I prepared this book in mid-2003 as a weekly course to give an entry level understanding of what Yoder was talking about. It was the time of the Iraq War, and this was very much on our minds. As I prepare the revisions for the second editions, all of the references to this seem just as relevant.

We wrote week by week, on the run. With the help of Brad and Marina Schilling, Ian and Ann Duckham, my brother Joshua and the attendance of many others, we served a simple meal each week in the Christian Centre for Social Action, read the weekly summary, and then had a discussion. It was a modest course with often modest attendance, and yet in these humble meetings we Perth Anabaptists felt greatly encouraged and moved.

After these meetings, James, Joshua and I joined the house church the Schillings and Duckhams had begun - named the Perth Anabaptist Fellowship. Teresa and Jarrod, who had been coming along to the Yoder studies, also started attending and suddenly the church was booming! We've since been joined by most of the Peace Tree community Joshua and Jarrod have helped establish in Lockridge. Our Sunday meetings rotate between five houses across the metro area.

I have since written a more basic series of six studies that form an introduction to Anabaptist Christianity for people with no previous understanding of church or education. It's called *The Body of Christ* and can be found at www.geocities.com/savageparade/body .

The Politics of Jesus study book has generated quite a lot of thinking since the appearence of the first edition. My friends Sarah Wadley and Simon Barns did several of the studies in their cell group attached to Mount Pleasant Uniting. Nicole James read it online and started coming along to Perth Anabaptist Fellowship. A review also appeared in the national Anabaptist newsletter, *On The Road*.

You might like to run a similar course to the one we did. The sharing of a common meal is very important to the kind of ideas expressed here. Or else you might like to study this as part of your Bible Study group. It will lead you over the whole New Testament and stimulate the thinking and acting of everyone who loves Jesus. Or, of course, you can also study this by yourself as an accessible introduction to a book which is hard going even for theology students. Feel free to photocopy and distribute as you see fit. Should you wish to contact me or anyone in the Anabaptist movement, contact details are provided in the appendix. I welcome feedback.

Yoder died soon after his 70th birthday in 1997. He was an American Mennonite and a former student of the most influential theologian of the twentieth century, Karl Barth. From speaking to those who knew him, the Duckhams and the Hursts among them, he was a brilliant, unsociable genius with genuine prophetic insight. His work continues to be very influential today. A brief guide to his work and that of related thinkers is found in the appendix.

In an attempt to make this work as accessible as possible, key terms which might not be understood have an asterisk (*) next to them the first time they appear in each chapter and are defined in the glossary at the end of the work. I have erred on the side of caution in choosing what to define, so there may be some terms which are very obvious to you.

- Nathan Hobby, January 2005
E-mail: nathanhobby@gmail.com
Web: http://perthanabaptists.wordpress.com

chapter 1
The possibility of a messianic ethic

1. The problem

In this book, Yoder confronts the linked problems that, firstly the church fails to understand Jesus as the radical figure he was, and secondly, a huge chasm exists between who Jesus was and what the church often does. Yoder wants to recover the social ethics that stem from following Jesus.

New Testament scholars are realising that Jesus was a radical man who defied a lot of what his society stood for and who had a vision of what our common life and actions should look like. However, because the most visible people acting out any of this radicalness today are hippies, anti-globalisation protestors and socialists who get equal inspiration from Jesus, Gandhi and Che Guevra, the church has tended to dismiss the idea that following Jesus entails a counter-cultural lifestyle. Instead, because for centuries 'Christians' have been in the majority, being a Christian involves being a conforming member of the state.

2. Mainstream Christian ethics: Jesus is not the norm

What excuses does the church usually offer for not imitating Christ and following in his footsteps? Generally, Jesus is made irrelevant for social ethics in one of five different ways:

1. 'Interim' Ethic - Jesus thought the world was about to end and so he wasn't bothered with being practical. His ethical teachings don't pay attention to the fact that stable society has to survive.

2. Jesus was a simple, rural man talking to 'fishermen and peasants, lepers and outcasts.' His personal ethics can only be applied in such a simplistic society. His ethics can't be used for a complex, developed society like our own in the same way that village economics can't apply to big business.

3. Jesus and his followers were a minority without power. Thus they didn't have to be responsible. But since Christianity took the 'reins of power' at the time of the first Christian emperor, Constantine, Christians have to face up to their responsibilities of governing and get 'realistic'.

4. Jesus dealt with *spiritual* and not social matters. As Paul helps clarify in Romans and his other letters, the gospel does not have social implications. Instead, it's a case of inner conversion and atonement rather than obedience. The extreme commands he gives in his teaching are just to remind us how impossible it is to be saved on our own part. They are an evangelism tool designed to get people to repent and ask Jesus into their hearts.

5. Jesus did not come to provide an example, but to die on the cross and be raised again in order that our sins might be paid for. The gospel is not about *works* but about *faith*.

This list of excuses for irrelevance apply most often to what is called the 'established' or 'state' church - that is, the Church of England and the Church of Scotland; the Lutheran church, and, to some extent, the Roman Catholic church. Today in Australia, the Anglican and Uniting churches best represent the established church tradition,

especially where the preachers and parishioners have what is known as a 'liberal bent'.

However, number four and five are also particularly relevant to the dominant force in Australian religion - evangelicalism and its relatives, pentecostalism and fundamentalism.

Within these traditions, the point is not usually that Jesus' ethics are irrelevant, but that they are 'inner' requirements not meant to be taken too literally. Thus Jesus words on the rich have a final meaning of a call to 'inner detachment' toward wealth. We should love our personal enemies and our nation's enemies in a 'personal way' but alas this will sometimes involves invading and/or killing them.

As in numbers four and five, the gospels are frequently understood in the terms that we are taught to understand Romans and Paul's other letters - personal sin, repentance and salvation. Yoder will go on in this chapter to challenge (briefly) this understanding of Paul as well as the idea that the letters in the New Testament should 'trump' (rule our understanding of) the gospels.

3. What other norm is there?

All these approaches assume that we will have to get our ethics from somewhere other than Jesus. Theology ('what we believe') will relate a *little* bit to ethics ('what we do') but not too much.

But what other sources or norms for ethics are there?

The most common source is the theology of the natural. This means deciding ethics on the basis of what is 'realistic', 'responsible' and 'relevant', 'effective' and 'efficient'. We can discern what is right by following our common sense in looking at the world around us.

Having swallowed these excuses, we read them into the New Testament. The Romans and Jews were mistaken about Jesus. They thought he was a threat to the social order, but in fact he was proclaiming that people should change their *inward* spirit.

Fortunately, for people who believe this, Paul came along and corrected the misunderstanding of the Romans and the Jews. Paul helped people realise that Jesus did *not* have a radical social agenda. Instead, he was actually encouraging positive respect for the institutions of society, even to the silencing of women and the keeping of slaves. Thus Paul, apparently, made the church realise that Jesus was not going to change the external acts of people too much.

This whole way of thinking has a number of problems, including:

1. If Jesus' disciples and enemies misunderstood him so greatly and the obvious meaning of what he was saying needed to be corrected by an ethic of social survival and order, is there such a thing as a *Christian* ethic at all?

2. In what sense was Jesus fully human (incarnated) if what he did is not what we are supposed to try to do?

Having realised these problems, the next step we are going to take is to read the Gospel story with a new question: 'Are there social ethics in here?' Or to put it in another way, 'Did Jesus want his followers to have a unique style of life and if so, what was it?'

Thus *The Politics of Jesus* has two tasks:

1. To sketch an understanding of Jesus and his ministry which shows his social ethics.

2. To put the case for believing that Jesus is the guide by which we should lead our common life now.

To make it simpler and shorter, Yoder concentrates mainly on the gospel of Luke. Any other gospel could have been used, but it is often

said of Luke that he had a concern to show the political and social *harmlessness* of Jesus. Thus, if we can show social ethics in Luke, we will have passed the hardest test.

Yoder will be trying to recapture the story, looking more at events than at teachings. He won't be saying anything original; this understanding of Luke comes from the work of others. He'll just be one of the first to apply it to current social ethics.

Discussion

1. *Is WWJD a good slogan?*
2. *In practice, does it mean the same thing as what Yoder seems to be talking about?*
3. *What approaches toward Jesus' radical words and deeds have you come across?*

chapter 2: THE KINGDOM COMING

The political aspects of Jesus's life - reading Luke with new eyes

1. Mary the revolutionary? (Luke 1:46ff, 68ff; cf 3:7)

Mary's prayer at the beginning of Luke, 'The Magnificat', has become so familiar that we have lost its shock value. It's revolutionary, in the mode of the Maccabeans* (and later, the Zealots*) who opposed the Romans with force –

> *'He has shown strength with his arm*
> *He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts*
> *He has put down the mighty from their thrones,*
> *And exalted those of low degree;*
> *He has filled the hungry with good things,*
> *And the rich he has sent away empty.'*

What Mary is saying is that the one whose birth is being announced is an agent of radical social change - he is coming to break the bondage of his people.

We've been too used to reading these with the assumption that all this is to be taken 'spiritually'. But is this what Luke wanted us to understand?

In the same chapter, Zechariah then talks about the birth of John as meaning 'that we shall be saved from our enemies...' Soon after John is preaching 'Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees...'

So, okay, maybe John the Baptist was hoping for a revolution, for a change to the social order - but he was wrong, wasn't he? Jesus soon came and set the record straight?

No.

If this was the case, Luke would have begun his story by warning us how wrong Mary, Zechariah and John were in their expectations. But he offers no such correction - he just tells us that the hope of those expecting the saviour was the political and social rescue of the Israelites.

2. The political importance of the temptations in the desert (Lk 3:21-4:14)

'You are my Son', spoken by a voice from heaven, is not simply an observation about Jesus' nature or origin. It is the summons to a task. Jesus is summoned to be the messianic son and servant, the bearer of God's goodwill and the fulfilment of his promises; the King of the Jews. The mission is made clearer with the testing which follows.

The Tempter (Satan) tempts Jesus with different ways of fulfilling his mission - different ways of being king. Unfortunately we are used to looking on this passage as a purely personal and fleshly temptation. But it was much more than this.

The first temptation to turn the boulders into bread is the economic option - to use his power to establish a kingdom based on the buying of loyalty, on economic reward.

In the second temptation, Jesus is offered rule over the whole world if only he will bow to the Tempter.

Is this an invitation to join a satanic cult? Would Jesus have taken such a suggestion remotely seriously? The meaning is much clearer and more concrete when we see Jesus being tempted by the idolatrous* nature of power madness and nationalism*. The way of Satan is not so much death metal music and pentagons as co-ercive*, evil use of power to the ends of nationalism.

The third temptation to jump off the temple roof is surely *not* about an acrobatic marvel to prove Jesus' wonder-worker status. Instead, it quite possibly refers to the penalty for blasphemy in Jewish law - being thrown down from a tower in the temple wall, followed by stoning. Thus Jesus was tempted to take on the penalty for his claim to divine authority - execution - but then to miraculously escape the consequences. It is a recurring temptation, put again by Peter and by Jesus' neighbour on the cross. Yet as we know, Jesus chose to suffer the punishment fully and was killed.

3. Jesus' platform speech (Lk 4:14ff)

In Luke, Jesus starts his public ministry by reading from Isaiah 61 - a passage that expresses hope for the Messiah in explicitly social terms:

> *'He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor,*
> *He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives;*
> *And recovering of sight to the blind;*
> *To set at liberty the oppressed,*
> *And proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord'*

To the Jews at the Nazareth synagogue, 'the acceptable year of the Lord' meant the jubilee year of Leviticus 25 - the time when all the debts and inequities accumulated through the years are crossed off and God's people will begin again at the same point. *Jesus has come to bring to Palestine the equalising impact of the sabbath year!*

Jesus' fulfilment of this prophecy is through his visible restructuring of the social relations among the people of God. A new order was in town, one where the rich would give to the poor, the captives would be freed and the hearers would gain a new mentality.

4. Jesus reaffirms his platform speech (Lk 6:12ff)

Jesus moves to Capernaum (4:31) and Luke reports a rising tide of effectiveness among the multitudes, the sick and the tax-collectors. The religious establishment soon objects, firstly to Jesus claiming the authority to forgive (5:21) and then to the bad company he keeps (5:30). Quickly the opposition mounts to the point of angry scheming (6:11).

It is at this time that Jesus, after a night long vigil, names twelve key messengers, the 'firstfruits'* of the restored Israel. *To organised opposition he responds with the founding of a new social reality!*

New teachings are no threat while the leader stands alone; however, a movement extending his personality in both time and space is a real threat to the system. It challenges the system as no mere words can.

In the sermon on the plain, Jesus sets out a new covenant* using the standard ancient structure of blessings and woes. Gentiles (non-Jews) from Tyre and Sidon are among the crowd.

Interestingly, at this point Jesus uses only personal and economic issues as specimens of the New Way. An essential part of primitive Christianity was refusing to reclaim property and forgiving people's defaulted loans. Many later Christian traditions have focussed mainly on the sexual and private spheres.

5. The bread in the desert (Lk 9:1-22; John 6)

Luke's account of the sending of the twelve (9:1-10), the feeding of the crowd (9:11-17) and the first confession of Peter, is not as clear as the account in John 6.

The crowd of thousands were not the hard core of tested disciples but the first wave of more casual seekers coming to see if the kingdom announced by the twelve is real. As the tempter said it would, the feeding of the crowd moves it to acclaim Jesus as the New Moses, the Welfare King they had been waiting for.

He withdraws from them because he knows his ministry wasn't to be like this: it was to be a ministry of suffering, and the disciples would need to suffer with him. Peter says that the Christ should not suffer and Jesus rebukes him sternly. In John, many disciples withdraw because it's 'a hard saying' (John 6:60, 66). It is now that Jesus 'sets his face to go to Jerusalem' – to be crucified.

Thus the bread in the desert is one of the hinges of Jesus' ministry. It is the climax of the time of popularity in Galilee. After this point, Jesus focusses more on the disciples and the approach to Jerusalem. 'Going to Jerusalem' (9:51) is like a subtitle for the second third of Luke's book.

The first explicit mention of the cross reveals that it is an alternative to both violent rebellion (the Zealots) and to passive withdrawal from society (the Essenes*).

6. The cost of following Jesus (Lk 12:49-13:9; 14:25-36)

Just as multitudes begin accompanying Jesus he speaks a severe word of warning that 'If anyone does not hate father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.' The point of this warning is not how literally we should take 'hate'. No - the point is that in a society of very stable family ties, Jesus is calling into being a community of *voluntary* commitment, willing to take the hostility of the rest of society.

(Notably, while modern churches try to make membership attractive to the great number, Jesus makes it hard.)

Jesus keeps on warning people - to be a disciple is to share in the style of life that culminates in the cross.

The warning is repeated later when the disciples clamour over who will be made greater in the coming kingdom (Luke 22:25). He doesn't tell them off for expecting a new *social* order instead of a 'spiritual only' kingdom. Instead, he tells them off for misunderstanding the *way* this new social order will operate - 'The kings of this earth lord it over their subjects; but it won't be like this among you... for I am among you as one who serves.'

Jesus' kingdom isn't unusual because it's invisible. Instead, it's unusual because its leader is a servant. Just think about how different to our 'kings' is King Jesus, who washed his followers' feet not as a public stunt, but in private, as a permanent way of operating. *The alternative to how the kings of the earth rule is not 'spirituality' but 'servanthood'.*

7. The clearing of the temple (Lk 19:36-46)

After the long journey since 9:51, Jesus finally makes it into Jerusalem in chapter 19. He comes as a king riding a donkey - an undeniably *political* figure who is also undeniably *different* to how other kings have always been.

After the triumphant entry, Jesus weeps at the gates of the city, because he knows it is going to refuse to recognise him; indeed, it is going to execute him.

Next, Jesus takes over the temple, driving out the animals and starting a daily teaching presence.

The Jewish authorities want to kill him for his non-violent takeover of the temple. If the clearing of the temple had been illegal, there would have been clear legal grounds for action against him. If he had assaulted the money-changers, he could have been arrested on the spot. However, there are no grounds for actions against him and ultimately the authorities have to incite lies to convict him.

Thus, the fact that *he did nothing illegal* suggests that he did *not* use violence.

Recent careful analysis of the Greek translates, for example, John's account (2:15) as '[he] drove all the animals out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle' (Today's English Version/ Good News Bible) rather than the King James 'he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep and the oxen' which suggests he violently threw out the sellers.

The question about the denarii comes soon after this. These days, Jesus' answer to 'render unto Caesar's what is Casesar's' has been twisted by spiritualisers to mean that Jesus was staying out of politics.

Instead, Jesus means that government claims and God's claims exist on the same level and it is our job as the church to untangle them faithfully. The loyalty God expects from us sometimes conflicts with the government. *Especially* when this happens, we must consider what is 'Caesar's' due.

8. Jesus' final rejection of the temptation to violence or avoiding suffering (Lk 22:24-53)

Jesus cries in agony, 'Let this cup pass from me!' What did he mean? What was the alternative to suffering after the huge tensions that had built up after the cleansing of the temple? Quiet withdrawal into the desert? Could he have made it up with the authorities by retracting some of his inflammatory remarks?

Not likely.

The only real possibility is that Jesus was tempted once again at this last moment by the possibility of messianic violence. 'Now's finally the time for holy war!'

All four gospels report Peter's use of the sword in legitimate defence; in Matthew, Luke and John it is interpreted in such a way to suggest that it is symbolic of a deeper struggle. John uses the language of Jesus' earlier prayer in Jesus' rebuke of Peter - 'Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?'

In Matthew, Jesus goes on to say, 'Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled that it must be so?'

Each legion has about six thousand soldiers. An option open to Jesus is God unleashing seventy two thousand angels to fight on the side of the disciples and the agitated crowds and overthrow the Roman soldiers, driving the heathen out of the holy city as Zechariah had predicted.

This is Jesus' third chance to take violent rule - the first was after the feeding of the five thousand; the second was in the clearing of the temple. Just as the tempter comes three times to Jesus in the desert, so the Zealot option rises three times through the gospel. And for the third and final time, Jesus renounces the crusade, the holy war.

9. Execution and glory (Lk 23-24)

Luke tells us that Jesus' fellow prisoner, Barabbas, was imprisoned for insurrection and emphasises the irony of the situation - 'He released the man who had been imprisoned for insurrection and murder, whom they asked for; but Jesus he delivered up to their will.'

It's in the story of the trial that spiritualising interpretation appeals to how misunderstood Jesus was - he never really meant to bother the established order. Yet the fact remains that it was for this reason that the authorities brought him to trial.

In the course of the trial, he does not act or say anything to correct people's 'misunderstanding' that he had come to *challenge* the established order. In actual fact, it seems the Jewish and Roman authorities were defending themselves against a real threat. Not a threat of armed revolt but a threat of a *non-violent* revolt. (This proves the political relevance of non-violent tactics.)

After the resurrection, the disciples' observation that 'We had hoped he would be the one to redeem Israel' (24:21) is not another example of their failure to get Jesus 'real point'. No - it is how those close to Jesus saw him. Jesus' rebuke is not that they are looking for a kingdom when they shouldn't have been, but that they were failing to see that the Messiah's suffering *is* the inauguration of the kingdom.

Jesus says to them, 'Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' "Glory" cannot meant the ascension to heaven here - because that hasn't happened yet. Might it not mean instead that the cross itself is the fulfilment of the kingdom promise?

The cross is not a detour on the way to the kingdom or a hurdle to it, nor is it even the way to the kingdom; it is the kingdom come.

In short, Jesus was not just a moralist whose teachings had some political dimensions. Nor was he primarily a spiritual teacher whose teachings were unfortunately seen in a political light. He was not just a sacrificial lamb biding time to his sacrifice.

He was, instead, in his prophethood, priesthood, and kingship, the bearer of a new possibility of human, social and therefore political relationships. His baptism is the start and the cross and resurrection the culmination of the new regime which his disciples are called to share.

No informed reading of his life can avoid his call to a life marked by the cross, a cross which was the punishment of a man who threatens society by creating a new kind of community leading a radically new way of life.

Discussion

1.(a) What interpretation does Yoder make of Jesus' use of the whip in the temple?

(b) If Yoder is wrong and the text does say that Jesus chased people out with the whip, what practical differences would this make in following Jesus' methods?

2. (a) According to Jesus, why does Jesus regard the Crusade/ holy war as wrong?
(b) What is the significance of Jesus refusing the Crusade for our lives? Ie: what forms might the temptation to Crusade take as individuals and as the church? If we are to reject these temptations, what will our alternative response be?

3. What 'lessons' do preachers usually pull out of these various events in Luke?

4. If we are to seek faithful creative analogies to our present situation, what is the form the temptation to popularity (bread) and avoiding suffering (the temple) might take for the church today?

5. One criticism I would make of Yoder's analysis in this chapter is that he does not reckon adequately with the other side of the cross: resurrection. What political significance might resurrection have? Suggestion - the resurrection is the future (eschatological) promise by which the church must endure the cross it bears now.

chapter 3
The Implications of the Jubilee

Did Jesus proclaim the restart of the jubilee (sabbath) year? This chapter aims to show the evidence in the gospels that he did just this.

The jubilee year consisted of four practices:

(1) leaving the soil unplanted (fallow)
(2) cancelling debts
(3) letting slaves go
(4) each family gets back its original property.

Yoder will be looking at the gospels for possible references to these policies.

1. The Fallow Year

Jesus does not speak directly about leaving the soil fallow. But this makes sense, because this is the only one of the four practices that was commonly followed at the time - he didn't need to tell the Jews to do it.

It took a lot of courage for the Jews to leave their fields fallow every seven years, counting on God to give them what they needed. Many worried. Leviticus 25:20-21 reassures the Israelites:

> *'If you say: "what will we eat the seventh year, since we will not sow nor harvest?" - I will give you my blessing on the sixth year and it will produce enough for three years.*

Jesus used similar language to reassure his disciples who had left their fields and their fishing boats to follow him in Lk 12:29-31:

> *'So don't be upset, always concerned about what you will eat and drink. (For the pagans of this world are always concerned about all these things.) Your Father knows that you need these things. Instead, be concerned with his Kingdom, and he will provide you with these things.'*

This can be misunderstood as encouraging laziness. It makes more sense if we understand that Jesus and the disciples were expecting the Kingdom of God, of which the jubilee was one of the first events. So to paraphrase the text to make it clearer, Jesus says:

> *'If you work six days (or six years) with all your heart, you can count on God to take care of you and your family. So without fear leave your fields unplanted. As God provides for the birds (who don't do any sowing or harvesting) so He will provide for your needs. The Gentiles who pay no attention to the sabbath are not richer than you.'*

2. Cancelling debt and freeing slaves

In contrast to the fallow fields, the second and third policies of the jubilee are central to the teaching and thought pattern of Jesus.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus says, literally, 'remit us our debts as we ourselves have remitted them to our debtors.' Numerous translations 'correct' Jesus' words by substituting 'forgive' and 'offences'.

This is misleading. The Greek word, *opheilema* means precisely a monetary debt. So, in the Lord's Prayer Jesus is not just vaguely telling us to pardon those who have bothered us. No - he is telling us purely and simply to erase the debts of those who owe us money - in other words, to practice the jubilee.

In Matthew, Jesus adds an extra clause at the end of the Lord's Prayer to make sure people understand that the principle about erasing debts apply to wrongs as well. [Mt 6:14-15]

The Lord's Prayer is a jubilee prayer. It means 'The time has come for the faithful people to abolish all the debts which bind the poor ones of Israel, for your debts toward God are also wiped away (for that is the gospel, the good news)."

Under Herod's policies, Galilean landowners were often enslaved by huge debts and taxes. They would borrow from bankers to pay up. This was only transferring the debt. The bankers would eventually seize the property and to recover their money, it was common practice for the bankers to sell the whole family into slavery and auction off the family's possessions.[0]

'The unmerciful servant' of the parable in Mt 18:23-25 is in this situation. He is in increasing debt, loses property and then loses his liberty. But then the jubilee year is proclaimed and the king forgives the servant his debt.

So far so good. But the story has a bitter end - one that reflects Jesus' disappointment that most of the Israelites, even the humble had refused him the jubilee. The freed servant meets one of his fellow peasants who owes him money and he demands for him to pay up. He doesn't extend the jubilee grace he was given to others. The servant is put before the king. The king orders that he be sold into slavery for there is no divine jubilee for those who refuse to apply it on Earth.

Yoder goes on to discuss some technical matters about the mispractice of the jubilee in Jesus time which we won't try to explain in this guide.

3. The redistribution of capital

Jesus states very clearly that we should redistribute capital: 'Sell all your belongings and give the money to the poor.' (Lk 12:33)

Many Christians deny is that this applies to all Christians. Usually it's taken as just a counsel of perfection for the minister or missionary. The ordinary believer can be satisfied with doing 'charity'.

But the people of Jesus' time who believed this very same thing were the Pharisees, and Jesus was savage with them on this issue. The Pharisees tithed all their income. A lot of churchgoers don't even do *that* today!

But Jesus considered the tithe insufficient: "How terrible for you Pharisees! You give God a tenth of everything, even the seasoning herbs like mint and rue but you neglect justice and love for God. These you should be practicing without neglecting the others.' (Lk 11:42) ('Everything' and 'even' added for clarification.)

Jesus did not wish to abolish tithes. He wished only to go beyond the level of easy fulfilment and easy moral self satisfaction which could be had by giving the tithe, and to call people to 'righteousness, goodness, and good faith.'

What did he mean by these last three phrases? Probably the gratuitous act whereby the disciple gives away his or her means of 'security' - capital.

Yoder translates the lesson from the parable of the poor widow who put in her last money: 'The quantity of money that you give is of little importance. What is important is *what* you give. If it is only a part of your income, then this is not yet righteousness, goodness, and good faith. If it is capital, savings, security that you give, then everything is in order.'

Still, Yoder does not believe that Jesus prescribed Christian communism. When he said 'sell what you possess and practice compassion,' he wasn't creating a constitution for a communist state. Neither was he just giving an impossible ideal for pastors and missionaries.

Instead, he was calling for a jubilee levelling in AD 26, a 'refreshment' giving a taste of the 're-establishment of all things.'

Today, such a redistribution of capital every forty-nine years in expectation of the kingdom would not be utopian. If the Christian church had been more faithful to the jubilee than Israel, many bloody revolutions would have been avoided.

4. Oversimple relevance

Yoder provides an epilogue saying that Jesus meant the jubilee to be a permanently defining trait of the new order - not a literal forty-nine year pattern. This seems to contradict his point from the last paragraph. Unfortunately he's not with us to clarify.

Making the jubilee a permanent trait of the new order would fit in with the way Jesus fulfilled and surpassed the Law by taking the ideas underlying it and making them permanent - like murder extending to angry thoughts and adultery to lustful ones.

A permanent state of jubilee also fits well with what we read about the life of the early church in Acts - eg 2:42-47; 4:32-36; 11:29-30. Yoder's understanding of Jesus' instructions seems to fit in with what the disciples understood also.

Discussion

(1) (a) What interpretation does Yoder make of the Lord's Prayer?
(b) Extend his analysis to the rest of the prayer?

(2) What was the reasoning behind the fallow year for the fields? (You may have to look up Leviticus.) What creative analogies might we find for our time?

(3) What support or challenge to this understanding of Jesus' teaching and practice is offered by the rest of the New Testament - Acts, Paul and the other writings?

(4) What types of economic evils occur today and how are they similar or different to Jesus' day? Also, has the Judeo-Christian jubilee tradition had any positive effect on society through the centuries?

(5) Obviously, economic relief is part of a wider pattern of a holy lifestyle. What type of guidelines might we follow in the church in relieving debts and redistributing income to ensure that it is not abused by the wasteful or dishonest? Suggestions: Accountability? Simple living? Mutual admonishment?

chapter 4 - GOD WILL FIGHT FOR US

'Pacifism? What about the Old Testament!'

In this chapter Yoder asks us to read the Old Testament like a Jew

When we 21st century Christians look at the Old Testament with the question of war in mind, we usually ask the wrong questions. .

We start with the broad question 'is war always contrary to the will of God?' and then when we see the wars in the Old Testament which are reported as having been according to the will of God, we can answer 'No, war is not always contrary to the will of God.' In this way, we are able to destroy the position of Christians who reject all war.

But the Old Testament was not written with our questions in mind. Nor did Jesus and the Israelites *read* the Old Testament with our questions in mind. Instead, for them, the Old Testament was primarily the story of their identity.

This being the case, one of the main traits of the Old Testament is the idea that **YHWH is the God who saves his people without their needing to fight**. When *we* read the OT to test a contemporary moral statement like the one we started with, we are struck by wars apparently sanctioned by God. Yet the *Israelites* reading the story were more likely to be struck by something else - the way Israel was continually saved by the mighty deeds of God on their behalf.

What follows is a reading of the Old Testament as Jesus and other believing Israelites made. The Old Testament's account of war and violence should be compared to the cultural norms of its time, instead of being read against *our* cultural norms.

1. The Exodus

The one clear thing which emerges from the different parts of the Exodus story is that the Israelites did nothing to destroy the Egyptians. The only call to them was to believe and obey. When they did, the menace of the Egyptian army hanging over them disappeared.

> *The Lord will fight for you*
> *All you have to do is be still*
> *- Exodus 14:13*

In Exodus 17 the battle against the Amalekites has a similar pattern. The battle comes after the people have been complaining heaps and want a sign of YHWH's presence; they decide on their own steam to start a fight. The battle goes against them every time Moses lowers the symbolic rod of God. They win only when he holds it aloft. Their fighting prowess counts for nothing; it's only whether or not Moses is holding his rod up. Victory is not attributed to the skill of the soldiers or generals but to the help of YHWH.

What might we learn from these examples?

In understanding texts we need to start by reading it as the author wanted it to be read, and as its first readers would have read it. Reading and telling these stories, the readers would have been struck by the idea that if Israel would believe and obey, its enemies would be driven out.

The question of whether it was ever moral to take human life was not a culturally conceivable question in the age of Abraham or Joshua. There was not the cultural language to ask it. The writers of the Pentateuch were not trying to answer this question.

Instead, what we should look for in the life of Ancient Israel is God at work in the cultural context of his people.

What was the behaviour encouraged by these and other biblical writings? Not to go and kill in God's name! Instead, in the midst of militarism, the Israelites were encouraged to stop and obey YHWH instead, who does not work through the strength of mighty soldiers.

To further illustrate Yoder's point, I will draw an analogy to the issue of slavery in the New Testament.

While there is no clear mandate in the NT for society to abolish slavery, there are transformations of the dominant culture of the time. Paul declared that Christ had abolished the cultural distinctions between slave and free; all were to be treated with the same dignity by Christians. *And yet* his advice to slaves was *not* to violently escape their position but to *submit* with reverence to their masters, like Christ did. *And yet* Paul pleads with master Philemon, as a friend and brother of Onenius the slave to free him from slavery.

The seeds of the anti-slavery movement are clearly present in the New Testament, even though the writers are not plucked from their cultural context to express these seeds in twenty-first century language.

2. The Time of the Two Kingdoms

In the Old Testament, wars are often the result of Israel and its kings not trusting YHWH.

In 2 Chr 14, the four times as strong Ethiopian army flees before the army of the Southern Israelite Kingdom (Judah) because of the Lord's intervention.

Soon after in chapter 16, King Asa forgets his lesson and makes an alliance with another king against his sister kingdom, the Northern Israelites. In response, the prophet Hannai condemns Asa for relying on political and military resources:

> *"Because you relied on the king of Syria*
> *And did not rely on the YHWH your God*
> *The army of the king of Syria has escaped you*
> *Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army*
> *With exceedingly many chariots and horsemen?*
> *Yet because you relied on YHWH*
> *He gave them into your hand.*
> *For the eyes of YHWH run to and fro*
> *Throughout the whole earth,*
> *To show his might on behalf of those*
> *Whose heart is blameless toward him.*
> *You have done foolishly in this;*
> *From now on you will have wars."*

In chapter 20, the whole population of Judah meets the enemy with a worship ceremony led by a prophet. As they advance they find that the enemy has mutinied in its own ranks and been destroyed.

In chapter 32/ 2 Kings 18-19, the enemy army makes all sorts of boasts but is destroyed by the angel of the Lord in one night, without the Israelites doing anything.

3. After the Exile

Israel looked back on its history as one of miraculous preservation. Sometimes this was seen to include military activity; at other times no weapons were used at all. In all cases, trust in YHWH was seen as the faithful alternative to the self-determining use of their army to defend their existence as God's people.

Yoder stresses that in summing up the OT like this, he is *not* trying to recover the actual historical events behind the OT or whether the Israelites used weapons in any of these cases. Instead, he has been trying to show what it meant for Jesus and his disciples to read this story in their Bibles.

With this focus, we can understand that the people expecting 'the consolation of Israel' we read about at the beginning of Luke were likely to have seen the miraculous deliverances of the Old

Testament story as the pattern by which God would save his people now. So, when Jesus proclaimed his message of liberty and revolution by the restoration of the kingdom community without referring to violent means, the Israelites listening wouldn't have just dismissed him as a dreamer. Instead, he would probably have been understood as another in the line of prophets who said that a believing people would be saved despite their weakness on condition that they 'be still and wait to see the salvation of the Lord.'

This background of Jewish belief in 'a God who fights for them' has a big effect on the meaning of Jesus' kingdom speeches like the Sermon on the Plain and the 'year of the Lord's favour' declaration. We realise two things:

(a) Readers today lack this hope and faith. Thus a time of jubilee or the miraculous retreat of an enemy occupier seems impossible. For this reason, they decide that Jesus could not have meant what he said and they look for symbolic or spiritual meanings. But since Jesus' listeners were believing Jews, these things were seen as possible - they had happened before.

(b) Jesus message of the kingdom was unacceptable to most listeners *not* because they thought it *couldn't* happen but because they thought it *might* and would result in a loss of their privilege and control.

The Israelites believed that the mighty acts of God in Israel's history occurred not as an apocalyptic end of time event but in time and history as we know it. Thus it is reasonable to assume that believers saw the jubilee and the kingdom in the same concrete terms they understood the Exodus. The jubilee and the kingdom were not just utopian ideals coming about at the end of time - they were the here and now.

Discussion

(1) What is Yoder suggesting about how Jesus would have understood the Old Testament?

(2) What is different between the idea 'God will fight for us' and the idea that many readers of today might take out of the Old Testament? ('God ordered the Israelites to fight'/ 'The Israelites weren't "pacifists"'?)

(3) If 'God will fight for us' is a major theme of the Old Testament, where does it show through in Jesus' thinking? How about in Acts and the letters?

(4) What modifications do Jesus and Paul make to this theme?

(5) With this reading in mind, how (and to who) might it have applied in the recent Iraq War?

chapter 5

Non-violent resistance is possible!

Readers these days can't imagine any options Jesus genuinely had for social change. This is reinforced by the belief that the only way to resist the Romans was the violent way put forward by the Zealots*. In the last chapter, Yoder laid out the Jewish belief that divine intervention was possible. What he did not do was suggest how the devout Jew would have believed such an intervention would take place, which is what this brief footnote chapter is about.

One important thing to consider is a case of effective non-violent resistance that would have been known by the first gospel readers.

Josephus was a famous secular Jewish historian of the first century. He wrote that at one stage Pilate decided to abolish the Jewish law. He set up idols of Caesar* in Jerusalem. When the Jews found out, they travelled to Pilate and argued with him for days to remove the idols. On the sixth day, he had the soldiers hide around the assembly area and when the Jews came, the army came out of hiding and surrounded them. Pilate told the people that unless they stopped disturbing him and went home, they would be immediately killed.

Instead, they lay themselves on the ground and said they would willingly die rather than allow their law to be broken. When this happened, Pilate was moved by their desire to uphold their law and he commanded the idols be removed from Jerusalem.

Later Pilate confiscated temple treasure and the Jews tried the same strategy. This time, however, Pilate gave them no warning or lenience and many were killed.

Soon after this, there was another act of resistance which Yoder describes as a Gandhi-like campaign.

A new Caesar, Caligula, was the first to demand formal worship of himself and got very angry when the Jews refused to do this. He ordered a Roman commander to put a statue of Caligula in the temple at Jerusalem. This was a repeat of the act that led to the Maccabean* wars a couple of centuries before Christ. This time the response was a general strike. Fields were left untilled and tens of thousands of Jews gathered to petition the Roman commander to remove the statue. The Jews insisted that they didn't want war with Caesar but were prepared to give their lives and those of their wives and children to prevent the threatened sacrilege. The Roman commander finally went back to Caesar Caligula and argued on the Jews' behalf.

So collective non-violent resistance by the Jews was successful against the Romans twice in a decade. The reaction was brought about by a threat to the heart of their religious identity and it happened without prior training or planning and without an ethical commitment which excluded all violence. (In other words, there would have been occasions when most Jews felt violence was an acceptable response. And yet even *these* extreme situations failed their criteria, and instead non-violent tactics were used.)

This does not mean that Jesus would have led similar campaigns if the crowds had accepted the whole of his message. But it does negate the big generalisation that in rejecting the Zealot option of violent revolution Jesus' only choices became waiting for the end of the world or retreating into the desert.

In other words, these examples show that to reject the 'responsible sword' (like that of modern just-war thinking) doesn't mean withdrawing from history and society and having nothing to do with political situations.

Discussion

(1) What situations might call for non-violent resistance for us in the near future?

(2) How would we go about it as the church?

chapter 6 - TRIAL BALANCE

Yoder's case so far and an outline of where his case will go from here

If you agree with Yoder so far, you will:

(a) accept social ethics were essential to Jesus' life and that he had a particular pattern of living in the world (like non-violent resistance; the jubilee)

(b) agree that Jesus wanted others to follow him in doing this.

However, you might still object that this stuff didn't make it past the gospels to the rest of the New Testament - probably because it couldn't be translated into to the non-Jewish cultural patterns of the Gentile church.

Yoder believes that arguing this point through every book of the NT would get boring. So instead, in the rest of the book he has decided to show at several different churches, at different time and places and in the writings of different Biblical authors the picture of Jesus he built up in the first five chapters holds true. He will be paying special attention to those passages which are usually seen as contradicting a political Jesus.

To test how the 'Jesus kind of life' got into the rest of the books of the Bible, Yoder is going to start by giving a summary of the issue and how he's going to approach it. That's what this chapter is all about.

1. From Luke to Paul

The epistles consistently talk of ethics in terms of the suffering of Christ. Particularly:

- Paul's ministry as a sharing in the dying and rising of Christ (2 Cor 4:10-11; Col 1:24)
- Suffering of all believers as the same sort of thing (Phil 1:29)
- As a model for marriage (Eph 5:25)
- As an attitude that will bring unity in the church (Phil 2:1-5)
- A slave obeys a cruel master because it models the same behaviour (1 Peter)

However, imitation is *not* used as a general guideline for Christian life - by this Yoder means that 'imitation of Christ' in his suffering is *not* extended to commands to imitate his celibacy, carpentry, or the itinerant lifestyle. St Francis* applies it at these points but the Bible does not. **The only point at which the New Testament church consistently and universally takes Jesus as its example is in following him in the way of the cross - that is, in its attitude toward the powers.**

This talk of the cross is familiar language for Christians. However, Yoder rejects the individualistic and internal way the cross has been understood. Instead, he believes we need to recapture its social character.

The believer's cross is not run of the mill daily burdens every human suffers - it is not sickness or tension or the most common forms of suffering. **Instead, the believer's cross is the price the believer pays for social non-conformity.** Unlike sickness or catastrophe, the cross is entirely avoidable. It's something that lies in the narrow path, freely chosen, after the believer has counted the cost. It means that we'll face hostility like Jesus did if we do what he did: that is, if we represent the divine new order at hand; if we refuse violence yet also refuse passive withdrawal from the problems of the world.

Since Jesus was human, he was tempted by things like pride, envy, laziness, anger, greed, gluttony and lust. However, the gospel writers didn't think it was important to concentrate on any of

them. Instead, the one temptation the gospels depict Jesus facing again and again is the temptation to be 'socially responsible' by using violent methods to achieve a violent revolution.

Social withdrawal isn't shown to be a real temptation; he excluded it at the beginning - yet this is the option Christians take part of the time. He also excluded the option of aligning himself with the Sadducees*, the Jews who sold out to the Romans and represented a conservative approach to politics (that of maintaining the status quo).

In the first chapter, we considered the idea that Jesus is not a model for political ethics because he had nothing to say on the subject. According to this idea, we have to consciously go and get our ethics from some other source - usually from a 'responsible' calculation of the likely effects and from our 'duty' to try to make things turn out as best as we can. Thus, since Jesus supposedly has nothing to say about the subject, we turn to nature or logic or history. Yet through the last chapters Yoder has put forward a very strong case - backed to some degree by all New Testament scholars - that Jesus *has* got something to say on the subject. Thus though we can refuse to follow Jesus' social ethics - that is, what he said and did - we cannot claim he is *irrelevant* to social ethics.

2. Back to the present

Yoder has already discussed some ways in which Jesus is removed from political relevance because of his humanness - for example, the idea that he thought the world was about to end and thus didn't care for the stability of society like he should have. But what about the other side? Some people divorce Jesus from his humanity and make him irrelevant in this way. The main ways this is done are as follows:

(a) Jesus had to die for the sin of human beings - this is something almost all Christians agree on. This was prophesised in Scripture and necessary because of God's holiness and human lostness. It might be seen as a ransom to purchase humanity's liberty from bondage, or an expiatory sacrifice to purge the stain of sin or as a substitute penalty for human sin. However it might be explained, Jesus knew he had to die for reasons unrelated to his social humanity. Thus the way it was carried out is irrelevant - all that had to happen was God become human and be killed and raise again. The details don't matter; they are just arbitrary specifics. Jesus didn't refuse violence and self defence because these were bad things - he refused them because it was the best way to ensure he got crucified.

(b) The early church quickly shifted from the local Jesus to the cosmic Christ* of Colossians. This cosmic Christ transcended the culturally specific nature of Judaism and Jesus' life and led the church to finally understand that God affirms the nature and structures of this world - its understanding of power and privilege; of wealth and violence. In other words, this view takes the majestic big statements about Jesus' divinity and uses them in the opposite way to Paul and the early church. While Paul used these claims to emphasise the importance and centrality of the Palestinian Jesus, this view uses them to emphasise that the Palestinian Jesus is *not* the definitive Christ.

(c) Another way to make almost the same point is to appeal to belief in the Trinity. The ethics of the Son found in Jesus of Nazareth need to be completed or corrected by the ethics of the Father and the ethics of the Spirit.

As Creator, the Father made the social structures of our world - so things like social order and armies are necessary to how the Father wants us to live in this world.

The ethic of the Holy Spirit is found in the tradition of the church - the decisions, arrangements and compromises which the church has made with society through history.

Together, these two correcting ethics largely overrule much of the ethic of Jesus.

(d) There's a fourth view taken by those who see a big difference between the Christ we read of in the gospels, reported by 'biased' believing followers, and the 'true' historical figure of Jesus. According to this view, we can't know what Jesus was really like and so we shouldn't rush in and follow an 'unhistorical' picture of Jesus.

This view underestimates the Gospel writers and the witness of faith in the early church. It also is watered down by the fact that if there was a big gap between the gospels and history, it seems to be that Jesus was *more* like the pacifist* revolutionary Yoder paints.

Yoder states that dealing with the many ways Christians excuse themselves from having to follow Jesus' ethic would take a long book different to the one he wants to write. But, what he will say is that the reading of the New Testament he is outlining does not *require* any of these redefinitions. Each of them believes there is a problem that requires adjusting the ethics of Jesus. Yoder has shown that this problem is with the *readers* - not with Jesus or the New Testament.

Yoder is not asking for an unheard of, modern way of viewing Christ's authority in our lives. No - instead, he is asking that the church takes more seriously the implications of what it has always taught about Jesus as Word of the Father, true God and true Human. **He is claiming that if Jesus is what the church has always taught, he needs to be seen as relevant to our social problems.**

But not just the relevance most Christians talk about. Not just the Reformed view that Jesus takes away our will and dampens our pride, sending us back to play the part society gives us - king, factory owner, slave, worker, executioner - with greater modesty and thoroughness. Not just the Puritan* tradition of a Christian country being improved to approach the theocratic - God ruled - ideal. Not just the quietist* tradition represented by some parts of Anabaptism that someone else should take care of the world 'out there'. But if not these then what? What should the shape of our 'Jesus-is-Lord' social responsibility be?

A lot of the problem is the way we debate these things in churches. We turn the issue into a choice between two options and then debate the merits of each, all the time missing the point. The whole debate needs to be changed. We can't let the standard fundamentalist/ liberal* duality constrain us. Yoder suggests five reformulations for a Christian social ethic that takes Jesus seriously. His goal is to change the questions we're asking. It's like a 'third way' in between the two offered by the mainstream. I have revised these into four to bring them in line with the sort of choices facing Christians thirty years later in 2003 in a church environment, rather than just the theology world Yoder concentrated on. We should:

1. Reject the idea that we must, in the name of Jesus choose between evangelical 'evangelism' and liberal 'social justice'.

The good news that Jesus proclaimed is not an invisible salvation ('faith') that occurs independent of what we do ('works'). The good news is tied up to the new order Jesus was starting - one of enemy love, of jubilee, of non-violence, of the melting away of distinctions that kept

people from fellowshipping with each other (Jew/ Gentile; slave/ free; Pharisee/ tax collector).

2. Reject the choice between the evangelical 'dogmatic' Christ and the liberal 'historical' Jesus.

The evangelical Christ leaps from birth to the cross with just one goal in mind: dying and rising to make a heavenly transaction which saves us all. The liberal Jesus of history, a reforming rabbi who calls us all to greater self awareness and freedom, and who we can choose how much of him we should follow. But for Yoder, Jesus the historical figure is one and the same with the salvific Christ.

3. Reject the idea that the only two ways we can understand 'God's kingdom' are as either: (i) a 'Christian country' where the president/ queen/ government are 'Christian' and make 'Christian' laws (ii) an inner, 'spiritual' reign over the individual heart

This idea assumes that when we talk about 'politics' we are talking just about government. It assumes that the only way to be 'political' is to govern and to govern with whatever means are necessary, sharing and accepting the duties and guilt of government. If you choose not to govern you are being apolitical and are more worried about other matters, like your salvation.

In doing this, it denies the powerful impact on society an alternative social group can cause. What about the green movement, which has an influence well beyond its parliamentary representation? What about the influence of the Klu Klux Klan movement in the USA? What about the influence of Gandhi in India? Because Jesus' rejection of the sword was politically relevant, the religious and political authorities had to kill him in the name of their form of political responsibility. His alternative was so much a threat that Pilate could afford to exchange Jesus for an ordinary violent revolutionary, Barabbas. **Jesus' way is *more* relevant to the question of how society moves than the struggle to get elected or seize power.**

4. Reject the idea that we must choose between the individual and the social

The ethics found in the Sermon on the Mount* (Mt 5-7:28) are for face to face encounters, according to this idea. We should love our neighbours, but this has nothing to do with how we behave or act at any other level.

Yoder rejects this as an invention of the twentieth century. To hear Jesus in his Jewish context, with the Old Testament behind him, is to understand that personal healing is part of social novelty of the healing community.

Discussion

(1) What does Yoder believe the New Testament calls us to imitate Christ in?

(2) How is the rest of Jesus' life made relevant to our ethics by the call to share in Christ's suffering?

(3) What is the approach of 'family values' Christian political parties like Family First and Christian Democrats - that is, what are they trying to do?

(4) How do Christians respond when the issue of 'politics' is raised in your experience? Do the choices Yoder and I talk about ring true?

chapter 7: THE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST AND THE WAY OF JESUS

The New Testament letters also call us to the social ethics of the cross

This chapter links the letters of the New Testament to the gospels.

In doing this, Yoder answers the claim that even if *Jesus* saw his kingdom in terms of social ethics, his first followers did not. Amongst evangelicals, this will often take slightly different form of claiming that the letters clearly show an unpolitical Jesus, helping us to 'clarify' the gospels, which could be misconstrued as involving social ethics.

In the letters of the New Testament, there are two main ways we are urged to relate to Jesus, both involving social ethics:

1. **Following (external)** - discipleship; like the Israelites following after the cloud, Jesus is followed around by his pupils.
2. **Imitation (internal)** - a person's inner correspondence to the nature of Christ.

It is the Holy Spirit who provides the strength and power to do this. To show the range of ethics preached and practiced by the apostles, what follows is a large compilation of passages which show the apostolic* ethics in action, linking them to the love of God, the life of Christ, and the death of Christ. Several gospel passages are used where it seems clear that the gospel writer is referring to practices in the early church. They are divided into the three main things which are the reason for social ethics as well as showing the character of our social ethics. They are the love of God, the life of Christ and the death of Christ.

Yoder reproduced all the verses; I have just listed them. It will help you to look them up.

(i) The disciple/ participant and the *love of God*

A. Christian life means sharing the divine nature - 1 John 1:5-7; 3:1-3; 4:17; Col 3:9

B. Forgive as God has forgiven you - Eph 4:32; Col 3:13; Mt 6:14-15

C. Love indiscriminately like God does - Lk 6:32-36; Mt 5:43-48 (The 'perfection' talked about here is attainable - it is Jewish, meaning 'indiscriminate' or 'unconditional'.) 1 John 4:7-12.

(ii) The disciple/ participant and the *life* of Christ

A. Christian life means 'being in Christ' - 1 John 2:6

B. Having died with Christ, we share his risen life - Rom 6:6-11; Rom 8:11; Gal 2:20; Col 2:12

C. Loving as he loved in giving himself freely - John 13:34; John 15:12; 1 John 3:11-16. The key concept of Jesus teaching is not the Golden Rule ('Do to others as they have done to you.') - Jesus gives this as the centre of the law, not his own teaching. He takes it further - 'Do as I have done to you,' or 'Do as the Father did in sending his Son.' (John 13:34)

D. Serving others as he served - John 13:1-17; Rom 15:1-7; 2 Cor 5:14; 2 Cor 8:7-9

E. Subordination - to be dealt with thoroughly in Chapter 9.

(iii) The disciple/ participant and the *death* of Christ

A. Christian life means sharing in Christ's suffering. (Phil 3:10-11; 2 Cor 4:10; 2 Cor 1:5; Col 1:24)

B. Sharing in divine condescension - Phil 2:13-14 (this is surely tied to Christ's decisions in the desert.)

C. Give your life as he did - Eph 5:1-2

D. Suffering servanthood instead of a position of power - Mark 10:42-45

E. Accept innocent suffering without complain just like Christ - 1 Peter 2:20-21, 3:14-18, 4:12-16

F. Like Christ, as bearers of the kingdom cause we suffer the hostility of the world -
Lk 14:27-33: Luke's call here comes after the warning that followers are going to have to leave their families and is followed by a warning to count the cost of discipleship. This hard road isn't just for the spiritually elite; it's for everyone who wishes to live the life of salvation.
John 15:20-21; 2 Tim 3:12: Christians often think that persecution is a religious matter, irrelevant to social ethics. For example, Communists don't like Christians and thus Christians in China are persecuted; universities don't like student Christian groups evangelising and therefore tries to stop them.

But the cross was a political punishment. When believers are persecuted, it is usually because theirs claims and actions are a real and present threat to the system, and especially to the secular ruler's claim to final authority.

G. Death on the cross is liberation from the power of sin - 1 Peter 4:12; Gal 5:24

H. Death on the cross is the fate of the prophets - Lk 24:19-20; Acts 2:36, 4:10; 1 Thess 2:15.

I. Death on the cross is victory - Col 2:15; 1 Cor 1:22-24; Rev 12:10-11

1. How can we generalise about the overall impact of these passages?

We should start by understanding that the three categories are not really separate lines of thought. Instead, they form an overall pattern with a lot of variations of meaning. Sometimes the passages refer to the earthly ministry of Jesus - especially his death. Other times a more philosophical (Greek) concept of the ascending and descending Christ is used. Usually the idea of suffering in these passages centres upon:

1. Renouncing lordship
2. Abandonment of earthly security
3. The threat which the Suffering Servant* poses to the world...
4. ... and the hostility of the world's response.

Thus the NT letters repeat the Gospel centres of social ethics: Mark 8:34 (let all followers take up their crosses and follow me) and 10:42 ('Men who are considered rulers of the pagans lord it over them...let it not be so among you').

Readers unaware of the political/ social dimensions of Jesus' ministry in the gospels may understand the 'in Christ' language of the NT letters to be some sort of mystical, private experience and the 'dying with Christ' references as a morbid psychological process. However, if we are to believe that the apostles actually had a core memory of Jesus' earthly ministry and they used this to talk about social ethics, then the centring of their ethics on the cross has to mean a social stance which is compulsory for believers and often costly.

Of course, this is not the main way of understanding the ethics of following Jesus, and Yoder now examines a common (mistaken) way of understanding the taking up of the cross.

2. The cross in pastoral care: a general symbol for undeserved and unexplainable suffering

The church today spends a lot of time consoling people who are suffering. So in these pastoral care situations, it's quite understandable that chaplains, pastors and lay carers turn to the biblical language of 'the cross' to make the people's suffering meaningful. They will say that enduring chronic illness is 'bearing the cross', meaning that the person is being a good follower of Jesus because of their endurance. Lots of sincere people have been helped by this thought, gaining a sense of divine presence and purpose.

Yet people can be 'sincerely' wrong, and the validity of the church's pastoral concern for those suffering shouldn't be used as an excuse for misusing the Scriptures. The cross was not an unexplainable or chance event like a car accident or cancer which happened to strike Jesus. Instead, Jesus accepted the cross as his destiny and he moved toward it, even provoked it as a constant choice. He warns his disciples not to start down his path without counting the cost in the same way (Luke 14:25-33). The cross of Christ is *not* a difficult family situation, not failure to buy a house or get a promotion, not crushing debt or debilitating illness; **it is for Jesus and his followers the legally expected outcome of a moral and political clash with the powers ruling society.**

Even the early Christians had to be warned against misinterpreting general suffering as the bearing of the cross. They were told their suffering was the bearing of the cross only if it was innocent and the result of their adversaries' evil will. (1 Peter 2:18-21, 3:14-18, 4:1, 4:13-16; James 4:10).

3. Imitation and renunciation

Yoder finishes by repeating that the only place where we are called to 'be like Jesus' is in the act of taking up the cross - and this is a universal and consistent call throughout the NT, from Jesus' words themselves to the Johannine writings; in the Pauline writings and the non-Pauline. Servanthood replaces kingship, forgiveness absorbs hostility.

Discussion

1. Explain the meaning of Yoder's three categories of apostolic ethics - what does our participation in the love of God involve? The life of Christ? The death of Christ?

2. In the many passages that Yoder lists, what is the cross seen as?

3. What relevance does the resurrection have in our bearing of the cross?

4. Using Yoder's framework, explore what actions we are going to take in bearing the cross this year.

5. What alternatives can we offer in pastoral care if we are to avoid misusing the idea of the cross but still be compassionate toward the suffering? (Here we might draw on the way Jesus approached the sick.)

chapter 8: CHRIST AND POWER

Christ's victory over the powers and the call for the church to be a restored society

This is a long chapter; if using it in a small group setting, you might like to do it over two weeks and discuss some of the questions in the first week.

Since the Reformation*, many Christians have claimed that the message of Christ is directed to the individual and carried out by the individual alone.

Yoder has already responded to the substance of this claim by outlining the social ethics preached and practiced by Jesus and the early church. Now he wants to turn to the question of whether we find in the New Testament some equivalent of what present day thinkers call 'powers' or 'structures.' So, the theme of this chapter is to show the way Paul's understanding of the powers relates to the present-day understandings of the topic.

1. The stimulating confusion of Paul's language about power

Paul makes it hard on us because his language about powers uses words from different areas – straightforward political stuff like 'principalities and powers,' 'thrones and dominions' as well as cosmological* language like 'angels and archangels' 'elements' 'heights and depths,' and religious language – 'law' and 'knowledge.'

In trying to draw all these things together, Yoder makes an extended consideration of the way we use the word 'structure'. The point behind all this, is that just as our word 'structure' refers to a whole series of different things with a common thread of patternedness, so Paul talks about 'powers' in a way that brings together a whole lot of things that we don't hold as close together as he does – the emperor and the angels and the natural forces, and many other things. Look at the ways we use the word 'structure':

1. To refer to a particular network of people or agencies who are in power or exert influence – the 'power structure' (eg 'the power structure' of the church: in the case of an Anglican church: archbishop, bishops, clergy, deacons, lay church workers)
    (a) sometimes this power structure might be clearly visible and identifiable, like in the example of the Anglican church;
    (b) other times it isn't easy to pinpoint the exact components of the structure, but it still exists - like when we talk about 'Wall Street'

2. Sometimes 'structure' is only visible to the person studying something – so if a psychologist talks about the 'structure of the personality', he is talking about a pattern he or she can see in the way a certain person responds and behaves.

3. For an architect, 'structure' means the basic building.

4. The structure of a language is its grammar and logic and the (originally) unwritten laws which have developed naturally and govern the way language is used.

In all these cases, the word 'structure' points to an overall patternedness in something – as a 'class' is more than the individual people who make it up; as a 'bridge' is more than the metal pieces which compose it; as a 'religion' is more than a bagful of assorted practices.

Similarly, 'power' points in all its variations to an ability to make things happen; this is the common thread between all those different words Paul uses to describe 'power.' **The powers include governments but are not limited to them; include demonic forces but are not limited to them; include religious bodies but are not limited to them; include the authority structures in a family but are not limited to them.**

2. Christ and the Powers in contemporary theology

A lot of Christians, when they hear Paul talk about angels or demons or powers, instantly throw out that part of what he was saying, as they believe it's just an outdated piece of an ancient worldview that didn't make it through the sieve. On the other hand, we could add, fundamentalists* tend to get very literal and hung up about such language and as a result we get people preoccupied with demons and angels and invisible spiritual combat behind every small occurrence - as seen in the novels of Frank Peretti*.

Instead of these responses, we need to get better at thinking about the meaning of scriptural thought within its own cultural context. We need to ask first what these passages meant *then* before we can ask what they mean *now*.

(1) The Origin of the Powers in the Creative Purpose of God

Col 1:15-1:17 '... whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all was created by him and through him. And he is before all things and things subsist in him.'

The Greek for 'subsist' here has the same root as our word 'system.' According to Paul, in Christ everything 'systematises' and is held together – Christ keeps the powers united in the reign of order among creatures, order which was a divine gift in its original intention.

Most of the references to 'powers' in the NT consider them fallen. But it is important to remember that they were part of the good creation of God. Society and history, even nature would be impossible without regularity, system, order – and God has provided for this need. The world is not sustained by constant divine intervention; it was made in an ordered form and it was good. God created through the creation of the Powers that ordered reality; He showed creativity within the bounds of a systematic ordering.

(2) The Fallen Powers in the Providence of God

Unfortunately, we have no access to this good creation of God. The world is fallen and so are the powers. Instead of only giving the creative life giving purposes of God to us, they also seek to separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:38); they rule over the lives of those who live far from the love of God (Eph 2:2) and hold us enslaved to their rules (Col 2:20). These structures, these powers which were supposed to be our servants have become our masters and our guardians.

Yet even in this fallen state the powers are not pure evil. They continue to order things even in their fallen state. Even the pagan forms of social and religious expression, although not to be imitated, remain a sign of the preserving patience of God toward a world that has not yet heard of its redemption (Acts 17:22-28). So, before declaring the impact of Christ on all this, Paul makes three declarations concerning the structures of creaturely existence:

(a) These structures were created by God. It is God's will that there should be a network of norms and regularities to stretch out the canvas upon which life can be painted.

(b) These powers have rebelled and are fallen. They did not accept their place but

claimed for themselves an absolute value – enslaving humanity and our history. We are bound in 'slavery' to them.

(c) Despite their fallen condition the powers cannot escape God completely and He is still able to use them for good.

Berkhof came up with some concrete examples of what these Powers are:

- Human traditions, morality, religious and ethical rules, the administration of justice and the ordering of the state
- The state, politics, class, social struggle, national interest, public opinion
- Place of the clan/tribe in indigenous peoples; respect for family and ancestors in Chinese tradition; the Hindu social order

Yoder sums these up as religious structures; intellectual structures (-ologies and –isms), moral structures; and political structures (the tyrant, the market, the school, the courts, race, and nation)

Paul's three declarations are backed up in these examples:

(a) All these structures can be seen as having some seed of good creation in them. There could be no society or history without the existence of religious, intellectual, moral and social structures. We cannot live without them.

(b) They fail to serve us as they should. They demand an unconditional loyalty from the individual and society. We cannot live with them. It is impossible to see anyway out from this enslavement.

(c) Our lostness and our survival are inseparable – both are dependent on the Powers. We live inside them while awaiting the redeeming work of God.

So, far from being outdated or irrelevant, Paul's teachings about the Powers is a very refined analysis of the problems of society and history. He manages to recognise both the fallenness of humans and the continued providential control. He relates the orders of creation to Christ himself; something theologians have been doing everything to avoid ever since.

3. The work of Christ and the Powers

The Powers enable history, society, in short *humanity* to exist. Creation is ordered through and by the Powers. If Christ saves us in our humanity, then, the Powers cannot simply be destroyed or set aside or ignored. What, then, *is* the relationship of salvation to the powers?

Their sovereignty must be broken. This is what Jesus concretely did by living a genuinely human existence. This life brought him, as it will bring any genuine human, to the cross. Jesus submitted himself willingly to the Powers but he refused to co-operate in their corruption – that is, rule by the sword (the Roman Powers*) or legalism as an end to itself (the Pharisees*). This holiness was a threat to their dominion – like Daniel who refused to bow to the idol - and so they killed him.

Jesus' obedience unto death is the first expression of an authentic, restored humanity. For the first time there is a human who lives in laws and customs, institutions, values and theories, yet is a slave to none of them:

> *He [God] disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him [Jesus]. (Col 2:13-15)*

So, in the cross Christ has ended slavery to the Powers. He made a public example of them – showing what they're really like: adversaries to the truth; enemies of God. They are unmasked as false gods by this encounter with the true God.

The resurrection shows more fully what has happened on the cross – God has challenged the Powers, penetrated into their very territory and shown that He is stronger than them, even than the Power of life and death which used to be ultimate as punishment and as coercion. By defeating it and showing that it is *not* the ultimate Power, Christ has freed his believers to do anything and everything – think of Paul in Philippians where he says that he doesn't know whether he'd rather die and be with Christ or live and preach the gospel.

Because of Christ, we know that we have a calling that is higher than any of the created Powers. No more can the Powers separate us from the love of God, from a full expression of our humanity. So, for example, the Sabbath rules had become a god in themselves in Jesus' time, and a barrier to the true God because of this. Yet Jesus disarmed and unmasked the evil pretensions of the system the Pharisees had set up; the Sabbath wasn't created to bound us up but to celebrate our humanness and our Creator. After the climactic proof of God's victory in the resurrection, believers didn't do away with the Sabbath rules. Instead, the Sabbath was put in its place. **In Christ, believers have the authority and duty to call the Powers to account.**

4. The work of the church and the Powers

The church is told to proclaim Christ's victory over the Powers. Paul writes '...the manifold wisdom of God should henceforth be made known by means of the church to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which he set in Jesus Christ our Lord.' (Eph 3:11)

The fact that through the work of Christ Gentiles and Jews have been brought together to live in Christ's fellowship is a sign to the Powers that their rule is over.

The church isn't simply either *against* or *for* the Powers. Instead, the church lives within the structures and orders of creation with its eyes on the Most High God, giving it discernment and freedom.

We can only *effectively* preach God's wisdom to the Powers if we are showing in the church a life freed from slavery to the Powers. We can only challenge Mammon* if our life displays that we are joyfully freed from its clutches. We can only truly reject nationalism if we live recognising there is no hierarchy amongst peoples. We will only resist social injustice if justice and mercy prevail in our common life.

So the position of the church in the New Testament is not withdrawal from social issues and certainly not withdrawal because of its smallness and low social class. Instead, the church was the beacon of liberation. **It did not withdraw - it faithfully modelled an alternative within the disarmed, dethroned Powers. Its counter-cultural attitude did not stem from its smallness but from its faithfulness.**

As Paul points out, our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the Powers flesh and blood serve (Eph 6:10-18). We don't need to defeat the Powers; Christ has done, is doing, and will do this – our task is just to hold firm in the name of Christ, showing his victory.

5. The priority of the church in Christian social strategy

In Paul's thinking, the very existence of the church is its primary social strategy. Just by existing, the church shows that the Powers' rebellion has been overcome and is being overcome. 'Let the church be the church' is a slogan thought up at an assembly of churches; Yoder clarifies this as, **'Let the church be a restored society.'**

One of the papers at this assembly declared that 'the world cannot be set right from the top but only from the bottom upwards.' This paper goes on to say that the only way to restore substance

and depth to the life of humans is in changing the way we live – and since humans can only know a number of people, this has to be practiced in small groups – family, church. These groups are to be the social conscience of the new order. Again, we go back to Yoder's earlier comment that a counter-cultural community resisting the Powers can have a huge impact on the world.

This paper also says that 'It is the worship of God that is the source of all genuine renewal.' So then, the most important thing the church can do for society is to be a centre of authentic humanity.

When people in our society look to our church, they should be able to see a group of people not in slavery to money or career; a group of people who take the demands of holiness seriously and live in a restored way, seeking and practicing pure sexuality, generosity and sacrificial servanthood.

6. The Jesus-for-Me and Withdrawal Misunderstandings

Paul does not believe that the gospel is only about personal ethics. Nor does he say that the way to change unjust structures, to reform the Powers, is 'heart by heart.' The hope of US fundamentalists, for example, is to have a born again president who will control society in a Christ-like way.

Instead, the main social structure through which the gospel works to change other structures is that of the Christian community. Within this community, people are changed in the way they behave by genuine social relationships with other believers who call each other to account – that is, who 'bind and loose'*.

This doesn't mean withdrawal from all the structures of the world, like the Amish* and the Two-by-Twos* practice. The Powers and the power within them are originally the good creation of God. It's more complex than withdrawal – the church is called to discernment, to work out which structures can be worked within and which can't.

There will be some situations where faithfulness involves refusing certain functions within society – so, for example, Yoder might have suggested the functions of soldier; executioner; abortionist; stockbroker. (Although some of these occupations might possibly be open to redemption – the peace corp? the ethical investor?) In these cases, power is refused because the most responsible choice is to refuse to collaborate, and in that refusal to take the side of the victims of that misused power. This refusal is not withdrawal. It is a major negative intervention within the process of social change, a refusal to use unworthy means even for what seems like a worthy end!

The church's calling is to be the conscience and the servant within human society. The church must be able to discern when and where and how God is using the Powers. We are called to contribute to the creation of structures more worthy of human society – perhaps like assisting in creating a more humane system of refugee treatment in Australia. God is working in the world and it is the task of the church to know how he is working.

7. The relevance of Christ to the Powers today

The biblical understanding of the Powers that we have been reading about in this chapter and the previous is an excellent framework to think about the task of social discernment to which we are we called. This is not a way of helping the needy or guiding individual Christians to avoid sin and practice good works. Instead, it is a part of our orders from God to proclaim to the Powers that in Jesus their rebellion is broken and their pretensions demolished.

The proclamation of Christ's lordship is not just something to add to individualistic evangelical formulas of asking Jesus into your heart. No – it is the whole of the gospel of which 'winning hearts for Christ' is a small and inadequate corruption.

Only individuals can respond to the proclamation that 'Christ is Lord' – but it is social, political, structural fact which constitutes a challenge to the Powers.

Its claims aren't limited to those who have accepted it – Christ is Lord of all and is reclaiming and restoring all. It is a declaration about the nature of the world and the significance of history, within which both our participation and objection (binding and loosing*) gain their authority and their end. We are given authority to live out a renewed common life because we act in the name of Christ who has disarmed the powers. Our end is to make this disarming known and live it out.

The Powers have been defeated not by some cosmic hocus-pocus but by the concreteness of the cross; the impact of the cross upon them is not the working of magical words nor the fulfilment of a legal contract calling for the shedding of innocent blood, but the sovereign presence, within the structures of creaturely orderliness, of Jesus the kingly claimant and of the church which is itself a [restored!] structure and power in society.

Discussion

1. *Using Yoder and Berkhof's understanding of Paul and the Powers, discuss Col 2:20-3:4 and what Paul wanted his readers to understand.*

2. *Talk through Berkhof's list of powers and analyse what it means to call them this. Can we add some?*

3. *What sort of attitude toward the powers might we be called to take if see them as a distorted part of God's intentions?*

4. *What are the similarities and differences with Dave Andrews' idea of 'Christianarchy'? ["From 'Christi' - Christ - and anarche - 'against the powers', as in 'the principalities and powers'"]*

5. *How does Yoder believe we should think about 'salvation' and the goals of Christianity?*

6. *Imagine what the Sunday meeting of a 'withdrawn' church might be like - what would be talked about and how or why. Now compare and contrast to the sort of church Yoder envisions - one which is a restored society speaking to the Powers.*

7. *Discuss the Power we call the mass media - internet, newspapers, television, radio - and our response as Christians.*

8. *Does the concern for living out the restored society threaten the priority of Christ and the 'preaching of him crucified'?*

chapter 9
Revolutionary subordination

One place where Christians go to in order to claim that their faith does not set out to challenge the prevailing social order is the so called 'household codes' of some of the later letters in the New Testament. They include Col 3:18 – 4:1 – 'Wives be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord...' and Eph 5:21 – 6:9, as well as 1 Peter 2:13 – 3:7, this last one including the verse, 'Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution...' These household codes are Christian *adaptations* of well known secular codes which were used for the ordering of households.

For liberal* Christians, these household codes may well show that even though Jesus (who thought the world was ending) preached a radical, unsustainable, insensible life, by the end of the first century, the church had realised that the end was not coming and adapted its life to be more sustainable and more in line with life of the wider social order. Therefore, the texts preach to us the necessity of fitting in with our society, borrowing its codes.

For us in the twenty first century, for example, they have meant the total overturning of these oppressive codes that have been shown to be wrong by liberal democratic thinking independent of Christ.

Alternatively, in liberal thinking these codes are also likely to give rise to attacks on Paul and Peter and the authors of these letters as having a low view of women and promoting slavery.

For fundamentalist* Christians, these codes are eternal truths representing the timeless will of God – a God who is socially conservative. Regardless of what sort of attitude toward society and politics these codes might have represented in the first century, our job is to enforce them obstinately, even and especially when it is unpopular with feminists, liberals and basically the rest of society.

1. Second Thoughts

These perspectives come from a failure to understand these texts adequately.

Liberal scholars were quick to compare the codes to their secular Greek cousins and draw all sorts of conclusions from this. What, however, are more startling than the similarities are the differences - the transformation of the codes at the hands of the church.

The secular codes focus on people as individuals. In the New Testament codes, people are talked about in relationships. The call of the New Testament, then, is not to live up to one's station in life but to live up to the relationships one finds oneself in. While the secular codes address firstly and mainly people in power, the New Testament codes address those considered lower first – wives, children, slaves.

It is from these differences that we begin to get a sense of the revolutionary innovation involved in the New Testament materials on these subjects. For the first time, the subordinates are addressed as moral agents, called upon to make moral decisions. Instead of their position being the timeless decree of fate, it becomes an opportunity for meaningful witness and ministry – winning masters and husbands to faith by their strange behaviour.

The call to subordination must have followed a tendency toward *insubordination.* Believers were liberated by the message of the gospel and the dignity it ascribed to them, and thus they threw off all constraints and responsibilities.

This 'revolutionary subordination' is modelled on Christ's path to the cross, as is particularly clear in the 1 Peter passage and in Ephesians 5:22-25 where the husband is called to give himself up for his wife as Christ gave himself up for the church.

Astonishingly, after calling the subordinates to subordination, these codes go on to call the dominant partner to a kind of subordination in turn. Parents are called to not irritate their children and husbands are called to love their wives. Philemon is invited to receive his runaway slave back as a brother; Paul even offers to pay him if this will help convince him.

The reciprocal call to both subordinates and dominators makes these codes truly revolutionary. It means that the New Testament doesn't simply endorse the status-quo, the present order of things. The practical changes called for by Paul are much more difficult and radical for the dominant partner – in the new behaviour expected of the dominant partner the status-quo is going to be really challenged.

Yoder makes a footnote here about Philemon – this short letter is not studied at length in this chapter because it doesn't explicitly refer to the codes. However, it would support the general trend going on. America's experience since 1865 has bore out the truth of Paul's words in many ways – more important than the simple act of releasing a slave from slavery is a change in the whole attitude of masters toward their slaves and a new honour given them in the social structure. Thus in asking Paul to receive him as a brother, he is using in an innovative, wise approach to the liberation and dignity of slaves.

If this revolutionary element of the 'codes' teaching present in both Paul and Peter comes neither from the Jews nor the Gentiles (as Yoder has shown), it seems likely that it actually comes originally from the words of Christ himself. At the very point where Paul supposedly abandoned Jesus and turned to the more sensible worldly ethic, we actually have an example of the upside down politics of Jesus affecting those most stable functions of society, family and economics.

2. Widening the Circle

Now that we have seen the ethical thinking behind the household codes, we can see this thinking at work elsewhere in the New Testament.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul calls on the Corinthian women to stop causing scandals by prophesying with their hair uncovered. Uncovered hair was possibly associated with prostitutes; covered hair was a symbol of a woman's protection by either her husband or father, and of her subjection. It seems the Corinthian women had heard and understood the liberating news of the gospel and flaunted this new found freedom by taking off the veil in their new found freedom to prophesy.

Paul calls the women to not use their freedom in this way – instead he wants them to use their new found freedom to choose subjection to the customs of the time. In asking them to freely choose this, he was ascribing them with more worth than they were given by society.

In chapter 7, Paul makes a call for everyone to remain in the state they find themselves in – slave, single, married to an unbelieving husband. These social distinctions are unimportant in the light of the gospel, and so the best path is to avoid anxiety and battles and as a newly liberated believer, to embrace subordination. The other side of this is that believers should avail themselves of those opportunities they are offered – to become free, to marry if one is burning with desire, to let an unbelieving husband go.

In a similar way, if a fifteen year old from a harsh, authoritarian family becomes a Christian in our context she would be tempted by her new found sense of worth to denounce her parents and their unfair rules. However, Paul would have told her to exercise her new found sense of worth to willingly embrace subordination to her parents, even to their unfair rules. In a new attitude of liberated, voluntary subordination – taking everything the 'extra mile' – her parents will see the immense revolution in thinking caused by Christ.

The same attitude characterises the ethical teaching concerning the wider circle of relations – that of the relationship of the church to the government. In 1 Peter 2, 1 Timothy 2 and Romans 13, believers are called to subject themselves to the government. Like the family, the government is one of the given structures of human relations within which the Christian has a role to live out.

However, there is no reciprocal call for the believing governor to be a servant of the public. Yoder suggests that this is because Christ told believers that their call to servanthood involves rejecting governmental domination over others (Mk 10:42-43, Mt 20:25, Lk 22:5). In other words, the very idea of coercive* rule over others is contrary to what it means to be a believer. A believer who is in power does not try to be the best leader she can; she gives up power altogether – resigns from office.

(Somewhere in *The Royal Priesthood*, Yoder suggests that there could be such a thing as a Christian ruler – only he would only last a day or two before being kicked out or assassinated, in all probability, because he would have dismantled the army, cancelled debt and basically shown a commitment to Christ above a commitment to the preservation of society and 'good governance'.)

3. A Whole New Order

The consistent thing that the New Testament shows is that the liberation of the Christian from 'the way things are' is so thorough and novel as to make evident to the believer that subjection to the enslaving or alienating powers of this world is broken. The common desire is to want to act in accordance with this radical shift.

However, precisely because of Christ we shall not impose that shift violently upon the social order, and instead we will practice it voluntarily in our believing community. We will follow his example of accepting subordination. We do this because the new order isn't just an alternative to the present world but is a renewed way of living in the present (1 Cor 7:20).

The loving willingness of our subordination will itself have a missionary impact. The church's voluntary subjection is a witness to the world.

Thus, the pattern is uniformly one of creative transformation. Jesus' willing servanthood in place of domination enables the person in a subordinate position in society to accept and live with that status without resentment. At the same time in calls the person in the dominant position to forsake or renounce all domineering use of that status.

The call, then is *not* a ratification of the stratified society into which the gospel has come. Neither does the call claim that there is a immediately a new world regime which violently replaces the old. Rather, the old and new exist at the same time on different levels.

The ethic of Jesus was transmitted and transmuted into the stance of the servant church within society, as indicated in the household codes. Since Christ's reign has come into our history through the resurrection and Pentecost, the church can now live out the newness of life in the reign, in the midst of the structures of society. The believers are free from needing to smash the structures of this world since they know the structures are about to crumble anyway.

Discussion

1. *Sum up what Yoder is saying in this chapter.*
2. *What things in the Old Testament might precipitate the idea of revolutionary subordination?*
3. *What will revolutionary subordination mean in the day to day working of your*

family?

4. *Think of the faith communities you have been involved in. What does revolutionary subordination to the state mean in these contexts?*

Chapter 10: Let Every Soul Be Subject

Romans 13 and the Authority of the State

prepared by James Patton

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God
-NKJV Romans 13:1

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established [ordained, ordered, appointed]. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation on themselves
- NIV, NASB, Romans 13:1-2

Unfortunately, Romans 13: 1-7 has often been used as though it were *the* constitution for Christian thought about the political realm, and sadly is often used to justify Christian violence and killing. This chapter attempts to read the teachings of the Apostle Paul as consistent with those of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount where he tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, and show that it is simply not justified for Christians to kill and destroy.

When looked at in its context, Romans can be harmonised with the Sermon on the Mount* in Matthew and other parts of Scripture that teach the Christian to live a life of consistent love and gentleness, never returning evil for evil, and peaceful, revolutionary subordination. Yoder argues that although Christians should be subject to the historical process in which the sword continues to be wielded and to bring about a kind of order under fire, they should not perceive in the wielding of the sword their own calling or reconciling ministry. This is not how a Christian learns Christ (Ephesians 4). In light of the arguments given below, it seems strange that Romans 13:1-7 is taken as the classic proof text that Christians have a duty to kill.

Yoder's line of thought raises the following issues:

1. The New Testament speaks in many ways about the problem of the state

Romans 13 is *not* the centre of this teaching. There is a very strong strand of Gospel teaching which sees secular government as the province of the sovereignty of Satan.

Take for example Luke 4:5-8 where the devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms in the world and says all these kingdoms "have been handed over to me, and I give them to whomever I wish". Jesus does not challenge the claim of Satan to be able to dispose of the rule of all nations. Consider also Paul's own teaching that "Satan is the god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4) and he is the "prince of the powers of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). John concurs with this view and says that "the whole world lies under the power of the evil one." (1 John 5:19ff, NASB) Consider the teaching of the prophet Hosea who condemns Israel and affirms that there are powers not ordained by God. "They have set up kings, but not by Me: they have made princes, and I knew it not." (Hosea 8:4)

Compare Revelation 13 to Romans 13. Here we find a clear picture of a world government given "authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation", while clearly *not* being God's government. This government (whilst ultimately subject to the sovereignty of God) nevertheless arrogantly blasphemes against heaven and makes war on the saints and overcomes them. We find similar references to very corrupt and evil world governments in Daniel chapters 7 and 8.

Also bear in mind that it is the "powers" (both religious and secular) that have killed and persecuted the prophets, Jesus Christ and many of His followers (including Paul himself, who tradition has it was beheaded by Nero) throughout history (cf. Hebrews 11:35-38).

2. We cannot rip Romans 13:1-7 out of its proper context

Romans chapters 12 to 15, resting on the foundation of Romans 1 to 11, make a literary unit, and must be understood as such.

Imagine if I based my whole doctrine of salvation on James 2:14-18 ('faith without works is dead'). Read alone, these verses would lead me to an inadequate understanding of the gospel. So, too, if I drew my whole understanding of government from Romans 13:1-7!

We need to interpret it in the wider context of what the rest of Scripture says, and particularly in the light of the surrounding chapters in Romans. Chapter 12 begins with a call to nonconformity, a radical transformation of the whole person, motivated by the memories of the mercies of God.

This whole life transformation finds expression first in a new quality of relationships within the Christian community, and, with regard to enemies, in love and service. The mercies of God are tied to the unmerited calling of Gentiles to the new life in God (chapters 1-5), the unmerited renewal of even the "body" through the Holy Spirit (chs 6-8) and the continuing unmerited redemptive concern of God for ethnic Israel (chs 9-11).

Therefore, believers must read the remainder of Romans in light of these "mercies", these unmerited and gracious acts of a loving God. Believers are called never to pay back evil for evil to anyone, to bless those who persecute them, and never to take revenge, but to leave room for the wrath of God. Our love is to always be without hypocrisy - all evil is to be abhorred, and we are to cling to what is good (Romans ch 12). Romans 13:8-10 calls us back to the supreme law of love which does no harm or wrong to a neighbour, and verses 11-14 call believers to holiness and purity. Chapter 14:1 - 15:21 issues in a new quality of concern for the "weaker brother" and in the gathering of financial and spiritual resources whereby the community of believers can support and demonstrate love towards one another.

Now compare 12:19 where the believer is told "never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God" and 13:4 about the state "not bearing the sword in vain" and being a "minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil". Reading these two passages together, one can conclude that the function exercised by government is *not* the function to be exercised by Christians.

God is sovereign and he can and does work through corrupt power structures in a sinful and fallen world to use the wrathful violence of authorities and rulers to punish evil with evil. This is clearly demonstrated, for example, in Isaiah 10 where an idolatrous and wicked Assyria is used to punish even more idolatrous and wicked nations. Be assured that Assyria and Babylon in Habbakuk received their own come-uppance in God's time.

Similarly, a believer may argue that Britain, America or Rome have also been used in the permissive providence of God to punish Iraq's evil with evil. Saddam Hussein's regime was, after all, based on lies, and those who refused to participate in the lie were choosing imprisonment, torture or death.

However, Iraq's evil does not mean God morally approves of the evil used by Britain and the USA to defeat it - He very clearly does not - and it is made very plain that all these nations, in God's due time, will in their own turn be judged for their actions.

3. Ordering states, not <u>ordaining</u> a <u>particular</u> state

Romans 13:1 says "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." The subordination which is called for recognizes whatever power exists. The text does *NOT* divinely ordain a *particular* government.

Yoder offers three possible interpretations of this passage, two of them, to his mind, in error:

Interpretation 1: Whatever government exists is of God and should be obeyed.

The idea many get from this text (Rom 13:1) is that whatever government exists must therefore have come into being by a specific providential action of God. Therefore the governments of pagan ancient Rome, Saddam Hussein, George Bush, Adolf Hitler, Jacques Chirac or John Howard must all be there by the will of God, and we Christians should therefore blindly obey whichever one we happen to be living under. This line of thought remains very much alive in popular Christian piety and patriotism.

The weakness of this view is that the text of Romans makes no affirmative moral judgement on the existence of a particular government and says nothing particular about who happens to be leader or what his policies happen to be.

Did Paul believe that the pagan Roman emperor, Nero, had a mandate from God to murder and persecute Paul's own brothers and sisters in the church? Could he have meant that Christians should have driven the nails through Jesus' hands and feet if the State had ordered them to do so?

Paul himself had many troubles with worldly rulers, as seen right through Acts. If he wanted Christians to always blindly obey the "governing authorities", then why did he escape from their hands in Acts 9?

At the resurrection, the stone was rolled away, breaking the Roman seal put there by the authority of Caesar (Matthew 27:66,28:2) - and thus it was an act of civil disobedience. Similarly, most Christians would not agree that German believers should have obeyed Hitler and participated in the slaughter of Jews, or Serbian Christians should have participated in ethnic cleansing, just because their government ordered them to do so.

Clearly Christians are not called to "blind, unquestioning obedience", but rather to discernment.

Interpretation 2: Proper government Vs improper government - Christians should obey one, and rebel against the other.

A second way of interpreting this text would be to say that God does not ordain a particular government, but the *idea* of *proper* government. That is, as long as a government meets a certain minimum set of requirements (e.g. providing adequate health care, education, justice, religious and racial tolerance, defence, care for refugees and the poor etc.) then that government may properly claim the sanction of divine institution. However, when a government fails adequately to fulfil the divine functions assigned to it (e.g. the Taliban or Saddam Hussein's, or arguably Bush or Howard's governments), then it becomes the duty of Christian citizens (We The People) to rise up against it in violent revolt, not because we are against government, but because we are in *favour* of *proper government*. For example, consider the American Revolution which threw off the shackles of Great Britain; the French revolution which threw off the shackles of a corrupt monarchy. Similarly one might think of liberation theology*, some of which justifies rebellion against white cultural and economic imperialism in South America.

However, this second view also has numerous weaknesses. Who is to judge how bad a government can be and yet still be "good", and

not worthy of rebellion? For example, Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime, whilst oppressive and tyrannical, never-the-less did provide a system of government, law and order, education, health care, sanitation and food distribution. The Taliban, whilst not a system of government I would ever wish to live under, did the same. One could argue that both the Taliban and the Ba'ath party (whilst both very far from ideal) did never-the-less provide a better system than the anarchy and problems that now reign in much of Afghanistan and Iraq.

An even greater weakness to the view of 'just rebellion' is that nothing in Romans 13 justifies it! The notion of 'proper government' and the function of Christians rising up to rebel and overthrow an 'aberrant government' is totally contrary to the passage. Recall that when Paul wrote to the Christian church in Rome, Rome was ruled by a corrupt pagan government which was persecuting the church. Therefore it is remarkable that Paul does not call the Jewish Christians in Rome to rebel or even emotionally reject this government - rather he calls them to remember the tender mercies of God, tenderly love their friends and their enemies, and to live in subjection to it.

Interpretation 3: God does NOT create or institute or ordain the "powers that be", he only orders them - he tells them where they belong and what is their place.

If we reject that the text is calling us to blind obedience to whatever government happens to exist (e.g. we should unquestioningly serve and kill in Hitler or Stalin or Hussein or Bush's military forces if the state calls us to do so), and we reject the idea that Christians should 'rise up' in violent revolution and overthrow the government if we don't happen to like it (e.g. the French or American or Russian Revolutions), then how do we make sense of our text?

Consider the possibility that Paul is making a *moral* statement, and not a metaphysical one. He is speaking to the present situation of the Roman Christians as representative of Christians throughout the Empire and throughout history. He is not speaking to the nature of all political reality, nor is he prescribing some 'ideal social order'. God did not make human government through some new creative intervention or redemption: rather, ever since the creation of human beings there has been hierarchy and authority and power in human society. And ever since the fall the exercise of this power and authority has involved domination, disrespect for human dignity (racism, oppression, slavery, injustice), and real or potential violence. This is simply the sad fact of unredeemed, sinful human existence.

In his sovereignty God orders the powers that be (the government), but that does not mean that He necessarily morally approves of everything they do, any more than a librarian necessarily creates or approves of the contents of the book he shelves or the school teacher approves the students she teaches or an army sergeant the soldiers he drills.

Likewise God does not take the responsibility for the existence of the rebellious 'powers that be' nor for their shape or identity; they already are. What our text tells us is that God, in His sovereign, permissive will, orders the powers, He brings them into line, that by His permissive government He lines them up to fulfil His purposes. This is true of *all* governments - whether they be the governments of dictators or tyrants or constitutional democracies, or even those of bandits or war lords, to the extent to which they exercise real sovereign control.

The fact God orders and uses the 'powers' does not tell us how Christians should respond to government. It does not mean that God has mandated or saved or redeemed or made a particular government His chosen instrument. Instead, all governments are 'lined up' or 'used' by God in his sovereign ordering of the cosmos.

God as sovereign may use America and Britain (the powers that be) to execute his purposes, but

that does not mean that he approves of everything they do. And although believers are called to recognise the sovereignty and 'ordering' of God in government and the realm of human affairs, it certainly does *not* mean that Christians are in any way acquiesce to evil.

On the contrary, Christians are called, as much as is possible within them, to live in peace with all people and to owe nothing to anyone but to love them. Therefore the Christian should display a 'non-resistant' attitude towards even a tyrannical government (and thus all Iraqi Christians should have ignored Bush's call to rise up in violent revolt against Saddam Hussein's regime).

In a strange way, revolutionary subordination is the Christian form of rebellion.

4. The instructions to the Christians in Rome are to be subject to a government in whose administration they had no voice.

The text cannot mean that Christians are called to do military or police service. At the time in history Paul wrote his letter, most Christians would have been slaves or Jews, and thus not even eligible to 'bear the sword' for the government.

The church has a solid history of pacifism* up until the fourth century AD, when Emperor Constantine* was 'converted' and Christianity became the official state religion. Until then, the church was persecuted and held little power; it would not have concerned itself with the functions of war, policing or government.

On its own, this does not prove that Christians should never submit to conscription or to serve in the military. However, it does prove that at the point in time and in the political context that our text was written, this was not an issue that was being addressed. The verses calling Christians to pay taxes and to 'render to all what is due to them'(Rom 13:6-8) can *not* in this context be understood as a call to the Christian to bear arms.

5. Yoder argues that Paul is referring to police action, not to war.

Paul writes that '[the government] is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.' War involves indiscriminate killing of people. In contrast, the practice of a well ordered police and justice system ideally uses violence only against the offending party who is being lawfully apprehended. Police violence is subject to higher review and is [supposedly] limited to capturing or debilitating the offending party without harm to innocent bystanders.

The 'just war' theory attempts to extend police action to the realm of mass killings. This may seem to have some logic but it simply does not work in reality. Consider even the 'humanitarian' interventions of recent times, which we are told are waged in the name of peace, democracy, national security, and humanitarianism - fighting Communism in Vietnam, Operation Just Cause (Panama), humanitarian intervention (Yugoslavia), Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq). When we consider carefully what happened (hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians maimed and killed, environmental pollution and degradation, economic exploitation and oppression, hundreds of thousands of soldiers killed or mentally and physically scarred for life), we quickly discover that "just war" theory falls apart.

Context considered, Romans 13:4 does *not* give authority to governments to wage war.

6. The Christian who accepts his subjection to government retains his moral independence and judgement

The authority of government is not self-justifying. Whatever government exists is ordered by God; but they are still made up of sinful men and women, and therefore we cannot say that

whatever a government does or asks of its citizens will always be good.

7. To the extent that they...
The Greek can be translated as '[rulers] are ministers of God to the extent that they busy themselves' or 'when they devote themselves' to their assigned, godly function of lawfully collecting taxes, rewarding good and punishing evil.

Or we could also read 'they are ministers of God by virtue of the fact that they devote themselves' to doing good and righteous things.

*

Christians should never blindly obey government or acquiesce to evil. For the Christian, subordination is a revolutionary act. It is a way we can share in God's patience with a worldly system we basically reject. Ultimately the believer accepts subordination because he or she is following the example of her Lord. Jesus Christ himself accepted subordination and humiliation (Phil 2:5ff), so the believer has a strong reason to do likewise.

The willingness to suffer is then given a greater meaning and purpose - it is not merely a test of our patience or a dead space of waiting; it is itself a participation in the character of God's victorious patience toward the rebellious powers. We subject ourselves to government because it was in so doing that Jesus, our Lord, revealed and achieved God's victory. Therein we participate in the 'faith and perseverance of the saints'.

It has often been said that Jesus' radical call to love of enemies and non-violent resistance stands in direct contrast to Paul's call in Romans 13 to obey the government in all circumstances. This chapter has attempted to show that this is not the case. When looked at in context, Romans can be read alongside Matthew and other parts of Scripture to teach the Christian to live a life of love and service to the Lord.

Both Jesus and Paul call on Christians to renounce participation in the interplay of egotisms which this world calls 'vengeance' or 'justice' or 'war on terror'. They both call on Christians to be subject to the historical process in which the government wields a sword and brings order by coercion, but never to perceive in the wielding of the sword their own calling or reconciling ministry.

Discussion

1. Explain Yoder's interpretation of the Romans 13 passage itself.

2. What is the wider canonical context Yoder places the passage in? That is to say, what other parts of the New Testament need to be considered?

3. When does the question of the church's attitude to the state come up in your life? Some possibilities:

- *National anthem; Australia Day*
- *Defence policy*
- *Police action*
- *Elections*
- *Working in the public sector*

chapter 11 – Justification by grace through faith

Justification is a social event

The last chapters have shown the themes of discipleship, obedience and participation coming through in the letters of the New Testament. Yoder's discussion has shown the link between the life of Jesus and his teaching, and the life of the early church following him.

Yet there remains a significant objection raised by the Reformed* tradition and its reading of Paul since Luther* and Calvin*. The Reformed Paul's theological centrepiece is justification by grace alone. The righteousness of the believer is effectively a legal fiction – a divine pretending. It does not mean obedience; in fact, grace separates salvation from works altogether.

If this perspective is well grounded, the social ethics of Jesus might well be considered marginal and irrelevant when translated into the life of the church.

1. Paul and the questions of the modern reader

Behind Reformed readings of Paul are a whole series of assumptions and questions which do not do Paul justice. We need to re-read Paul in his own context.

Was Paul pre-occupied with personal self-acceptance? With overcoming his personal guilt complex? According to Yoder, no.

It is these concerns which Martin Luther projected onto Paul to come up with the understanding of justification which he did. Luther, John Wesley*, Kierkegaard* and Billy Graham* all ask the same question of personal guilt and righteousness and unsurprisingly come out thinking that Paul was talking about the same things they are.

For these people and most Protestants, Paul argued that the law was only there to convict people of their sinfulness and the inadequacy of 'works'. Anguished recognition of our inadequacy precedes the acceptance of God's grace.

Yoder wants us to challenge this assumption. He points out the following:

1. The epistles show a Paul largely untroubled by feelings of guilt; when he feels guilty, it is because he once persecuted the church.

2. Paul did not see the Old Covenant – the law - as insufficient and works based. Rather, the law was a gracious arrangement made by God for the ordering of his people while they were awaiting the arrival of the Messiah.

3. Faith for Paul was not a spiritual, inner journey from self trust through despair to confidence in God's grace. Instead, faith was the affirmation which separated Jewish Christians from other Jews – that Jesus was the Messiah. Jews did not become Christians by coming to see God as a righteous judge and a gracious, forgiving protector – they already believed this. Neither did it take some new idea about their sinfulness or God's righteousness. What it took was the messianic affirmation, which was explained by Paul in Jewish concepts of God's grace and righteousness.

Indeed, the struggle Paul had with Jewish Christians was not that they continued to keep the law – he was tolerant of those who held to such a conviction. No, instead the basic heresy he exposed was their failure to recognise that since the coming of the Messiah the covenant had been broken open to include Gentiles*. The fundamental issue was that of the social form of the church. Was it to be a strange radical union of Jews and Gentiles? Or were the Jewish and Gentile believers to have separate sects? Or did all the Gentiles have to become Jews first?

If this is true, what was Paul's understanding of sin? Not existential anguish felt by the tortured soul,

Yoder insists. Instead, Paul's own sin was the fact that he had persecuted the church and fought the opening up of the covenant to the Gentiles. What was set right in his life was not that he was now able to trust in God for his righteous status; no, it was that through the intervention of God on the road to Damascus, Paul had become an agent of God for the right cause, the bearer of good news to the Gentiles.

2. The new person

In Ephesians, Paul sets out clearly this understanding of his apostolic ministry.

Consider Eph 3:1-10. Paul claims to be unique among the apostles; knower of the 'mystery' – that is, God's strategic plan which was not fully understood before this. It was hidden for a long time but now was being made known by the church, proclaimed even to the principalities and powers.

This mystery, this strategic plan, is that in Christ Jew and Gentile are reconciled in one community – Eph 2:11-26, 'that he might create in himself the one humanity instead of two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing hostility to an end.'

This hostility is not primarily between a righteous God and a rebellious human. It is first and foremost the hostility between Gentile and Jew – between the peoples of the world. They were once separated by the demand for Jewish holiness in the law; by nationalism and cultural conflict; by greed and the misuse of power.

The work of Christ is not only that he saves the souls of individuals and henceforth they can love each other better; the work of Christ is the making of peace, the breaking down of the wall, the creation of a new community made up of two kinds of people, those who lived under the law, and those who had not.

Paul does not use the phrase 'justification' here, but it seems that the equivalent concept is this breaking down the walls of hostilities. Galations 2 shows this idea clearly. Verse 14 – 'we are justified by faith in Christ...' – is the culmination of the discussion on whether Jewish and Gentile Christians were to live together in one fellowship. In other words, justification by grace is the joining together of disparate people who were not a people. It is a social event.

3. The 'new creature'/ new creation

A simple reading of some translations of 2 Corinthian 5:17 sums up the common individualistic understanding of faith – 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!' (NIV).

Christians connect it to John 3:5-6's language of being born again and think about the 'spiritual' transformation of the individual person. It is the promise of evangelism. It is the starting point for conservative Christian thinking about social concern. Because only a transformed individual will behave differently, social activism is largely useless. The surest way to change society is to change the individual hearts of converts.

Yoder disagrees, although he believes there might be some positive benefits stemming from this misunderstanding, and he is not commenting on the John 3 born again language in challenging this misconception. The question is what Paul is saying in *this* text.

The words 'He is' are in italics in the Authorised Version to show that they are not in the original Greek manuscripts – they have been inserted by translators. It is regularly necessary in translation to add the 'is' as the Greek often doesn't supply it. However, it is much more difficult and obscure (though not impossible) to add 'he' or 'she' in this sort of case.

The word translated 'creation' here is not used anywhere else in the New Testament to describe individuals. Instead, it usually means either the act of creating (eg Rom 1:20) or the entire universe (Col

1:15) or a new creation in the sense of a new social reality (Gal 6:15).

From just a linguistic perspective (without even weighing the theological arguments) it is much more probable that we should favour the translation, 'if anyone is in Christ, new is creation', or 'there is a whole new world' (New English Bible; cf NRSV). The emphasis is not on the transforming of a person's psychological/ spiritual state but on the believer suddenly recognising the kingdom.

This is the point of the rest of the passage, with Paul explaining why he no longer regards anyone from the human point of view – as Jew and Greek – but rather in the light of the new world ruled by Christ and seen when he is acknowledged as Lord.

4. Romans: to the Jew first but also to the Greek

Yoder rounds off the chapter with some brief comments on the interpretation of the book at the centre of the Reformed Paul – Romans. It is here that Paul talks at greatest length about 'justification' and it is here that Reformed believers will go to insist that Paul is not talking about a concrete reality but about a spiritual pronouncement.

In opposition to this, Yoder points out how concerned the letter is with the concrete reconciliation of Jews and Greeks. The Roman believers are not even unified enough to be properly called a church – instead they are divided by their ethnicity. At each turning point of the letter, Paul refers back to this situation, and the famous discussion of Jewish identity in the time of the church in chapters nine to eleven is clearly directed toward not hypothetical possibilities but the actual situation in Rome.

Once these things are considered, it becomes possible to understand 'justification' as the social event of Jew and Greek being brought together.

5. Conclusion

If, then, we are willing to accept that justification is a social phenomenon centred on the reconciliation of different types of people, what does this have to do with the revolutionary non-violence which Jesus offers to his disciples?

Paul says that in the victory of God's creation sustaining victory, insider and outsider, friend and enemy are equally blessed. The genuineness ('perfection' or indiscriminating nature of) our love is shown and made real at the point of its application to the enemy, the Gentile, the sinner.

The Christian ethics of marriage, work, truthfulness and all other manner of things are part of God's promise of a new humanity. However, the most radical and startling foundation of the new humanity is the end of enmity between peoples – the extension of love to the enemy, and the renunciation of violence. The Good News is that my enemy and I are united, through no merit or work of our own, in a new humanity.

Lastly, Yoder makes an explanatory note to make it clear that his goal in this chapter was to correct the one sided view which has been dominant, that of rejecting Jesus as teacher and example. But Yoder is *not* rejecting in turn the other side– Jesus as sacrifice, God as creator. Both need to be held together.

Discussion

1. If justification is the bringing together of Jew and Greek, and today we are neither Jew nor Greek (in a literal sense), what is justification for us?

2. How does the conversion experience of someone joining the body of Christ fit in with Yoder's understanding of justification? If we take the Billy Graham type evangelistic formula, what is right and what is wrong and what is left out of the fundamentalist approach to evangelism?

3. If guilty, troubled soul is not necessarily the first necessary step toward accepting God's grace, just what is it? Psychological phenomenon?

chapter 12: The war of the lamb

The Book of Revelation and the idea of obedience before effectiveness

1. Introduction – the meaning of history

So far, Yoder hasn't examined the General Writings of the New Testament – that is to say, the odd assortment of books that aren't gospels and aren't by Paul – the Peter epistles, Revelation, Hebrews and James. So, to finish the book off, he examines Revelation and particularly how the 'later' early church (Revelation was probably written in the 90s or early second century) dealt with the question of the meaning of history.

The meaning and direction of history tends to be the focus of social ethics today. In making political decisions, the most common question is: how we can influence events so that thing turn out how we think they should? What is the end, the goal of history?

For the communist of a century ago, the goal was the creation of a communist society where resources would be shared equally by everyone. Every other consideration was placed second behind this goal. Violence, killing, deprivation of rights, lying, robbery where all justified as means to this ultimate end.

For the neo-conservatives of the USA, the goal of history is to achieve 'democracy' and 'liberty' (as they understand these terms) across the world. At the moment, this is seen as involving the extermination of 'terrorism'. The end justifies the means it requires – deceiving the public, ignoring due process and the United Nations, pre-emptive strikes and the redirection of all available funds to the military.

For many evangelicals*, the goal of history is to get as many souls into heaven as possible. This end justifies all sorts of means – watering down the demands of following Jesus to make them more palatable; ignoring physical and social problems to concentrate on the 'spiritual'; using mass-marketing techniques to maximise numbers and effectiveness.

This concern for the meaning and goal of history is well founded. It is exactly what John the Seer seeks in Revelation when he is given the scroll sealed with seven seals (Rev 5:1-5). Throughout the Scriptures, there is a concern with the goal of history and its direction.

However, the way the question is usually approached by our society assumes that we can accurately predict the outcomes of our decisions, and that the likely outcome overrules concerns that the methods might be wrong in themselves. Thus, dropping nuclear bombs on Japan was calculated to cost a certain number of lives, which was (it is claimed) less than not dropping them. Therefore, it was better ('more right') to drop than not to drop. To *not* drop would have been a form of evil because less lives would have been saved.

For the early church the answer to the question came not in choosing the most effective means to achieve the best possible outcome (that is to say, the lesser of evils). Instead, the answer came in God's now-but-not-yet victory of the slain Lamb – Christ. Their social ethics were based not on reason but on revelation, the idea that God had revealed 'a more excellent way' than reason. That way was the way of the cross, of sacrificial love.

2. The war of the lamb

Christ renounced effectiveness – the control of history – and accepted impotence (Phil 2:6). He could have been much more 'effective' if he had joined in the Zealots and driven the Romans out of the holy city. On any calculation, it would

have been the more reasonable thing to do. But he refused.

Throughout scripture, a Christian is one who does the same, renouncing effectiveness for the sake of obedience. The Lamb is praised, and then John the Seer sees that 'our brothers and sisters' have defeated the dragon 'by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death' (Rev 12; cf 2 Cor 4:10.)

Christ's renunciation of godlikeness in the Philippians passage was his rejection of the temptation offered to Adam in the garden – unchecked dominion over creation; it was his rejection of godlike rule over society like that claimed by Caesar*. Paradoxically, it is because of this refusal to claim what was his right that God declares Christ to be victorious over the powers of the cosmos (Phil 2:9).

Too often this passage is spiritualised into a metaphysical*, heavenly decision by the Heavenly Son wondering how he was going to do things. But it was more than that: it was the earthly, costly decision made time and time again by an itinerant rabbi rejected by Jerusalem.

Interestingly, Martin Luther King* once said, 'If I was not opposed to violence on idealistic grounds, I would be opposed to it on pragmatic grounds.' By this statement we can guess that he would have refused violence even if it had cost him victory. But in this case, he saw it also as the most effective and pragmatic course for an unarmed, poor race of people trying to win democratic rights against an armed state.

Christ's pacifism* is different to the type of secular pacifism which says that non-violent techniques are in the end the most effective means, the type of pacifism which says we can get whatever we seek by non-violence. Sometimes non-violent means *do* work best, like in the campaigns by Gandhi* and Luther King. But sometimes they do not, as mentioned at the end of 'The Possibility of Non-Violent Resistance' chapter; as seen in Tienanmen Square*; as seen by the Jews who refused to fight on the Sabbath in the book of Maccabees*.

The point of Jesus' pacifism is instead that our readiness to let go of our goals (even legitimate ones!) whenever they can't be achieved with just means is itself our participation in the triumphant suffering of the Lamb. We are participating in God's struggle with a rebellious world – 'the war of the Lamb'.

This only makes sense if Christ is really Lord. Most other Christian ethics can be rationalised on non-Christian grounds – on effectiveness or on 'natural' justice. But not this one. It makes no sense to the non-Christian. If the Lamb is not victorious, then we're sunk - because it's only in Christ's return and final victory that we expect things to work out right.

3. Accepting powerlessness

Obedience means reflecting the character of the love of God. The 'ultimate good' is achieved by obedient faithfulness - not by results. The constant mistake is to think that good will be achieved by gaining influence, by seizing the reigns of power or public opinion. It will not, because the character of the love of God is *not* co-ercive*. The character of the love of God is something that cannot be legislated, but must be voluntarily enacted by the faithful.

The pacifism rooted in the character of the love of God breaks the link between obedience and effectiveness. The triumph of God comes in resurrection, a miraculous intervention in history that can't and couldn't be humanly brought about. Our job is to bear the 'foolish', ineffective cross of defeat, given meaning only by our faith in God's ultimate promise of victory by his intervention.

If this is something that cannot be legislated, cannot be forced upon people, are we then to retreat into our Christian bunkers and have

nothing to say to society? By no means! We are to be a light on a hill. We must recognise that judgement begins in the house of God. We must call ourselves to account for the crusading mentality that has led to so many wars. We must embody God's alternative.

As a minority in a world full of people of non- and post- Christian convictions, we as the church are beginning to see how inappropriate and preposterous the assumption was that the fundamental responsibility of the church in society was to manage it. We must renounce coercive power.

If we are freed from this vision of ourselves as the guardians of history (godlike figures!) we might again receive the gift of being able to see ourselves as participants in the loving nature of God. In a new servant-stance in society, we will find better ways and words to invite those outside the church to join in.

4. The hereafter: our world and the world to come

The church has often been criticised for hoping in an other-worldly heaven disconnected from what we do now. But this is not the vision in Revelation or anywhere else in the Bible. **Instead, the new world lies further in the same direction in which we are being led.** The unforseeable future is further along in the same direction as the forseeable future for which we are responsible.

The future in Revelation is of a universe, a single system, in which God acts and we act in harmony and restored relationships. The social and ethical realities we expect in this system are as solid for the believer as the ones the communist hopes for

Throughout the New Testament, a new community is proclaimed, one which anticipates and embodies the form of the kingdom fully come.

'Our lamb has conquered; let us follow him.'

Discussion

1. *What is the goal of our life as the church according to Yoder?*
2. *Do you agree?*
3. *What might obedience ahead of effectiveness mean for decisions in your church – evangelism strategies; discipline; charity; anything else you can think of?*
4. *What does it mean to say that the slain lamb is (will be) victorious?*
5. *What other examples through the Bible of obedience being seen as more importance than effectiveness?*

DICTIONARY

Amish	A branch of Anabaptism which believes in withdrawing from society and living as a self-sufficient, 'pure' community which avoids modern technology. Made famous in the film *Witness* starring Harrison Ford.
apocalyptic	Relating to last things. 'Ap were a certain type of book from a few centuries before until a few centuries after w offered a vision of the futur by God. Two made it into t Daniel and Revelation.
apostolic	Relating to the twelve apostles and the first churches.
binding and loosing	The church's authority to discern and decide things in the spirit of Christ - Jesus gives this authority in Mt 18:15-20. It includes the forgiveness of sins; the casting out unrepentant sinners; speaking out as the church; and mission and operational decisions. The idea is central to the Anabaptist understanding of church.
Calvin	Sixteenth century Reformer, who insisted that beliefs should all be based in the Bible. He saw Geneva as a 'holy city' ('Constantinianism') and firmly believed in pre-destination. He emphasised the total evil of humans and their inability to do anything on their own to set things right with God.
co-ercive	To force someone to do something with force, threat or violence.
cosmic Christ	The idea of a Christ with universal presence and power; the beginnings are seen in the gospels, but it is especially in letters like Colossians that we see Christ talked about not just as the earthly messiah but as a heavenly being existing before Jesus and after his resurrection.
cosmological	Concerning the origins and meaning of the universe ('cosmos').
covenant	An agreement. Specifically, the old and new covenants are the agreements between God and his people - the first, in the event of the Exodus and the second in the death and resurrection of Christ.
Crusades	The historical event of the attempt by Western Christians to 'convert' Muslims by force; also has a more general sense of any action with a similar intent.
Essenes	Jewish 'quietists' who lived a life of separation

	from society at the time of Jesus. They had a community in the desert and an elaborate set of rituals. They practised a baptism of repentance and bear many things in common with John the Baptist and several with the practices of Jesus and the early Christians. They are not referred to by name in the New Testament.
evangelical	A branch of Christianity with a concern to base its beliefs directly on biblical principles and emphasising the need for an individual conversion to Christ. Evangelicals come from many different denominations and are less hostile to scholarship and culture than fundamentalists. It is a broadly used term, and open to misunderstanding because such a wide range of Christians claim the title. Typical representatives of evangelicalism as it is used in this book are Sydney Anglicans with their 'rational', conservative reading of the Bible; and Baptists and Churches of Christ with a concern for 'church growth' and cultural relevance.
fundamentalism	In this book, fundamentalism is taken to mean Christians who are suspicious of scholarship, insist on the absoluteness of their interpretation of the Bible. In it I include especially pre-millenialists who interpret Revelation as referring to current events; Creationists who insist the world is eight thousand years old; and the American Right who believe that the USA is God's chosen nation.
Gandhi, Mahatmi	Indian independence leader who led a huge non-violent campaign against British occupation that led to independence in 1947. His ideas were informed by the ethics of Jesus; yet he did not identify himself as a Christian, partly because of the very un-Jesus-like nature of the church he saw.
Graham, Billy	Graham, Billy - 20th century American evangelist, who led huge revival meetings through the fifties and sixties; a friend to many US presidents.
idolatorous	Serving idols - that is, anything which can take the place God is meant to occupy in a person's life, including money, status and power.
Johannine	Any of the NT books said to come from John and his Christian community - the Gospel of John, 1, 2, 3 John and Revelation.
Kierkegaard, Soren	19th century Danish thinker who stressed the

	need for a deep, personal commitment to Christ, even when it went against the establishment.
King, Martin Luther Jr	20th century black rights campaigner in USA and also a Baptist minister. He used non-violent civil disobedience in massive marches and strikes.
liberal	A branch of Christianity which reinterprets faith and the Bible in terms of prevailing thinking. Thus, their outlook tends to be largely positive about society, while often having some concern for justice or social issues. (Evangelicals are often just as positive, but with more concern for sexual morality and family values.)
liberation theology	A branch of Christianity growing out of South American Catholics. Liberation theologians believe that Christ has a special concern for the plight of the poor, and that all theology should start from the perspective of the poor and oppressed. In some cases, this has led to support of armed rebellion against oppressors. In their concern for counter cultural 'base' communities of Christians in which faith infects all areas of life, they show a lot of overlap with Anabaptists.

Luther, Martin	16th century German Reformer who was expelled from the Catholic church for his insistence amongst other things that salvation is by grace alone.
Maccabean	Often used to describe anyone striving and hoping for the sweeping away of Roman occupation of Israel. Named after the Maccabees, a group of brothers who defeated the Greeks in the second century BC and established a period of Jewish home rule until the Romans took them over. The books of the Maccabees are found in the Apocrypha in the Roman Catholic Bible.
nationalism	Extreme, militaristic patriotism which aggressively pushes the interests of a particular country.
pacificist	A view of the world which says that violence is always wrong and alternative solutions to conflict should be used. It does not mean 'passive'/ or 'inaction'; some of the most creative responses to injustice and conflict have come from pacifists in the form of 'non-violent resistance'.
Pauline	Pauline works are all those letters of the New

	Testament attributed to Paul. Most scholars believe that some of them were actually written by Paul's disciples after his death.
Peretti, Frank	American fundamentalist novelist who writes popular works which depict satanic battles behind everyday events. Tim La Haye is another American fundamentalist novelist, but he is more concerned with the end times and the Rapture.
Pharisees	Used to describe the Pharisee movement leaders; a type of first century Judaism which emphasised personal holiness by obedience to the Law. They were the forerunners of the rabbinic Judaism which survived the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE to carry on until the present.
political	Political - When Yoder talks about the 'political', he is not talking simply about the government, or 'politics' as it is shown on TV news - 'Liberal and Labor'. Instead, he means anything pertaining to the way things are run - the ways in which we arrange our common life.
Puritan	Christian movement begun in 16th century England which emphasises the spiritual experience, devotion and moral life which must follow conversion. Many Puritans fled to the USA to escape persecution.
quietism	An attitude often associated with pacifism, involving withdrawal from society because of a refusal to even associate with what are seen as the hopelessly impure ways of the world. Yoder argues that Jesus rejected both the violent and quietist options.
Reformation	The period of change and reform beginning in the sixteenth century which saw countries remove their churches from the authority of the Catholic church. The Anabaptists went further than this and removed their churches from the authority of the state and hence are known as the 'Radical Reformers'. The Reformation was very concerned for believing only what was in the Bible and insisted on 'salvation by grace alone'.
Sadduccees	Temple centred wealthy Jews who co-operated with the Roman occupation and so were unpopular with other Jews.
sermon on the mount	The best known statement of Jesus' teaching - Mt 5-7. Luke sets a lot of the same sayings on a sermon

	given on a plain - Lk 6:17-47.
St Francis	Medieval monk with a special concern for the poor, for nature and for Christians to live in a state of poverty.
suffering servant	In Isaiah there are four songs (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12) which talk about the coming Messiah not as a great king, but as a suffering servant. These songs were critical to Jesus understanding of himself and the church's understanding of him.
Tienanmen Square	In 1989, peaceful student protestors were fired on and hundreds killed in China's Tienanment Square.
Tolstoy, Leo	19th century Russian novelist and theologian, whose understanding of Christianity bore many similarities to Yoder's - including pacifism - but also included a concern to imitate Jesus in dress and itinerant, rural lifestyle. He is the author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*.
Two by Twos	Secretive sect which avoids all unnecessary contact with the outside world - including television, newspapers and radio. Possibly also known as 'the Way'.

Zealots	A movement around the time of Jesus which had hopes of a Maccabean type revival. One of the four Jewish sects with the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes. Prepared to use violence or whatever else was necessary. Several of the disciples were originally Zealots.

APPENDIX OF OTHER RESOURCES: WHERE TO FROM HERE?

1. Other people with Anabaptist interests

If you are convinced and inspired by the account of the New Testament offered by Yoder, please join the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand (AAANZ)! This is a network which brings together individuals with Anabaptist interests and concerns.

Membership (in 2005) is $20, which includes subscription to the quarterly newsletter *On the Road*. AAANZ has two staffworkers, Mark and Mary Hurst, currently based in Sydney, who spend time raising awareness of the Anabaptist vision and the practical importance of peacemaking.

The network is made up of members with different interests. Some are Christians working within established churches who might be seen as 'Anabaptist leaven', seeking to help their churches rediscover the social ethics of Jesus. A considerable number are academics working within universities or theological colleges who have an historical interest in Anabaptism.

Still others belong to house churches or small fellowships which formally or informally identify themselves as 'Anabaptist'.

We at Perth Anabaptist Fellowship would love to have you visit or join our church. Contact me (Nathan) or Brad and Marina even if you're in another state, because we want ultimately for Anabaptist fellowships to be planted throughout the country.

If you are interested in joining a house church somewhere else in Australia, please contact Bessie Pereira who doubles as Oikos House Churches Network director.

AAANZ
AAANZ@iprimus.com.au
www.anabaptists.asn.au
Mark and Mary Hurst
PO Box 367
Sutherland NSW 1499

Oikos House Church Network
Bessie Pereira
10 Viviani Crescent
Heathmount Vic 3135
(03) 9893 2649
oikos@optusnet.com.au
www.oikos.org.au

Perth Anabaptist Fellowship
Brad & Marina Schilling (08) 9291-0259,
bradmarinapaul@yahoo.com.au
webpage: http://perthanabaptists.modblog.com

What follows are some recommended books. However, I'm an amateur in recommending them. If you want further and very thorough recommendations, I think Anabaptist scholar Ian Packer would like to help you - (02) 9877 2939 ; ipacker@exemail.com.au . He's the one who introduced me to Anabaptism and Yoder.

2. Other works by or about Yoder

Of course, if you haven't already read it, the ideal follow up or companion to this booklet is Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*.

Body Politics is a good, short and practical follow up to Politics, as it goes through Christian practices which flesh out the reading of the earlier book. This is the book our group in Perth followed on with. It has been very rewarding.

A Royal Priesthood: Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Essays is a collection of essays concerned with the nature church; while *For the Nations: Essays Public*

and Evangelical is about engaging society and participating in public life. Both are very important.

Yoder's *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* [Brazos 2002] 427 pp: hbk RRP: $60 has been recently posthumously published for the first time; it was previously only available as course materials for his lectures. It is the closest Yoder gets to a systematic setting out of his beliefs. He engages with theology broadly and on many of the classic Christological questions.

The Politics of the Cross by Craig Carter is a thorough and intelligent overview of Yoder's thought; alas it is not a good introduction for anyone without a theology degree as it assumes a lot of background knowledge.

3. Works by or about Anabaptists

Cornelius Dyck *An Introduction to Mennonite History* - out of print, but try libraries and book exchanges.

William R. Estep *The Anabaptist Story* 330pp: pbk $35.

4. Works with considerable similarities or importance to Yoder's work

www.jesusradicals.org - includes some articles by Yoder.

www.thepaulpage.com - dedicated to the New Perspective on Paul, which is very similar to Yoder's comments on Paul.

Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator* (1973) 300pp: pbk
A classic statement of Liberation Theology's understanding of Jesus from a South American Roman Catholic.

Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (Harper-Collins: 1998) 500 pp: pbk, estimated price - $40
Hays' book includes a thorough evaluation of Yoder's method of reading the Bible. The book is an excellent guide to the task of applying the sort of methods and concerns Yoder has to current issues in society.

Lesslie Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Eerdmans: 1989; also SPCK) 190pp: pbk
Newbigin presents a readable overview of the philosophy and theology of 'postliberalism', which underlies a lot of Yoder's work. Newbigin stresses that each world view 'speaks a different language'. For this reason Christianity should not try to be understood with the assumptions of a foreign view of the world - like a 'mainstream' view which says that ethics need to be accessible to everyone.

Mark Strom, *Reframing Paul* (IVP: 2000) 200 pp: pbk, estimated price - $30; and *The Symphony of Scripture* (1992) RRP $18
Strom is an Australian writer who offers a radical rewriting of Paul in a similar vein to Yoder. He talks about the way the church has twisted Paul into a figure almost opposite to who he was. This book emphasises the need for changing the evangelical church's view of authority, of participation in the church and to see church as grace-filled conversations around the common meal.

The Symphony of Scripture gives a sweeping overview of the Bible and its recurrences of themes.

And most things by:

- Stanley Hauerwas - a free church catholic methodist, relentlessly controversial and a friend of Yoder's.
- * Jim Wallis - founder of Sojourners community; prominent American evangelical activist.
- * N.T. Wright - British NT scholar who has written great stuff of both Jesus and Paul.

- James McClendon - Has what he calls a 'baptist' vision of free church theology, with ethics primary.
- * Howard A. Snyder - Free church Methodist who frequently sounds a lot like an Anabaptist.

- * Ronald J. Sider - Wrote the classic *Rich Christians in an age of hunger.*

- *Richard Foster - This Quaker restores the ethical, spiritual life of the individual and the church in his classic *Celebration of Discipline.*

- * Robert Banks - Australian who writes about following Christ in everyday life and house churches.

The ones with asterisks have written some accessible, non-academic works.