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SCRIPTURE, FIVE PRACTICES OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, AND MISSION

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BY
ANDREW D. ROWELL
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
METHOD: WHY DOES YODER USE PRACTICES? YODER LOOKS TO THE CANONICAL WITNESS AS A BASELINE	4
PROLEGOMENA: HOW DO THE PRACTICES INFLUENCE YODER’S THEOLOGICAL APPROACH? YODER ASSESSES THE VOCABULARY OF PRACTICE, MARK, SACRAMENT, AND CATHOLICITY IN LIGHT OF THE CANONICAL WITNESS	8
CONTENT: WHAT ARE THE FIVE PRACTICES? A SUMMARY OF YODER’S FIVE PRACTICES OF THE CHURCH	24
SIGNIFICANCE: WHAT DIFFERENCE DO THEY MAKE? YODER’S EMPHASIS ON THE PRACTICES CHALLENGES FIVE COMMON ECCLESIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS (SACRAMENT, INVISIBLE CHURCH, THE GOSPEL, EVANGELISM, AND AUTHORITY).....	28
SUPPLEMENTING THE PRACTICES: WHAT NEEDS TO BE ADDED TO THE PRACTICES TO GET AN ADEQUATE UNDERSTANDING OF YODER’S ECCLESIOLOGY? REVIEWING YODER’S FOUR <i>NOTAE MISSIONIS</i> AND HIS FOUR ECCLESIAL AGENTS	49
1. The Church Scattered: Yoder adds four <i>notae missionis</i> (marks of mission) to the <i>notae ecclesiae</i> (marks of the church)	49
2. The Role of the Individual: Yoder’s describes the four ecclesial Agents	55
IMPLICATIONS	68
Theology of Mission—How accessible are Yoder’s practices of the Christian community to outsiders?	68
Church and Ministry in the New Testament—How does Yoder’s selection of New Testament texts affect his stance toward preachers and biblical scholars?	81
Scripture and Ethics—How does Yoder’s emphasis on local and communal deliberation challenge ethical reflection in the church?	89
CONCLUSION	93
BIBLIOGRAPHY	97

INTRODUCTION

In response to declining attendance in many denominations, there has been a surge in entrepreneurial and innovative approaches to church life with names such as: church planting, new church development, church consulting, church renewal, natural church development, multi-site churches, missional churches, and emerging churches. These phenomena are fueled by dissatisfaction with the current state of the church. Meanwhile, tensions rise within denominations such as the Anglican Communion, Presbyterian Church USA and Southern Baptist Convention about which direction the church should go. Throughout the West, people wonder aloud, does the *dying* church we are familiar with today resemble at all the church Jesus envisioned when he said “I will build my church, and the gates of *death* will not overcome it” (Matt 18:16 TNIV)?

There is wide acknowledgement that improvement is needed but the radical changes suggested by the dissatisfied are by no means universally embraced. Understandably, there is a suspicion that radical changes will alienate those currently involved in the church thus making the situation worse. The changes proposed will often alter the very characteristics why people decided to attend that congregation in the first place.

So how do church leaders and congregation members sort through the dizzying range of books and conferences which propose solutions? How does one decide what is creative and fresh and what is pandering and faddish? The question often boils down to: what makes a church a church? What characteristics are nonnegotiable and what are malleable? Which innovations intended for outreach end up compromising what should not be compromised? The answers to these questions in turn affect the answers to such everyday questions such as: of all

the competing demands and expectations on church leaders, what activities should church leaders spend their time doing? Preaching, visiting, praying, strategizing, blogging, twittering?

As an Anabaptist teaching at a Roman Catholic institution Notre Dame, who studied under the Reformed theologian Karl Barth, John Howard Yoder (1927-1997) was aware of a wide variety of ecclesiological approaches. Many of his published articles began as lectures at seminaries: Presbyterian, Episcopal, Methodist, Mennonite, and evangelical.

This paper argues that Yoder's practices are particularly relevant to our pressing ecclesiological questions because they are drawn from the New Testament and are thus significant for every theological tradition. Furthermore, they are relevant because they are inherently reforming. A congregation cannot grow cold and static if they have embraced Yoder's practices. As we will see in the conclusion of the paper, Yoder's practices coincide with the best practices of church consultants who are trying to help congregations reevaluate and reassess their life together.

Admittedly, Yoder's practices have their shortcomings. Here are the two that surface in this paper: (1) they are not necessarily representative of the New Testament—the New Testament does have some stabilizing and institutional features that Yoder give short shrift. (2) A congregation will want to take further steps in considering how to make its life together accessible to the world. But despite these qualifications, this paper argues that Yoder's writings on ecclesiology can serve as a powerful source of edification and challenge for the contemporary church. The church leader and congregation member will find practical insight and biblical wisdom on every page of Yoder's writing.

This paper begins by showing that Yoder's reference to the canonical baseline of the New Testament was foundational to his ethical method.¹ When addressing ecclesiological issues, Yoder would typically begin by reflecting on the questions he was asked to address and then steering the discussion to Scripture. In particular, Yoder often raised one of his "five practices of the Christian community" as a point of comparison to the ecclesiological issue at hand. In the prolegomena section, I show that Yoder allows the language of Scripture to reframe the issues rather than succumbing to the way the issue is typically addressed. After a summary of the five practices, I then identify five important ecclesiological concepts that are substantially recast by Yoder's emphasis on practices. These major ideas make up the substantial interconnected parts of Yoder's ecclesiology. Finally, I argue that Yoder's ecclesiology while greatly encompassed

¹ This paper draws upon the following six books and three chapters by Yoder.

John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1992).

John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock, 1997).

John Howard Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ: Paul's Vision of Universal Ministry* (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1987).

John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: vicit Agnus noster* (2d. ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994).

John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical* (ed. Michael G. Cartwright; Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1994).

Chapters:

John Howard Yoder, "The Apostle's Apology Revisited," in *The New Way of Jesus: Essays Presented to Howard Charles* (ed. William Klassen; Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life Press, 1980), 115-134.

John Howard Yoder, "Church Growth Issues in Theological Perspective," in *The Challenge of Church Growth: A Symposium* (ed. Wilbert R. Shenk; Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1973), 25-48.

John Howard Yoder, "The Social Shape of the Gospel," in *Exploring Church Growth* (ed. Wilbert R. Shenk; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 277-284.

in the five practices could be misinterpreted and misunderstood if it is not seen in light of two other ecclesial heuristics—namely the four *notae missionis* and the four ecclesial agents. These two schemata address the church scattered and the role of the individual respectively—two issues that he rarely addresses in his discussion of the practices but critical to a well-formed ecclesiology. Finally, I summarize the implications for three subjects this paper intersects.

- Theology of Mission—How accessible are Yoder’s practices of the Christian community to outsiders?
- Church and Ministry in the New Testament—How does Yoder’s selection of New Testament texts affect his stance toward preachers and biblical scholars?
- Scripture and Ethics—How does Yoder’s emphasis on local and communal deliberation challenge ethical reflection in the church?

These questions are addressed throughout the paper but are summarized in the implication section. In the short conclusion, I return to the questions raised in the introduction about the ailing contemporary church and suggest Yoder’s five practices as a resource for renewing congregational life.

METHOD: WHY DOES YODER USE PRACTICES? YODER LOOKS TO THE CANONICAL WITNESS AS A BASELINE

The methodological starting point for Yoder is his insistence that church communities humbly approach “the canonical witness as a baseline and a critical instance” from which to judge tradition.² In the essay “The Authority of Tradition,” Yoder makes clear that reading Scripture as a Christian community may “enable a midcourse correction, a rediscovery of something from

² Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 66.

the past whose pertinence was not seen before.”³ Because of this approach, Yoder regularly recasts theological issues in New Testament terms and urges Christian communities to practice reading the Bible together.

Yoder distances himself from the labels: “biblicist,”⁴ “restorationist,” “primitivist,”⁵ “fundamentalist”⁶ and “evangelical.”⁷ For example, he writes in *The Politics of Jesus*, “It should not be thought that by failing to deal at length with such historical-critical problems the present book makes any neo-fundamentalist assumptions.”⁸ But in each case he commends the derided group for its emphasis on the importance of Scripture. Yoder points out that biblicists who “claim to grant authority ‘to the Scriptures alone’” are rooted in a rich theological tradition that was not in the past rigidly literalistic. “The [biblicist] theological tradition, which in its original age (Wyclif and Hus or of Luther and Calvin) was by no means naïve nor disrespectful of tradition as a hermeneutical matrix.”⁹ Yoder says that modern day biblicists who tend to draw on the *early* church’s experience as normative would do well to acknowledge that they are interpreting the Bible from a certain “context of interpretation” and to acknowledge that they owe a debt to the *later* church for the formation of the canon.¹⁰ “What is wrong with fundamentalism is not that it holds too tightly to the text of Scripture (although that is what it thinks it does). It is rather that it canonizes some postbiblical, usually post-Reformation

³ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 69.

⁴ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 66.

⁵ Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ*, 86.

⁶ Yoder, “The Apostle’s Apology Revisited in *The New Way of Jesus*, 116.

⁷ Yoder, “Introduction,” *For the Nations*, 6-7.

⁸ Yoder, “The Possibility of a Messianic Ethic,” *The Politics of Jesus*, 12.

⁹ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 66.

¹⁰ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 66-67.

formulation, equating it so nearly with the meaning of Scripture that the claim is tacitly made that the hermeneutic task is done.”¹¹ Their naiveté that they are immune from being influenced by a tradition is their blind spot.

However, Yoder affirms that the biblicists are right to insist that later tradition be evaluated by whether it has about it “the organic quality of growth from seed, faithful translation, or fecundation.”¹² Yoder insists that “there is such a thing as unfaithfulness.”¹³ Not all “unfolding, clarification or reformulation” by later Christians has biblical resonance. There is a “difference between compatible extrapolation and incompatible deviation” from the early church.¹⁴

We are faced with error, into which believers are seduced by evil powers seeking to corrupt the church and to disqualify her witness. To denounce those errors we must appeal to the common traditions from which those who fall into error are falling away, which they previously had confessed together with us . . . The clash is not tradition versus Scripture but faithful tradition versus irresponsible tradition. Only if we can with Jesus and Paul (and Francis, Savonarola, Milton, and the others) denounce *wrong* traditioning, can we validly affirm the rest. Scripture comes on the scene not as a receptacle of all possible inspired truths, but rather as witness to the historical baseline of the communities’ origins and thereby as link to the historicity of their Lord’s past presence.¹⁵

For Yoder, it is Scripture that holds the key to “enable a midcourse correction, a rediscovery of something from the past whose pertinence was not seen before.”¹⁶ Scripture provides a historical baseline by which the community can assess itself.

¹¹ Yoder, “The Apostle’s Apology Revisited in *The New Way of Jesus*, 116.

¹² Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 67.

¹³ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 67.

¹⁴ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 67.

¹⁵ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 69. Italics original.

¹⁶ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 69.

Yoder's emphasis on the clarity and relevance of the Scriptures to the Christian community is the foundation of his most famous book *The Politics of Jesus*. In the first chapter, Yoder explained that he would be operating from the point of view of the

Radical Protestant axiom, which more recently has been revitalized and characterized as 'biblical realism,' according to *which it is safer for the life of the church to have the whole people of God reading the whole body of canonical Scripture than to trust for enlightenment only to certain of the filtering processes through which the learned folk of a given age would insist all the truth must pass.*¹⁷

Yoder believes it is entirely appropriate for the church to read the Scriptures together for ethical guidance.

Yoder is respectful of critical scholarship and many of his insights in *The Politics of Jesus* depend on the work of critical scholars. But he is skeptical about the consistency of the "critical reconstructions" that claim to have found "hard facts" "behind the [canonical] documents."¹⁸ He maintains his confidence in using the canonical Scriptures as a baseline.

Yet after having stated my serious openness to the critical task, it may be in order to testify to some skepticism about the degree of clarity that can be promised by the techniques currently used in that field of research.¹⁹

Rather than depending on scholars who claim to be able to reach behind the sources, Yoder argues that "it is safer for the life of the church to have the whole people of God reading the whole body of canonical Scripture."²⁰

The vision of the community poring over the Scriptures together is central to Yoder's ecclesiology. As we will see in this paper, Yoder emphasizes practices drawn from the canonical Scriptures. In particular, he focuses on practices where the whole people of God is discerning

¹⁷ Yoder, "The Possibility of a Messianic Ethic," *The Politics of Jesus*, 4. Italics mine.

¹⁸ Yoder, "The Possibility of a Messianic Ethic," *The Politics of Jesus*, 12.

¹⁹ Yoder, "The Possibility of a Messianic Ethic," *The Politics of Jesus*, 12.

²⁰ Yoder, "The Possibility of a Messianic Ethic," *The Politics of Jesus*, 4.

together. Yoder argues that *communal* biblical interpretation serves a reforming and renewing function—keeping in check the development of authorities and institutions which would put power in the hands of one preacher, scholar, or bishop.

PROLEGOMENA: HOW DO THE PRACTICES INFLUENCE YODER’S THEOLOGICAL APPROACH? YODER ASSESSES THE VOCABULARY OF PRACTICE, MARK, SACRAMENT, AND CATHOLICITY IN LIGHT OF THE CANONICAL WITNESS

Yoder argues the vocabulary of the practices of the New Testament should override and renew technical academic vocabulary.

Yoder argues in *The Fullness of Christ* that the social structures of the church today should also be “tested by scripture.” He denies that he is trying to “restore” the early church. But he also criticizes those who dismiss reference to the New Testament pattern as “primitivist.”

It is neither possible nor necessarily desirable to reproduce in detail specific social structures of another age; to this the generally pejorative label ‘primitivist’ points. Yet such a label is very blunt weapon. It gives us no help in explaining why preaching should be biblical, or why doctrine should be tested by scripture, and church order not; unless one assumes, with Luther but clearly against scripture itself, a difference of kind between the dogmatic and the social. Why should it be assumed that church order is the one area in which the New Testament is not normative?²¹

He goes on to say that arguing that the New Testament is germane to the question of church structures is not a particularly controversial point. “Every Christian tradition, including the Roman Catholic, is agreed that the New Testament is to serve as in *some* way or other a checkpoint and court of appeal.”²² Similar to what he said in the “Authority of Tradition” essay that is quoted above, he says, “The question is rather which changes are good or legitimate and which other changes involve moving away from or even denying the essence of the church.”²³

²¹ Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ*, 86.

²² Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ*, 86.

²³ Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ*, 86.

Thus, it is not an accident that Yoder redefines the important ecclesiological terms “practice,” “sacrament,” “mark,” “catholicity” and “charisma” in light of New Testament usage. In each case, the five practices function for Yoder as a shorthand way of referring to the New Testament baseline. This paper questions whether Yoder’s five practices are representative enough of the New Testament to be used that way.

Yoder maintains that the ecclesiological, ethical, theological terms should be calibrated by the New Testament baseline. The terms are significant. “Practice” was defined technically by Alasdair MacIntyre in his 1981 book *After Virtue*²⁴ and has been influential in ethics and theology circles.²⁵ “Sacrament” and “catholicity” are central understandings of the church in liturgical traditions. The two “marks” of the church (proper preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments) are generative to much later thinking in Lutheran and Reformed traditions. For example, pastors and associate pastors in PCUSA churches are still today called “ministers of Word and Sacrament.”²⁶ “Teaching elders” in the PCA are similarly responsible “to feed the flock by reading, expounding and preaching the Word of God and to administer the Sacraments.”²⁷ Finally, misunderstanding of the New Testament usage of the word “charisma” fuels church structures which place great emphasis on leadership by a “gifted”

²⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (3d. ed.; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 187.

²⁵ For one example, see Dorothy Bass, ed. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 10.

²⁶ *Book of Order: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II*. (Louisville, Ky.: The Office of the General Assembly, 2007), G-6.0202. Cited 9 July 2008. Online: <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/boo07-09.pdf>

²⁷ *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (6d. ed.; Lawrenceville, Ga: The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2007), 88. Cited 9 July 2008. Online: <http://www.pcaac.org/BCO%202007%20Combined%20for%20Web.pdf>

few leaving the rest of the congregation to function as spectators—thus completely reversing the apostle Paul’s use of the word.

Yoder might have chosen to surrender words that are commonly used in ways he disagrees with but instead he attempts to redeploy them in ways that better cohere with his understanding of the baseline of the New Testament.

I shall return later to the notion that we should eschew the use of words that ‘might be misunderstood,’ i.e., that others would use differently. This concern is understandable, but if we took it seriously there would not be many words left.²⁸

He goes on to say,

The right corrective is not to seek fail-safe words never yet corrupted but rather to renew daily the action of preempting the extant vocabulary, rendering every creature subject to God’s rule in Christ.²⁹

Thus, Yoder argues that it is theologically warranted to try to redeem words that have strayed too far from the New Testament baseline. He hopes that reassessing them by “the historical baseline of the communities’ origins”³⁰ will “enable a midcourse correction, a rediscovery of something from the past whose pertinence was not seen before.”³¹

Similarly, in the realm of ethics Yoder argues that the church need not be bound to the conventions of the field of ethics. In 1987, Yoder delivered the lecture “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture” as the Presidential Address to the Western Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics.³² He commends five practices of the early church that are described in the New Testament and then says,

²⁸ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 368.

²⁹ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 370.

³⁰ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 69.

³¹ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 69.

³² Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 359.

It is hard to link this picture with our guild's standard meta-ethical discussions of consistent moral discourse. Some ethicists believe that the most important, and the procedurally prior, task of the ethicist is to disentangle the varieties of modes of moral argument and to argue that one of them is right . . . The originality and the specificity of their [the apostolic writers'] stance lies elsewhere than within the reach of that traditional but abstract methodological debate. Methodological analysis is helpful to illuminate problems of structure, but it is not the prerequisite for the community's right or capacity to think morally.³³

In other words, ethicists often helpfully dissect and analyze moral reasoning but they should not be given the authority to make decisions for the Christian community—a role the community itself should retain. (Yoder will note below in the section on four agents that the “teacher” in the community plays the role of analyzer of words—similar to the professional ethicist). The community can make use of the insights of ethicists but needs to weigh issues by its own values.

While recognizing the difficulty of constructing a pure type of deontological or utilitarian reasoning, the academic ethicist still sees it as his contribution to call for relative purity of type in order to bring the debates more under control. In a more communal and less monolingual context of discernment, the task of the teacher will rather be the opposite: to contribute to the community's awareness that every decision includes elements of principle, elements of character and of due process, and elements of utility.³⁴

This is largely in keeping with what MacIntyre argues in *After Virtue*—that “what is virtuous” cannot be determined by someone in a community that does not share the same *telos*.³⁵ Yoder addresses this question specifically in the section “Is Our Ethics for Everyone?” of his essay “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood.”³⁶ These two quotations at the beginning and end of this section capture Yoder's nuanced view:

³³ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 371-372.

³⁴ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 36.

³⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 30, 149.

³⁶ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” 40-43.

The view I am seeking to interpret does not discount public comprehensibility nor the appeal to outside audiences. Yet it is suspicious of ‘nature’ or ‘public’ truth claims when it is proposed that they can stand alone, or come first . . .

Our concern should then be not to limit truth to the sectarian but to suspect the common-sense epistemology which underlies at least some ‘natural revelation’ claims. It would also be wrong to claim, with a certain degree of high Protestantism, that depravity is the most fundamental truth about human nature and moral insight; yet to put our truth in the generally accessible knowability of the moral on the part of our secular human culture is certainly farther from the truth.³⁷

In other words, Yoder claims that Christian ethical discourse is usually intelligible to the outsider. It need not conform to the rules of “proper” ethical discourse for it to be accessible. Like MacIntyre, Yoder denies that such a “pure” “objective” language exists. This discussion also has implications for a theology of mission which is addressed in the “implications” section below.

Yoder intentionally uses the term “practice” to refer to New Testament processes rather than following MacIntyre’s technical definition of the term.

Yoder has no hesitation about using the term “practice” in a more general way as a synonym to “process” rather than following MacIntyre’s technical definition. Yoder’s book *Body Politics* includes in its subtitle the word “practices”: *Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World*. But Yoder makes clear that he is not using MacIntyre’s technical description of practice.³⁸ Yoder probably makes the distinction because his work on the five practices grew out of a lecture at Duke Divinity School in 1986 and Stanley Hauerwas of Duke has been influenced by both MacIntyre and Yoder.

³⁷ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” 40, 43.

³⁸ According to MacIntyre, a ‘practice’ is “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which good internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.” MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

Yoder clarifies that he uses the word “practice” to describe any social process.

I chose the term practice as the most neutral word available; yet at the same time one may note that the contemporary philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has made of this ordinary word his key to a renewal of the understanding of how moral thinking works.³⁹

In *The Royal Priesthood* published two years later, a similar footnote reads,

I hesitate to use routinely and uniformly the term ‘practice’ for fear that it be taken too technically as having a special meaning defined by ethicists. There are some who do this with the definition offered by Alasdair MacIntyre in his *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981): 175. There is nothing wrong with MacIntyre’s description, but some take it as transforming a commonsensical meaning into a recondite one.⁴⁰

In other words, Yoder does not feel he must explain how each of his five practices conform to MacIntyre’s definition of a practice. If it is something the New Testament describes the community doing together, Yoder informally identifies it as a practice.

This necessarily leads to some impreciseness as to what Yoder might consider a practice. In “The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm,” he clarifies that, “The five parallel phenomenon which are all part of our common apostolic heritage . . . could be listed in any order, and there could very well be a sixth or seventh.”⁴¹ Perhaps he had in mind the list he, along with the other faculty at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries of Elkhart, Indiana, collated in 1967-1970. The list of practices and marks includes: (a) Bind and Loose, (b) Love the Brothers and Sisters, (c) Teach, (d) Follow Christ, (e) Serve, (f) Praise God, (g) Make Disciples, and (h) Greet the Brothers and Sisters.⁴² But Yoder does not seem to have returned to this set of elements in his own later writing. Or, what about other community processes

³⁹ Yoder, *Body Politics*, 88.

⁴⁰ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 363.

⁴¹ Yoder, “The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm,” *For the Nations*, 43.

⁴² Michael G. Cartwright, “Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity: John Howard Yoder’s Vision of the Faithful Church,” in *The Royal Priesthood*, 12-13. Cartwright cites Ross Thomas Bender, *The People of God: A Mennonite Interpretation of the Free Church Tradition* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1971), 142-145.

mentioned in the New Testament? Permit me a bit of facetiousness: (a) Foot-washing, (b) devotion to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42), (c) baptism for the dead (1 Cor 15:29), (d) laying on of hands,⁴³ (e) collecting offerings for poor churches (2 Cor 8), (f) singing of hymns, (g) not eating meat sacrificed to idols, and (h) limiting the authority of women in the community.⁴⁴

Which of these should be considered practices? Yoder does not identify criteria by which one would decide how many other processes referred to in the New Testament might be considered important practices today.

Yoder might have used MacIntyre's criteria to more clearly define what should qualify as a practice. But he rightly affirms that the church need not impose MacIntyre's definition anachronistically on the New Testament documents as if a New Testament process must meet MacIntyre's criteria in order to be significant for the church.

But Yoder still should have argued why the five practices he identifies are more central than some other possibilities. The weakness of Yoder's using so prominently the word "practice" which he considers to have "commonsensical meaning" is that when he does not bother defining it, that the reader is left with little reason to prioritize the five practices he identifies over other important New Testament ideas.

Consider as another example the many social processes named in Acts 2:42-47 (TNIV):

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their

⁴³ "There is in the New Testament some reference to the laying on of hands. It was applied in the commissioning of the seven (Acts 6:6), of Paul (13:3), and perhaps of Timothy (1 Tim. 4:14), so that it might seem parallel to later sacramental concepts. Yet it was also applied to an entire congregation (Acts 8:17; 19:6) or to an individual at the point of conversion, (9:17, which means it was done at least twice to Paul)." Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ*, 28.

⁴⁴ Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ*, 50-54.

homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Why should “breaking bread” qualify as a practice while “giving to anyone who had need” or “praising God” did not make it into Yoder’s list? What about “adding to their number daily those who were being saved” and “being filled with awe at the many wonders and signs” and “prayer”? It seems that other ecclesiological traditions could make solid arguments from not just this passage but from the whole New Testament that some of these practices are more important than the five Yoder emphasizes. Are the multiplicity of gifts, binding and loosing and open meeting more well documented in the New Testament than some of those in the Acts 2 passage?

Furthermore, with the two undisputed practices—baptism and eucharist—Yoder downplays their “religious” or “ritual” significance in order to emphasize their social significance and their similarity to the other practices. Yoder argues baptism implies the transcending of racial and other social barriers. Yoder says the Eucharist signifies economic sharing. Yoder rightly wants to recover the social emphasis of the sacraments but baptism and Eucharist also place (primary?) emphasis on Christ’s past objective work on the cross. When Paul says he “passed on” (1 Cor 11:23) the Eucharistic words to the Corinthians and the Last Supper is recorded in all of the four gospels and baptism is to be done “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19) it is overstating it to say these “are not ‘religious’ or ‘ritual’ activities, they are by nature ‘lay’ or ‘public’ phenomena.”⁴⁵ It is understandable that traditionally these two practices have been identified as having a different character than that of the other practices Yoder mentions.

⁴⁵ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 370.

People from other ecclesiological traditions could certainly make the argument that Yoder does not adequately capture a snapshot of the New Testament baseline with his five practices. As I will reiterate in the implications section under the heading “church and ministry in the New Testament,” in this way, Yoder’s five practices suffer from some weakness in what Richard Hays calls “the synthetic task” in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*.⁴⁶ Yoder helpfully draws from the five practices a powerful critique of the contemporary church but there may be other New Testament texts and practices that might speak just as powerfully and incisively. As we will see below, Yoder persuasively argues for the inadequacy of the two marks of the church being “proper preaching of the Word and the proper administration of the sacraments” but his five practices are not necessarily a better summary schema of the New Testament material.

Yoder admits he is not being comprehensive—he admits there could be a sixth and seventh practice—but as we will see, Yoder again and again returns to these practices to describe his vision of what the church should be. Therefore, it makes sense to point out that this vision would likely look differently *if there were a sixth and a seventh!* A community that adds praising God, devotion to the apostle’s teaching, experiencing awe at wonders, adding to their number regularly, or giving to anyone who was in need, is bound to look differently than Yoder’s five-practice church.

This line of criticism is the kind Yoder would have appreciated. He was disappointed that more reviewers of *The Politics of Jesus* did not question his biblical exegesis.

The most striking thing I learned from the critical responses to my *Politics of Jesus* has been the relatively low importance which the critics, even when they were Scripture

⁴⁶ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 245-246.

scholars, gave to basic questions of textual interpretation. The book was presented as an exercise in reading the text of the New Testament with certain questions in mind. Those who disagree with the book's conclusions, however, very seldom found it fitting or necessary to differ on the grounds that the text of the New Testament had not been read correctly. The differences were stated in a variety of ways but very seldom on the basis of the text. Critics find it easy to disregard direct textual interpretation, especially when the reading of the text calls into question one or another of the deeply believed axioms of Western Protestant culture. The ability to perceive that what the Bible says is different from what we have always assumed it meant is very difficult to acquire and accept. It is not simple for an author to deal with this kind of critical response. For it rejects what had been argued without dealing with the scriptural basis on which the argument rests.⁴⁷

This paper on the whole appreciates Yoder's exegesis but merely counters that his selection of texts highly influenced the final vision. Yoder would have gladly accepted the challenge

to go back again to the text, to read it still more modestly; with still less confidence that we already know all that it says; with still more attention to historical context and literary coherence; with still more concern to understand, from the inside, the mind of the writer(s); with still more trust that 'the Lord has yet more truth to break forth from his Holy Word.'⁴⁸

Yoder intentionally uses various terms for the church's processes rather than be limited by the historical use of the term "marks."

Another way that Yoder distances himself from technical ethical and systematic theology vocabulary is by intentionally varying his vocabulary. In his essay, "The Paradigmatic Public Role of God's People," Yoder reflects on what H. Richard Niebuhr and Karl Barth wrote about the social processes of the church. Yoder intentionally uses a variety of terminology. He calls Barth's list of six activities: "practices," "marks," "characteristics," "ways," and "specimen dimensions of exemplarity."⁴⁹ Here is an example of one sentence: "Barth in this passage

⁴⁷ Yoder, "The Apostle's Apology Revisited," in *The New Way of Jesus*, 115.

⁴⁸ Yoder, "The Apostle's Apology Revisited," in *The New Way of Jesus*, 115-116.

⁴⁹ Yoder, "The Paradigmatic Public Role of God's People," *For the Nations*, 27-29.

suggests six *characteristics* of the faith community, six *ways* in which it may be exemplary.”⁵⁰

In other words, Yoder tries to make clear that at this point he does not want to engage the historical conversation regarding the doctrine of the “marks of the church.” (Yoder makes clear his disagreement with the traditional formulation of the marks of the church in “A People in the World,”⁵¹ which we will examine below in the section on the *notae missionis*). The point is that Yoder is not as concerned about specifically identifying what is or what is not a practice or a mark. Rather, he is trying to make the point that however many there are, they speak to the world. Yoder does not believe later terminology (“marks” and “practices”) should be allowed to limit or distract from important points that can be made from the canonical Scriptures.

Yoder intentionally widens the use of the concept of “sacrament” to include other practices beyond those traditionally identified as sacraments.

Similarly, in the field of systematic theology, the important lexical issue is not as in ethics what a “practice” is but what can be called a “sacrament.” Yoder wants to challenge traditional understandings of the word “sacrament” because of its clergy-centered and ritual connotations. Yoder tries to crack open the settled definition of a sacrament by reexamining the activities of the early church. He is concerned that the concept of sacrament is too often given disproportionate influence on the church’s ecclesiology while some activities assumed to be normative in the New Testament are ignored. For example, Yoder argues that the conflict resolution process described in Matthew 18:15-20, his first practice, should qualify as a sacrament.

A process of human interchange combining the mode of reconciling dialogue, the substance of moral discernment, and the authority of divine empowerment deserves to be

⁵⁰ Yoder, “The Paradigmatic Public Role of God’s People,” *For the Nations*, 27. Italics mine.

⁵¹ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 77-89.

considered one of the sacramental works of the community. Only a few of the Reformation traditions came near to saying that, and the ‘Catholic’ practices carried on under the rubric of ‘absolution’ or ‘reconciliation’ have long since come to have a much thinner meaning.⁵²

Yoder suggests that at least three other New Testament activities should be considered as sacramental as baptism and Eucharist: (1) the conflict procedure described in Matthew 18, (2) the open floor discussion depicted in 1 Corinthians 14, and (3) the recognition of the multiplicity of gifts described in 1 Corinthians 12. Together with (4) baptism and (5) Eucharist, these round out Yoder’s five practices. He argues that the first three practices have the qualities of a sacrament even though they are not typically considered such.

I interrupt the listing to note that I began with these three specimens of apostolically prescribed social process because they do *not* fall within what ordinarily is called ‘worship,’ even less ‘liturgy.’ Yet, why should they not be so designated? Each speaks of practices carried out when believers gather for reasons evidently derived from their faith and capable of being illuminated by doctrinal elaboration. These practices are described as involving both divine and human action and as mandatory. It makes a difference whether they are done rightly or wrongly. Are these not the characteristics of what we ordinarily call ‘worship?’⁵³

In addition to arguing that the established number of sacraments is incomplete, Yoder also attempts to imbue the established two sacraments with social significance.

Each of the themes, moreover, calls into question in its own way the traditional understanding of the realm of sacrament, which has often stood in the way of believers’ understanding of their faith as a phenomenon in and for ‘the real world.’⁵⁴

Yoder believes that the social significance of the sacraments has often been obscured by the emphasis on the otherworldly significance of them.

⁵² Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 362.

⁵³ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 364. Italics original.

⁵⁴ Yoder, *Body Politics*, x.

Yoder calls his view of the Eucharist “sacramental (as distinct from sacramentalistic)” though also different from “Zwinglian.”⁵⁵ He explains that the early church’s understanding of breaking bread had social importance in addition to its ritual significance.

[The significance] is that bread is daily sustenance. Bread eaten together *is* economic sharing. Nor merely symbolically but in actual fact it extends to a wider circle the economic solidarity that normally is obtained in the family.⁵⁶

Thus, Yoder reexamines the practices that are widely considered sacraments (baptism and eucharist) by the light of the New Testament and argues that their constitutive parts can also be found in other practices. Like practice, Yoder does not specifically argue why other New Testament processes might or might not also be considered sacramental. Certainly people from other ecclesiological traditions would want to argue that there are other practices—praising God, caring for the poor, experiencing awe, adding to their number—that are described in the New Testament as being Spirit-empowered and socially impactful—fitting closely with Yoder’s description of the sacramental.

Yoder redefines the concept of “catholicity” to include those who attempt to align themselves by Scripture.

Because Yoder argues the traditional understanding of the sacraments is incomplete, he has often found himself explaining the “catholicity” of his ecclesiology.

I have often accepted the challenge of explaining why this [so-called “sectarian”] position is more ecumenical and more ‘catholic’ way to be Christian than are the various national and regional establishments that have become accustomed to claiming to the mainline.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 366.

⁵⁶ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 365. Italics original.

⁵⁷ Yoder, “Introduction,” *For the Nations*, 4.

The Nicene Creed describes the church as “catholic.” In “Catholicity in Search of a Location,” Yoder notes that the definition of “catholicity” is invariably shaped by the tradition of the definer.

If there were a way to sort out all the shapes of the claim to universality or catholicity, without anyone’s being accused of using the clarification in the interest of her own ‘spin,’ it would clarify the lay of the land but would not advance any particular thesis. I must, therefore, resign myself to walking with you through the conceptual minefield without naming or taming beforehand all the hazards.⁵⁸

In *Body Politics*, Yoder argues that his understanding of the church is catholic because it draws upon the practices of the New Testament churches.

Our model in each case will be the practice of the early church as reflected in the writings of the New Testament . . . Our agenda is ecumenical, not in the modern organizational sense of arranging conversations among denominational agencies, or in the sense of comparing and contrasting the foundational documents of conflicting confessions, but in the simpler sense of being relevant to all kinds of Christians.⁵⁹

In an essay in *For the Nations*, Yoder again submits that practices derived from the early church have unique significance. He notes that his practices are more straightforwardly derived from Scripture than those of Barth and Niebuhr.

Between H. Richard Niebuhr’s list of four marks and Karl Barth’s of six, let me close with my list of five. This list differs from the others *in that it is derived straightforwardly, inductively, from the experience of the first Christians*, and in that it makes still more evident the unity between message and medium.”⁶⁰

Because they are derived from the experience of the first Christians, they are relevant to all Christians, i.e. “catholic.” Again we see here the point made above about the importance Yoder places reference to the New Testament “baseline.”

⁵⁸ Yoder, “Catholicity in Search of Location,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 305.

⁵⁹ Yoder, *Body Politics*, ix- x.

⁶⁰ Yoder, “The Paradigmatic Public Role of God’s People,” *For the Nations*, 29. Italics mine.

In the “Catholicity in Search of a Location” essay, Yoder defends more technically his definition of catholicity.

It [Yoder’s criterion for catholicity] says in a systematic and formal way what must happen, namely that there must be substantial contemporary dialogue *in the light of Scripture*. Catholicity has been located, in that formal sense, wherever and whenever everyone concerned converses about everything they do and should believe and do as they respond to the Lord who sent them to all the nations with all that he had taught them. Such formal catholicity is denied if any people, or any subjects, are excluded from that conversation. Catholicity has secondly been ‘located’ in that no one place, not Rome or Canterbury, Geneva or Rhodes is privileged; such conversation must take place everywhere. Normative criterion for these conversations, as for the others a fuller list might add, *will be the common loyalty to the Scriptures*.⁶¹

Processes that involved communal discussion of the Scriptures constitute for Yoder the common ground which is catholicity. The idea from this last quotation is one of Yoder’s most valuable and original formulations. Like a theological Robin Hood, Yoder takes authority from the few and gives it to the many. But he insists that Scripture be the common loyalty which holds the many together. This is Yoder’s solution to the problem of authority (Pope vs. Bible; hierarchy vs. Biblicism)—he chooses neither. He replaces the pope with the people. He replaces literalistic reading of the Bible with discerning conversations with the Scriptures at the center (Matthew 18’s binding and loosing and 1 Corinthians 14’s open meeting). We will revisit this insight again later in the paper under the topic of “authority.” This idea is also the critical one reflected on in the final section with regard to Scripture and ethics. The person who believes passionately in the authority of Scripture should help facilitate dialogue about it rather than merely inform people about it. There is a lesson here for preachers who like to unload information on their hearers but do not consider it their responsibility to facilitate conversation.

⁶¹ Yoder, “Catholicity in Search of Location,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 319. Italics mine.

Yoder recovers the word “charisma” to mean something everyone in the church is given so that they can minister to others.

Yoder points out that the current connotations of the word “charisma” distort the New Testament meaning. According to current usage, someone who has “charisma” has a certain flashiness. This is diametrically opposed to its use in 1 Corinthians 12 where the apostle Paul argues that everyone has received a gift (*charisma*). The distorting of this term was spurred on by sociologist Max Weber’s definition of “charismatic.”

‘Gifts’ are thought to be those activities which pop out unpredictably, in that erratic-ecstatic way which since Max Weber even secular language calls ‘charismatic’ . . .⁶²

. . . here we must point out that the meaning of ‘charisma’ is warped when it is thus focused on the spectacular and the powerful. For 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, no function, no Christian, is non-charismatic; some charisma is flashy and some is not; some is for leading and some is for healing. Paul’s special concern is to make flashiness less important.⁶³

The emphasis in the New Testament is not on the few who are “gifted” (charismatic) but rather on the contributions that all can make to the community.

Nor is the other twentieth century definition of “charismatic,” as those who are particularly interested in speaking in tongues, close to the apostle Paul’s usage. Paul is instead urging the Corinthians and Romans to recognize that tongues is only one gift.

It is ironic that a usage which Paul introduced in order thus to teach against over-valuing the special endowment of a few has come in modern usage to be a standard label for just what he was opposing . . . These two strands of language practice have pretty well fixed the meaning of the term in current English. We cannot stop the evolution of popular parlance, but we can ask . . . that new definitions not be read back into ancient documents.⁶⁴

⁶² Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ*, 28.

⁶³ Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ*, 31.

⁶⁴ Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ*, 33.

Yoder cautions again here that a biblical word may need to be renewed.⁶⁵

In summary, Yoder reexamines the ecclesial language of practice, mark, sacrament, catholicity and charisma in light of the baseline witness of the canonical Scriptures. Yoder argues that the New Testament descriptions of the church should not be domesticated by external grids. The ethical guild's definition of practice, the traditional understanding of sacrament, the classical Protestant marks of the church, the language of catholicity, and the sociological definition of charisma need to be critiqued with reference to the practices of the early church as depicted in the New Testament. However, it was also pointed out that Yoder's loose definition of New Testament practices and sacraments might be expanded to include many other processes not included in Yoder's five. The addition of an additional practice, which Yoder concedes might be theoretically appropriate, would certainly give the Yoderian ecclesiology a different flavor (e.g. praising God, adding to their number daily, caring for the poor or experiencing awe).

CONTENT: WHAT ARE THE FIVE PRACTICES? A SUMMARY OF YODER'S FIVE PRACTICES OF THE CHURCH

In 1986, in a lecture at Duke Divinity School, Yoder described five practices of the early church which he argued should be recovered today.⁶⁶ These same five practices are described in the book *Body Politics* (1992), and in essays in *The Royal Priesthood* (1994), and *For the Nations* (1997).⁶⁷ In his earlier book *The Priestly Kingdom* (1984), all five appear - sometimes in groups

⁶⁵ Yoder, "Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture," *The Royal Priesthood*, 370.

⁶⁶ Yoder, "Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture," *The Royal Priest hood*, 359-373.

⁶⁷ Yoder, "Table of Contents," *Body Politics*, iii. Yoder, "Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture," *The Royal Priest hood*, 359-373. Yoder, "The Paradigmatic Public Role of God's People," (originally presented in 1992), *For the Nations*, 29-33. Yoder, "The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm," (originally presented in 1994), *For the Nations*, 43-46.

of three.⁶⁸ He had also written extensively about the individual practices⁶⁹ but they are not collected into the five-fold arrangement until 1986. As can be seen in the table below, Yoder slightly changes the title of the practices and the order in which he lists them.

<i>Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World</i> ⁷⁰	“Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture” in <i>The Royal Priesthood</i> ⁷¹	“The Paradigmatic Public Role of God’s People” in <i>For the Nations</i> . ⁷²
(1) Binding and Loosing “The law of Christ” ⁷³ “the <i>Regel Christi</i> —the Rule of Christ,” “loving dialogue” “reconciling dialogue” ⁷⁴	(1) Fraternal Admonition	(2) Forgiveness
(2) Disciples Break Bread Together / Eucharist	(4) Breaking Bread	(3) socialism as implied in the Eucharist
(3) Baptism and the New Humanity / Baptism	(5) Induction into the New Humanity	(1) egalitarianism as implied by baptism into one body
(4) The Fullness of Christ / Multiplicity of gifts	(2) The Universality of Charisma	(5) the universality of giftedness
(5) The Rule of Paul / Open meeting	(3) The Spirit’s Freedom in the Meeting	(4) the open meeting

⁶⁸ The first three are mentioned in Yoder, “The Kingdom as Social Ethic,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 93-94. “Binding and Loosing” and the last two are mentioned in the following two essays. Yoder, “Radical Reformation Ethics,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 116-118. Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 22-34.

⁶⁹ He addresses “The Rule of Paul” in Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists,” in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Willard Swartley; Elkhart, Ind.: Institute for Mennonite Studies, 1984). He addresses “The Fullness of Christ” in Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ*. He addresses “Binding and Loosing” in Yoder, “Binding and Loosing,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 323-358.

⁷⁰ Yoder, “Table of Contents” *Body Politics*, iii. I have included after the slash in the *Body Politics* column of the table the words on the back cover of *Body Politics* because they use different wording than the table of contents. Yoder uses both wordings.

⁷¹ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 368.

⁷² Yoder, “The Paradigmatic Public Role of God’s People,” *For the Nations*, 33.

⁷³ Yoder, *Body Politics*, 4.

⁷⁴ Yoder, *Body Politics*, 7.

Yoder's ecclesiology has many aspects and could be approached from a variety of angles—pacifism, repudiation of Constantinian accommodation to the state, Anabaptist roots, and the sacramental—to name a few. But in his writing after 1986, Yoder uses the five concrete practices as his primary way of throw contemporary churches into sharp relief. These practices serve “as a baseline and a critical instance”⁷⁵—a sample of New Testament ecclesiology. Yoder suggests reflection on them may clarify whether churches today have developed faithfully from the early church—the “difference between compatible extrapolation and incompatible deviation.”⁷⁶ In each case, Yoder argues that the original New Testament practice has been today almost entirely lost in most churches.

First, Yoder laments that “binding and loosing” (Matt 18:18), which involves moral discernment through dialogue and forgiveness, is rarely practiced. Yoder argues that life in Christian community involves regular conflict resolution. Matthew 18:15-18 serves as the model confrontation procedure. If a person in the Christian community has a problem with what someone else in the community has done, they should go and talk to the person about it. If they are unsatisfied with how this conversation goes, they are to enlist the help of someone else to see if they can come to a mutual understanding of the issue. These conversations may lead to ethical discussion by the whole community.

Second, the sense of the Eucharist as a meal (1 Corinthians 11:20-22), where people share their food with one another, is rarely practiced. Yoder calls this practice of the early church, “Disciples Break Bread Together.” Yoder points out that what we call today “Communion” or “Eucharist” or “Lord’s Supper” was surely a meal in the early church. Though

⁷⁵ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 66.

⁷⁶ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 67.

this subject has a complicated history with debates between Catholics and Protestants about the meaning of this practice, it can at least be acknowledged that eating together, then and now, is most often done with family. Sharing a table is one way of opening up one's life with others.

Third, baptism rarely communicates the profound transcending of social and cultural barriers. Yoder says that the early church participants were bonded together as a family. Other loyalties and obligations related to social class and race were diminished because of their common connection to Jesus. He calls this "Baptism and the New Humanity" citing Galatians 3:27-28, "for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Fourth, in almost every church there a few so-called "gifted" people who dominate the church while most congregation members are spectators. Yoder urges churches to recover the value of every person in the congregation, "The Fullness of Christ." The apostle Paul wrote "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' . . . God has put the body together" (1 Cor 12:21, 24).

Fifth, it is the rare congregation that truly opens the floor for all congregation members to participate. Small groups often pick up what Yoder calls "The Rule of Paul,"—the procedure outlined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14. The open meeting includes opportunity for everyone to share. Speech that improves, encourages and consoles, (called by Paul "prophecy") should be shared. Other members of the group should "weigh" what has been said.

Denominational groups that have less formal hierarchy (Mennonites, Quakers, Methodists, Plymouth Brethren, Baptists, Pentecostals, Puritans, and house churches) are more likely to find Yoder's suggestions practices palatable though these traditions are not spared from

Yoder's critique. On the other hand, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Lutherans, Anglicans, and Presbyterians are more likely to find Yoder's ideas radical, untenable, and unrealistic. For the purpose of summarizing the contrast in ecclesiological traditions, let me simplistically describe how a Roman Catholic might perceive the five practices: (1) *Binding and Loosing*: the priest facilitates confession, (2) *Disciples Break Bread Together*: the priest facilitates the mass, (3) *Baptism and the New Humanity*: infants are baptized, (4) *The Fullness of Christ*: the priests have a special religious ritual calling, and (5) *The Rule of Paul*: the congregation is silent as the priests recite mass. Yoder argues that all of these developments are unfortunate. Again, I am merely sketching here the kind of contrasts that an Anabaptist ecclesiology like Yoder's will typically have with a higher church ecclesiology. Roman Catholic churches are not singled out by Yoder as problematic. Yoder sees problems developing soon after the death of the first apostles and exacerbated by Constantine. Thus, few church traditions are exempt from Yoder's concerns.

SIGNIFICANCE: WHAT DIFFERENCE DO THEY MAKE? YODER'S EMPHASIS ON THE PRACTICES CHALLENGES FIVE COMMON ECCLESIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS (SACRAMENT, INVISIBLE CHURCH, THE GOSPEL, EVANGELISM, AND AUTHORITY).

Drawing from a wide range of Yoder's writing on ecclesiology, I have identified five ecclesiological concepts that Yoder challenges by emphasizing the five practices of the early church.

1. *Sacrament*: The practices reveal that the church should be as socially relevant as it is sacramentally religious.

Yoder challenges a view that says the sacramental practices of the church have little social impact. I have noted above that Yoder contends that all five practices can be seen as

sacramental. The sacraments are sometimes thought of as instrumental, even magical—they themselves “accomplish their spiritual purpose” regardless of the social reality. They are thought to have spiritual value, not practical value. They are thought to accomplish something in the unseen realm but are mere religious rituals in this world.

Yoder, on the other hand, argues that these New Testament practices can be described quite readily in “social process” terms. In his essay, “Sacrament as *Social Process*: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” he explains that the five practices,

can be spoken of in *social process* terms easily translated into religious terms . . . Part of the reason for not looking at them as *social processes* over the years may well be the special aura cast around them by the word ‘sacrament.’⁷⁷

I paraphrase below his descriptions of the social process aspects of each practice.

- Baptism can be described as interethnic reconciliation.
- Eucharist can be described as economic sharing.
- Binding and loosing can be described as conflict resolution.
- The Spirit’s leading and discernment in the meeting can be described as soliciting feedback.
- The universality of giftedness can be described as the division of labor.

He writes,

There you have before you the fivefold pattern. In each case the shape of grace is described and prescribed and practiced in the early church as a *social process* pattern, enabled and mandated as part of the good news of redemption.⁷⁸

When Yoder uses this phrase “social process,” he is pointing out that these practices are not unintelligible to the world. For example, though Eucharist is not practiced by government

⁷⁷ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 364. Italics mine.

⁷⁸ Yoder, “The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm,” *For the Nations*, 47. Italics mine.

agencies, the economic sharing implied in its practice could be comprehended by a social worker. Someone observing the practice of Matthew 18's "binding and loosing" might be impressed with the process's potential for improving conflict resolution in the workplace. The practices of the church are not wholly unintelligible to the outside world.

But, Yoder argues, too many Christians are unaware of the accessibility of the "social processes" because they think of church practices as wholly relegated to the "religious" sphere. Most Christians do not see the connection between "real life" and their religious practices. They come to a religious building, sing religious songs, participate in religious rituals, listen to a religious message and leave. Some stop attending worship services and do not find they miss it much. Yoder argues that these people have not actually experienced church life because they have not participated in the five practices of a Christian community. They have rejected a stale imposter of the church.

Furthermore, the social importance of these processes are rarely emphasized to outsiders. The practices of the church have been seen as "religious" but without value to outsiders. Yoder argues that if the church will do the practices of the New Testament church, the church will end up serving as an example of what the world should be.

2. *Invisible Church:* The practices reveal who is really part of the community and render unnecessary the concept of the "invisible church."

Yoder challenges the concept of the "invisible church." Within Christendom, there had been a recognition that many church attenders were nominal Christians and that only God knew who were true Christians. Thus, the idea of the "invisible church" arose.

It was perfectly clear to men like Augustine that the world had not become Christian through its compulsory baptism. Therefore, the doctrine of the invisibility of the 'true church' sprang up in order to permit the affirmation that on some level somewhere the

difference between belief and unbelief, i.e., between church and world, still existed. But this distinction had become invisible, like faith itself.⁷⁹

A preacher might preach to a large congregation but there was an acknowledgement that only some were true Christians. Martin Luther was aware of the phenomenon of nominal Christians. His vernacular mass was intended for “those who do not believe and are not yet Christians.”⁸⁰ Luther wondered whether a visible church (i.e. a voluntary community) should be established in which the New Testament practices might be undertaken.

Martin Luther himself, for instance, thought seriously of the possibility of creating a committed Christian community, to which he testified in the oft-quoted preface to his ‘German Mass’ of 1526. It would have been desirable, he said, that in addition to a continuing use of the Latin liturgy and to the introduction of the high Lutheran German language liturgy there might have been in the third place new corporate expressions in visible congregations.⁸¹

Luther decided not to form such a community.

As we suggested before, the loving community was likewise a part of the vision of Martin Luther. Yet, contrary to the changes that he felt he was fully authorized to make in the external forms of the magisterial church, Luther felt it improper to seek actively to form at his own initiative a group with this quality of relationship, without the prior presence of the people required to form it, for fear of its becoming a clique.⁸²

This dynamic continues to the present day. Should a church community make clear that a high standard of Christ-like behavior is required if a person is to remain a member of the church in good standing? Or should one allow the people who exhibit little indication of Christian behavior to remain within the community with hope that they might be encouraged to renew their commitment when they happen to show up at a church service? The Southern Baptist

⁷⁹ Yoder, “The Otherness of the Church,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 57.

⁸⁰ Cartwright, “Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity,” *Royal Priesthood*, 24.

⁸¹ Yoder, “A People in the Word,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 78. See also Cartwright’s summary of Luther’s position in Cartwright, “Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity,” *Royal Priesthood*, 24-25.

⁸² Yoder, “A People in the Word,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 82.

Convention debated this exact issue this summer—some arguing that overinflated church membership rolls were giving the denomination false confidence while others arguing that the church should not pick fights with nominal Christians for risk of turning them off even more.⁸³

Yoder notes that these positions do not necessarily break along denominational lines. When reflecting on the exchange between Johannes C. Hoekendijk and Donald McGavran regarding the expectations placed upon new believers, Yoder notes that Hoekendijk demands costly racial integration whereas McGavran is content to push for this at a later stage. Both are reacting against their tradition.

We have come upon one of the reasons the dialogue around church growth has been so confusing and shown so little progress. People like Hoekendijk, although he was a member of a ‘national church,’ represent the vision of the church and its mission which the historians call ‘believers’ church’ or ‘radical reformation,’ according to which the situation of the established institutions of Christendom was not mere imperfection or incompleteness but denial of the faith. Although he belongs to a ‘free church’ denomination, McGavran, using evangelical language and attracting support in America from an evangelical public, proceeds from a multitudinist and establishmentarian view of the church.⁸⁴

Hoekendijk is calling for purity while McGavran wants large numbers of people to join a church (i.e. “church growth”) with relatively low initial requirements and ease these new Christians into greater commitment and depth over time.

Yoder’s tact, of course, is to recall the baseline of the New Testament and invite reflection on whether these traditions have developed faithfully or not from that tradition. A person like McGavran defending inclusiveness and low standards might point out that people converted and baptized in the book of Acts do not always seem to be highly informed beforehand about the behavior that will be demanded of them when they become Christians. Furthermore,

⁸³ Bob Smietana, “Resolved to Discipline: Southern Baptists repent of inflated membership numbers,” *Christianity Today* (August 2008). Cited 28 July 2008. Online: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/august/3.13.html>

⁸⁴ Yoder, “The Social Shape of the Gospel,” *Exploring Church Growth*, 279.

Galatians and 1 Corinthians indicate that some believers in the church were immature in their faith. A person defending purity might point to Jesus' calls to count the cost of the different way of life that would be required before embarking to follow him.

Yoder argues that it is not so much their individual purity or beliefs that mark believers in the New Testament but rather their active submission to the practices of the community. The Christians in the early church could be readily identified by their participating in church practices.

To see them in operation we need to do sociology, not semantics or philosophy. Together (though other dimensions could yet be added) they offer a well-rounded picture of the believing community; that is, of specific, datable, nameable, local, first-century, messianic synagogues as a form of human life together demonstrating not only far-reaching continuities with earlier history and culture but also foundational innovations.⁸⁵

If a person was part of the church, they did these practices. If they did not submit to the practices, (consider the consequences of defying the community's processes in Matthew 18:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 5), they were not part of the church.

A person could not say what is often said today, "I believe as they do but do not participate in those practices." It was not an option in the early church to have a set of right beliefs but not participate in the practices of the church. People who seem to be individually converted in the books of Acts were incorporated into the community. For example, Apollos was converted but Priscilla and Aquila assumed they were part of the same community thus taking it upon themselves to confront and correct him. We have no record of what happened to the Philippian jailer but we do know that there was a church formed in Philippi.

Yoder is arguing that both Hoekendijk and McGavran are wrong. It is not a matter of judging who is pure enough to be a member in good-standing. The issue is whether the person is

⁸⁵ Yoder, "Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture," *The Royal Priesthood*, 369.

committed to participation in the church's practices. If they are not, they are not a member. And the even bigger issue is the expectation that churches will consider the five practices Yoder identifies as central to their existence. If the only practice is sitting and listening to a sermon, many people will qualify as being members in good standing. But if the practices include the moral discernment of binding and loosing, participating in the community through the open meeting, prioritizing the church family bond over social prejudices, sharing with one another, and using of one's abilities for the community, then the standards are substantial enough that there is a clear difference between those who are involved and those who are not.

It is not one's individual achievement of purity, nor perfunctory participation in an institution, but rather participation in the voluntary community. "The alternative to arbitrary individualism is not established authority but an authority in which the individual participates and to which he or she consents."⁸⁶

Yoder argues that the distinctiveness which is mandatory is corporate or "collective." As individuals, there is a mix of Christ-like and sinful behavior in every person. But these individuals submit to the distinctiveness of the community's practices. Yoder emphasizes that this distinctiveness and collectivity are consistent throughout the canonical witness. "Each of the four nouns [in Exodus 19] designates a collectivity: chosen *race*, royal *priesthood*, holy *nation*, God's own *people*, while each of the adjectives denotes distinctiveness."⁸⁷ After drawing on Revelation 5:9f, 1 Peter 2 and Ephesians in his essay "A People in the World," Yoder concludes, "In every direction we might follow in exposition, *the distinctiveness of the church of believers is prerequisite to the meaningfulness of the gospel message.*"⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood," *The Priestly Kingdom*, 24.

⁸⁷ Yoder, "The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm," *For the Nations*, 40.

⁸⁸ Yoder, "A People in the World," *The Royal Priesthood*, 74-75. Italics original.

3. *The Gospel: The practices embody the gospel and are enabled by the gospel.*

Yoder argues that an understanding of the gospel as mere mental assent is inadequate. Yoder argues that the word “gospel” in the New Testament has social significance.

If we are ever to rescue God’s good news from all the justifiable but secondary meanings it has taken on, perhaps the best way to do it is to say that the root meaning of the term *euangelion* [“gospel”] would today best be translated ‘revolution.’⁸⁹

In other words, it has sometimes been thought that one could be a Christian by merely believing the right things. Yoder tries to make it clear that the original intent of the phrase “accepting the gospel” meant something more like “joining a revolution.”

Believing in the gospel necessarily means participation in the gospel-soaked practices of the church. The practices of the church embody and are made possible by the gospel. The previous dense sentence needs unpacking. For example, “binding and loosing”—being concerned enough about someone to talk to them about an issue—is one way of showing someone love. Jesus took human beings and their sin seriously enough to die. Thus, in a way, the practice of binding and loosing embodies the gospel. Furthermore, the forgiveness and the awkwardness of confronting someone, is enabled by the shared foundation of the good news of Jesus. If you are forgiven, you also ought to forgive others—this is the lesson of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:21-35 which appears right after the binding and loosing text (Matt 18:15-20). The gospel practice and gospel parable in Matthew 18 are related.

This is what Yoder means when he says the gospel is in the practices and that the practices are enabled by the gospel.

⁸⁹ Yoder, “The Original Revolution,” *For the Nations*, 166.

There you have before you the fivefold pattern. In each case the shape of grace is described and prescribed *and practiced* in the early church as a social process pattern, *enabled and mandated* as part of the good news of redemption.⁹⁰

Thus, the practices of the Christian community and the gospel are intimately connected. “The medium and the message are inseparable.”⁹¹ Yoder is implicitly criticizing the way most people see their role in the church—mechanical participation in the hierarchy (a tired medium) along with mental assent to certain beliefs (a tired message). For Yoder, accepting the gospel entails participating in the gospel community’s social processes.

After 1984, Yoder utilized practices to clarify his writing about transcending cultural prejudice in the church. In his writing on the subject until 1984,⁹² Yoder notes the problematic nature of church growth methods which purport to share the gospel without inter-ethnic fellowship but he does not cite a specific practice that might alleviate the problem. But in his later writing, he suggests baptism as the practice which embodies this aspect of the gospel.⁹³ The next few paragraphs trace this progression.

In his essay “Church Growth Issues in Theological Perspective,” Yoder responds to the church growth strategies of Donald McGavran. Yoder notes that it is difficult to help people to

⁹⁰ Yoder, “The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm,” *For the Nations*, 47. Italics original.

⁹¹ Yoder, “The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm,” *For the Nations*, 41.

⁹² Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (1972), 212-227. Yoder, “Church Growth Issues in Theological Perspective,” in *The Challenge of Church Growth* (1973), 25-48. Yoder, “The Apostle’s Apology Revisited,” in *The New Way of Jesus* (1980), 115-134. Yoder, “The Social Shape of the Gospel,” in *Exploring Church Growth* (1983), 277-284.

⁹³ From my research, it seems Yoder first begins deploying baptism as a church practice which addresses the problem of cultural barriers in the church with a brief mention in 1984’s *The Priestly Kingdom*. Yoder, “The Kingdom as Social Ethic,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 93. This is further developed at Duke in 1986 when he sketches the set of five practices. Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 359-373.

transcend their cultural prejudices if they have initially joined a church that is segregated.⁹⁴

Yoder raises a case study and sketches how a church growth proponent might think about it.

Building the church in a racist culture in southern Mississippi, you can only win people if you accept racism. You can only win whites if you accept their racism, and you can only win blacks if you are just as black. You should have no qualms about that adjustment in the first generation. You win your people that way. Then you nurture them. One of the things you teach them in the course of nurture is that racism is wrong. This you can tell them now that you have them in the church.⁹⁵

Yoder disagrees with this two-step progression.

This is partly a question of the psychology of the audience. If I were the convert in the racist Mississippi, I would think the missionary was cheating if he told me after I was baptized that I have to love the blacks when he had not wanted to tell me before.⁹⁶

Though the church growth proponent hopes that the new believer will eventually be “perfected”

(McGavran’s terminology) in their understanding of racism, often this does not happen.

McGavran would affirm this concern for inter-ethnic fellowship in the church but he would put it under two headings which come rather low on his list of priorities. One is to say that when you have people disciplined then you nurture them, and one of the things you will nurture them in is ethics. As part of this you will teach them that racial discrimination is a vice. And, second, you will nurture them in ecumenics, teaching them that church unity is a virtue. But both of these are second level items in priority. They are good, but they come later. If necessary we are willing to set them aside for the sake of growth. That seems to be the major theological tension between the New Testament and the ‘church growth’ emphasis.⁹⁷

Yoder concludes that the tendency in church growth methodology to confine inter-ethnic fellowship to a later stage in a church’s life conflicts with the New Testament’s frequent emphasis on reconciliation between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

⁹⁴ Yoder, “Church Growth Issues in Theological Perspective,” in *The Challenge of Church Growth*, 25-48.

⁹⁵ Yoder, “Church Growth Issues in Theological Perspective,” in *The Challenge of Church Growth*, 39.

⁹⁶ Yoder, “Church Growth Issues in Theological Perspective,” in *The Challenge of Church Growth*, 40.

⁹⁷ Yoder, “Church Growth Issues in Theological Perspective,” in *The Challenge of Church Growth*, 44.

Yoder addresses the biblical issues in more depth in a short essay called “The Social Shape of the Gospel.”⁹⁸ His subject again is McGavran’s dismissal of the need for church communities to cross cultural barriers. Yoder asks whether transcending cultural boundaries is part of the gospel or secondary to it. In other words, should evangelism embody transcultural relationships or can the gospel be taught to racists and the challenging of their racism be done later? Yoder argues from Galatians, Ephesians, and Acts that transcending the Jew / Gentile barrier was a key component of the Gospel.

He summarizes the problem in Galatians this way,

[Paul] says that they are denying the true gospel, or preaching a false gospel, if the overcoming of the barrier of the Jew and Gentile is not being lived out in their daily communal and sacramental life. What they [the Galatians] are practicing is a different gospel (1:6), a gospel contrary (1:9) to what he [Paul] is free to preach. They deny the gospel because they think they can have valid messianic faith without overcoming the barrier between Jew and Greek.⁹⁹

In other words, for the apostle Paul, the segregation of Jew and Gentile Christians which Peter participated in before he was confronted by Paul, was incongruent with the gospel (Gal 2:11-14). In *The Politics of Jesus*, he puts it this way, “The basic heresy he [the apostle Paul] exposed was the failure of those Jewish Christians to recognize that since the Messiah had come the covenant with God had been broken open to include the Gentiles. In sum: the fundamental issue was that of the social form of the church.”¹⁰⁰

Yoder clarifies that this does not mean that Christian communities will be perfect. Rather, he modestly concludes, “The gospel itself does have a preferred social shape.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Yoder, “The Social Shape of the Gospel,” in *Exploring Church Growth*, 277-284.

⁹⁹ Yoder, “The Social Shape of the Gospel,” in *Exploring Church Growth*, 280.

¹⁰⁰ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 216.

¹⁰¹ Yoder, “The Social Shape of the Gospel,” in *Exploring Church Growth*, 283.

Yoder's statement is modest in that he does not say the gospel has a *mandatory* social shape. He is cautious because he knows that integration is an ongoing process not a completed state. Still, Yoder maintains integrating cultures is a non-negotiable direction which the church must pursue. He urges churches to "seek for trans-cultural and trans-generational ecumenically usable criteria to measure which expressions of the gospel are more or less authentic, and which strategies for its propagation are more or less adequate."¹⁰² His words become more concrete later when he integrates this idea with baptism.

In his later works on ecclesiology that include the five practices, this point—transcending cultural barriers—is addressed in the practice of "Baptism and the New Humanity." This framing of the concept is particularly effective because transcending cultural barriers and baptism are explicitly connected in Galatians 3:27-28¹⁰³—"for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27-28 TNIV). Not only does the pairing of inter-ethnic fellowship and baptism have biblical support, it is also directs congregations to explicitly incorporate the transcending of social barriers in the practice of

¹⁰² Yoder, "The Social Shape of the Gospel," in *Exploring Church Growth*, 283.

¹⁰³ Yoder, *Body Politics*, 28-29. Yoder makes his strongest argument here on this subject in *Body Politics*. Yoder also argues earlier about the importance of the Jew-Gentile reconciliation for the apostle Paul in the following two works. Yoder, "The Apostle's Apology Revisited," in *The New Way of Jesus*, 115-134. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 212-227. In this two passages, he spends significant time interpreting 2 Corinthians 5:17. He argues the best reading does not describe something inward. "So what Paul says is not centered on the changes that take place within the constitution of the individual person, but on the changed way in which the believer is to look at the world, and especially on overcoming the 'carnal standards' in which he used to perceive men in pigeonholes and categories and classes. Now he is able to perceive them in the light of their being in the place of Christ." Yoder, "The Apostle's Apology Revisited," in *The New Way of Jesus*, 131. The context of 2 Corinthians 5 supports Yoder's reading which the TNIV has adopted (though other recent translations —HCSB, ESV, NLT—have not). "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view . . . Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come" (2 Cor 5:16-17 TNIV). The importance of the Jew-Gentile issue is more easily made from Galatians, Romans, Ephesians, and Acts than from 2 Corinthians. Still, Yoder makes a good case that conversion is always more than an internal feeling. The reference to "new creation" in Galatians 6:15 strengthens his case further that this conversation language of "new creation" connoted overcoming social barriers. "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation" (Gal 6:15 TNIV).

baptism. When a person is baptized, they can easily see from Galatians 3:27-28, that this embarks them on the process of realizing what it means to be “one in Christ Jesus.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, the initiatory practice of baptism allows the community to state its long-term trajectory. Rather than a two-stage process of conversion and later perfection, both ideas are present in the one practice.

4. *Evangelism: The practices make clear that in evangelism the outsider is being invited to join a community.*

Yoder criticizes evangelism that merely proclaims an intellectual message to the outsider, rather than the church embodying the gospel in its social processes. He regularly asserts that the church is the center of God’s plan for renewal of the world.

The work of God is the calling of a people, whether in the Old Covenant or the New. The church is then not simply the bearer of the message of reconciliation, in the way a newspaper or telephone company can bear any message with which it is entrusted.¹⁰⁵

Yoder laments that the gospel is typically understood as a message to be passed on and thus the character of the Christian community is typically clergy-dominated because they are the ones who are thought to be the message-deliverers. He understands this problem to be rooted in the underestimation of the importance of the gathered community embodying the message. Without the community demonstrating the message, it is just “a message.”

¹⁰⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:13 parallels the words about baptism in Galatians 3. “For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor 12:13). 1 Corinthians 1:13-17 reveal Paul’s frustration that the practice of baptism has been used as a point of division in the community. The principle “baptism” text I have utilized in the past is Romans 6:3-4 which does not specifically address the overcoming of social barriers. “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Rom 6:3-4 TNIV. Col 2:12 is similar). Baptism, as Romans 6 and Colossians 2 indicate, involves dying to one’s old life and its sinning ways. This includes dying to one’s old social prejudices (Gal 3, Gal 6, 1 Cor 12).

¹⁰⁵ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 74.

The church continues rather, even in the newer ways of thinking of the ministry of the laity, to be sociologically identifiable only in the structure of the preaching ministry, since the only specifically Christian contribution being made to the renewal of secular society is a message . . . in the Constantinian picture the Christian congregation is thought of as a preaching post and not as a distinguishable fellowship in society . . .¹⁰⁶

If Yoder is correct as we reviewed in number 1 that “the social relevance of the church’s practices is visible to all,” it is a mistake to conceive of evangelism as an external activity with little connection to the normal internal functioning of the congregation. Yoder argues that the social processes of the gospel community will proclaim the gospel.

Yet in each case [practice] that way of interacting in the faith community is so concrete, so accessible, so ‘lay,’ that it is also a model of how any society, not excluding the surrounding ‘public’ society, can also form its common life more humanely.¹⁰⁷

Yoder is confident that the practices will speak loudly because they have social payoff that can be discerned easily by the world. “Ethics is more than ethics. Actions proclaim.”¹⁰⁸

In “The Biblical Mandate for Christian Social Action,” Yoder suggests different ways that the world will be touched by the witness of the church.¹⁰⁹ The church is (1) a paradigm or model. Outsiders see an idea in the church and strive to imitate it.

Sometimes the experience of the Christian community is a *paradigm* in the simple sense. The Christian community does things which the world may imitate . . . Today, even secular business management circles are adopting the concept of decision making through conversation which stems from the Radical Reformation.¹¹⁰

(2) The church keeps accountable their own members who are in positions of power in the world. “It is a pastoral and prophetic resource to the person with responsibilities of office.”¹¹¹ (3) The

¹⁰⁶ Yoder, “The Racial Revolution in Theological Perspective,” *For the Nations*, 115.

¹⁰⁷ Yoder, “The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm,” *For the Nations*, 47.

¹⁰⁸ Yoder, “The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm,” *For the Nations*, 41.

¹⁰⁹ Yoder, “The Biblical Mandate for Christian Social Action,” *For the Nations*, 185-189.

¹¹⁰ Yoder, “The Biblical Mandate for Christian Social Action,” *For the Nations*, 185-186.

¹¹¹ Yoder, “The Biblical Mandate for Christian Social Action,” *For the Nations*, 186.

church demonstrates that a different kind of social organization is possible. “The Christian community is also a *means of influencing* other groups . . . The church as a network of complementary charismata is a *laboratory* of social pluralism.”¹¹² Proclaiming the gospel is for Yoder about communicating to the outsider the good things that are being embodied by the community.

In various places in Yoder’s writing, he stresses that the whole people of God are the message. See the italicized phrases for different ways of describing the community in the quotes below from four different writings by Yoder.

- “The bearer of the prophetic task is *the whole people of God*.”¹¹³
- “The primary social structure through which the gospel works to change other structures is that of *the Christian community*.”¹¹⁴
- “So the foremost political action of God is the calling and creation of *his covenant people*, anointed to share with him as priests, prophets, and in the servanthood which he revealed to be the human shape of his kingship.”¹¹⁵
- “*The community of believers* is the form of the mission.”¹¹⁶

There are not strong boundaries which divide the church’s internal processes and its outreach.

“It becomes evident all along this exposition how little it would help if we were to seek to filter these affirmations through the grid of an a priori distinction between the ‘public’ world and some other world.”¹¹⁷ Yoder thinks that “fidelity and relevance” are a false dichotomy. They need not be “alternatives, in a null-sum trade-off where more of one is assumed to mean less of the

¹¹² Yoder, “The Biblical Mandate for Christian Social Action,” *For the Nations*, 188-189. Italics original.

¹¹³ Yoder, “Are You the One Who Is to Come?” *For the Nations*, 217. Italics mine.

¹¹⁴ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 153. Italics mine.

¹¹⁵ Yoder, “The Biblical Mandate for Christian Social Action,” *For the Nations*, 189. Italics mine.

¹¹⁶ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 89. Italics mine.

¹¹⁷ Yoder, “The Paradigmatic Public Role of God’s People,” *For the Nations*, 28.

other.”¹¹⁸ The Christian community need not make some sort of calculation about how dirty to get, how sinful to become, what compromises to make, in order to reach out to outsiders. Rather, “the very shape of the people of God in the world is a public witness, or is ‘good news,’ for the world.”¹¹⁹

To be clear, Yoder does not believe that the church’s priority should be to legislate its standards on the entire state. “Christian ethics is for Christians.”¹²⁰ In fact, Yoder argues that it is the non-coercive nature of these practices that is attractive to the world. Outsiders are invited to consider voluntarily joining a community that practices: (1) dialoguing with one another (binding and loosing), (2) listening to one another (open meeting), (3) valuing one another (multiplicity of gifts), (4) transcending prejudice (baptism) and (5) sharing with one another (eucharist).

The credibility of that which is both ‘good’ and ‘news’ consists precisely in its vulnerability, its refusability. That weakness marks all five of the incarnational processes I have been describing. They are not ways to administer the world; they are modes of vulnerable but also provocative, creative presence in its midst. That is the primordial way in which they transform culture.¹²¹

Thus, practicing the practices well is significantly evangelistic.

Yoder argues this line of thinking is present in Karl Barth’s work. In his essay, “The Paradigmatic Public Role of God’s People,” Yoder shows how Barth (with whom Yoder did doctoral work) argued that the church’s practices cannot help but speak to the world. Barth wrote, “the order of the faith community constitutes a public offer to the entire society.”¹²² In

¹¹⁸ Yoder, “The Paradigmatic Public Role of God’s People,” *For the Nations*, 28.

¹¹⁹ Yoder, “Introduction,” *For the Nations*, 8.

¹²⁰ Yoder, “The Otherness of the Church,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 62.

¹²¹ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 373.

¹²² Yoder, “The Paradigmatic Public Role of God’s People,” *For the Nations*, 27. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, IV:2 (trans. G.W. Bromiley Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 721.

other words, by the church being the church, the world will be “spoken to.” Yoder questions the idea that evangelism is something that the church does at a later stage—after its corporate life is attended to. The church’s internal life immediately speaks to the outside world.

It is not that first we set about being a proper church and then in a later move go about deciding to care prophetically for the rest of the world. To participate in the transforming process of becoming the faith community *is itself* to speak the prophetic word, *is itself* the beginning of the transformation of the cosmos.¹²³

What they [the five practices] have in common is that each of them concerns *both* the internal activities of the gathered Christian congregation *and* the ways the church interfaces with the world.¹²⁴

Thus, for Yoder, the church is inherently missional. The corollary is that mission should not be undertaken that is wholly removed from the church. “Thus peoplehood and mission, fellowship and witness, are not two desiderata, each capable of existing or being missed independently of one another; each is the condition of the genuineness of the other.”¹²⁵ The church’s internal life speaks to the world. Witness is fundamentally telling people about the good life of the internal community. In the “Implications” section below concerning the theology of mission, I reflect on what it might mean for Christian communities to intentionally make accessible their community practices to the world.

Because Yoder so strongly argues for the evangelistic power of the gathered Christian community, one is left to wonder what role the individual Christian plays in the world. What is the role of the church scattered? Do not most individual Christians live throughout the week in rather secular settings? Does not one’s integrity and Christ-likeness speak to others?

¹²³ Yoder, “The Paradigmatic Public Role of God’s People,” *For the Nations*, 27-28. Italics original.

¹²⁴ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 361. Italics original.

¹²⁵ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 78.

Yoder addresses these questions in the essay, “The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm” and the aptly named “A People in the World”—adding servanthood, enemy love and forgiveness as vital additions to the five practices. “If we are interested in making sense to our unbelieving or otherwise-believing neighbors, let this threefold cord be the test case.”¹²⁶ He criticizes “communitarians” who place singular focus on achieving optimal internal community life. He is skeptical that servanthood, enemy love and forgiveness can be fully lived out without contact with outsiders. “They [the communitarians] pull back on the grounds that only they have already experienced the power and novelty of that threefold evangelical cord in the worship and ministry of the church. They affirm [internal] integrity but at the cost of witness.”¹²⁷ This essay along with the earlier “A People in the World” which we will address below in the “The Church Scattered” section is crucial to understanding Yoder’s understanding of mission because he here qualifies the idea that the five practices will themselves be adequate for evangelism.

However, this does not negate Yoder’s emphasis that the message of the person in the secular workplace testifies by their serving, loving and forgiving that God is forming a people. It is not “the predominant purpose of God . . . to make individuals whole each by herself or himself, but to constitute a new covenant people responding freely to God’s call.”¹²⁸ The person in the workplace “alone” is always a member of the body of Christ, testifying that this body is worth belonging to. Those who are impacted by that person’s witness are moved not just to *repent* of their sin but to join the community of the *penitent*.

¹²⁶ Yoder, “The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm,” in *For the Nations*, 48.

¹²⁷ Yoder, “The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm,” in *For the Nations*, 49.

¹²⁸ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 91.

5. Authority: The practices expose the need for communal moral discourse rather than individualistic Scripture reading or institutional hierarchy.

Yoder argues that Scripture is to be understood in the context of the practice of reading Scripture in community, rather than as a tool for individuals apart from the community. The five practices of the early church assume regular intimate interactions with other Christians. The open meeting and binding and loosing assume that there will be dialogue and discussion surrounding the Scriptures and the moral life. The Bible is not one's authority unless one is part of the Christian community. Neither studying the Bible on one's own as a scholar nor reading the Scriptures devotionally on a mountaintop are Christian ways of reading Scripture, if they are not accompanied by a person's immersion in the lives of other Christians.

What we then find at the heart of our tradition is not some proposition, scriptural or promulgated otherwise, which we hold to be authoritative and to be exempted from the relativity of hermeneutical debate by virtue of its inspiredness . . . The most important operational meaning of the Bible for ethics is not that we do just what it says in some way that we can derive deductively. It is rather that we are able, thank to the combined gifts of teachers and prophets, to become aware that we do not do what it says, and that the dissonance we thereby create enables our renewal.¹²⁹

Assenting to the Bible as authoritative, but not participating with other Christians about the difference it makes in my particular life, falls short of the New Testament understanding of the church.

Yoder envisions a community with Scripture at its center. Authority does not lie in a singular interpreter, preacher, or writer but rather in the collective wisdom of the community guided by the Spirit.

Evangelical thought in recent decades has often been hampered by too naïve an understanding of how the Bible can function authoritatively in social ethics. On the one hand there has been naïve trust in the insight of the regenerate man of God; just as naïve on the other side has been the trust that a few phrases from the Bible could be translated directly into social policy without any discipline of translation across cultures. The

¹²⁹ Yoder, "The Authority of Tradition," *The Priestly Kingdom*, 70.

alternatives to these oversimplifications are not relativism or selling out to some contemporary social-science insight, but rather the functioning of the congregation under the guidance of the Spirit. The New Testament does not claim that Scripture contains all the answers. It rather promises us (John 14:25ff.; 16:12ff., as samples only) that there will be adequate and binding further guidance given to the church as it goes along, and that this further guidance will be subject to the judgment of the community, oriented by the fixed points of the apostolic witness in the canon.¹³⁰

Yoder challenges the concept of the church as an authoritarian hierarchical institution that precludes ongoing dialogue and examination by every member. Regular listening and discussion should characterize the Christian community.

Often church corporate meetings exist for information transmission. They rarely have mechanisms for self-examination. The implication for the contemporary congregation is that its direction should not be reviewed merely once a year when the Annual General Business meeting is held or when the budget is approved or when a pastor leaves or when the congregation must describe itself in a Church Information Form. The open meeting as envisioned in 1 Corinthians 14 should be a common practice. The church hierarchy should be held accountable.

Similarly, congregation members should be held accountable. But this is rare. Congregation members often think of themselves as consumers—putting their money in the plate for the show they watch and the services they enjoy. Yoder envisions congregational involvement that is far more dynamic. For example, he argues that congregations that foster the practice of conflict resolution described in Matthew 18 at the individual level will catalyze reflection throughout the organization. Confrontation produces conversation. Conversation produces discernment. Discernment produces wisdom. Wisdom recognizes the need for more evaluation. “Forgiving furthers discernment.”¹³¹

¹³⁰ Yoder, “The Biblical Mandate for Evangelical Social Action,” *For the Nations*, 187.

¹³¹ Yoder, “Binding and Loosing,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 328.

If the standards appealed to by those who would reprove someone are inappropriate, the best way to discover this is through the procedure of person-to-person conversation with reconciling intent. Thus the group's standards can be challenged, tested and confirmed, or changed as is found necessary, in the course of their being applied. The result of the process, whether it ends with the standards being changed or reconfirmed, is to record a new decision as part of the common background of the community, thus accumulating further moral insights by which to be guided in the future.¹³²

As discussed above, for Yoder the process of interpreting the Scriptures *as a community*, (a) allows him to use the Scriptures as central in his method without an authoritarian biblicism or hierarchy, (b) is a large component of his understanding of catholicity and (c) as we will see in implications section for "Scripture and Ethics," challenges scholars and ethicists and preachers to facilitate communal discussions to ensure formulations are local and owned by the community.

Section Summary

Here are the five ecclesiological concepts Yoder challenges with his use of the practices:

- (1) the tendency by some to misunderstand the *sacraments* as socially irrelevant,
- (2) the inability to discern between nominal Christians and disciples (i.e. *the invisible church*),
- (3) the problem of understanding the *gospel* as merely a statement of belief to assent to,
- (4) the problem of seeing *evangelism* as mere message-delivery, and
- (5) the distorting of *Scripture* by individualistic reading.

In many Protestant churches, there is a sense that one's beliefs are far more important than one's participation in the practices Yoder describes. There is the tendency to think that (1) the sacraments have only an otherworldly effect, (2) church members are identifiable only by their beliefs which only God knows, (3) the gospel is just a proposition to be believed, (4)

¹³² Yoder, "Binding and Loosing," *The Royal Priesthood*, 328.

evangelism is persuading people to accept a belief, and (5) the Scriptures do not serve as a constant source of challenge to the community.

On the other hand, if the New Testament assumes that church members will engage in certain social processes, then everything is different: (1) the sacraments of the church have social impact, (2) church members are identifiable sociologically because of their involvement in certain practices, (3) the gospel is not just a belief but rather an all-encompassing participation in a revolution, (4) outsiders are moved by the good news they see embodied in the Christian community, and (5) the Scriptures are to be pored over by the church for the purpose of living faithfully.

SUPPLEMENTING THE PRACTICES: WHAT NEEDS TO BE ADDED TO THE
PRACTICES TO GET AN ADEQUATE UNDERSTANDING OF YODER'S
ECCLESIOLOGY? REVIEWING YODER'S FOUR *NOTAE MISSIONIS* AND HIS FOUR
ECCLESIAL AGENTS

Thus far we have discussed almost exclusively Yoder's ecclesiology as it relates to the five practices. Two earlier essays fill in some of the gaps in Yoder's ecclesiology. What is the church like when it is scattered? What role does the individual play?

1. The Church Scattered: Yoder adds four *notae missionis* (marks of mission) to the *notae ecclesiae* (marks of the church)

The essay "A People in the World" was originally written in 1967 and later republished in *The Royal Priesthood* in 1994. Yoder critiques the *notae ecclesiae* or "marks of the church" stressed in what Yoder calls "classical Protestantism" ecclesiologies.¹³³

¹³³ Yoder, "A People in the World," *The Royal Priesthood*, 75.

The *notae ecclesiae* can be traced back to the Lutheran Church's Augsburg Confession (1530) written by Philipp Melancthon and Martin Luther.

The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.¹³⁴

A revised version of the Augsburg Confession called *the Variata*, was later signed by John Calvin in 1540. Calvin's words in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536, 1559) are quite similar to the Lutheran document.

The marks of the church and our application of them to judgment: Hence the form of the Church appears and stands forth conspicuous to our view. Wherever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence.¹³⁵

Both name the proper preaching of the word and the proper administration of the sacraments as the crucial characteristics of a church.

Yoder develops four additional marks suggested by Menno Simons in the 1540's: (1) holy living, (2) brotherly love, (3) unreserved testimony, and (4) suffering.¹³⁶ In the following quotation, Yoder first criticizes the classical protestant marks as overly vague to the point of useless and then criticizes them as overly clergy-centered.

The classical instrument for the interpretation of the mission and nature of the church is the concept of a shorter or longer list of 'marks' that are the minimum standards that enable one to recognize the existence of a particular church. 'The church is wherever the Word of God is properly preached and the sacraments properly administered.' From this definition of classical Protestantism we may appropriately begin our analysis. The shortcoming of this two-point statement is not merely its petitionary character.

¹³⁴ The Augsburg Confession, article 7 (*The Book of Concord*). Cited 9 July 2008. Online: <http://www.bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.html#article7>

¹³⁵ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; 2 vols.; LCC; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), IV, 1, 9. Cited 9 July 2008. Online: <http://www.reformed.org/books/institutes/books/book4/bk4ch01.html#nine.htm>

¹³⁶ Yoder, "A People in the World," *The Royal Priesthood*, 77-89.

Obviously, the entire meaning of these two criteria is utterly dependent upon what ‘properly’ is taken to mean. Conceivably one could pour all of any theology into these two phrases . . . But a more fundamental flaw in this statement of criteria is that the point of relevance in their application is not the church but its superstructure. The place you would go to ascertain whether the word of God is properly preached in a given church is the preacher or conceivably the doctrinal statement by which the ecclesiastical body is governed. The place you go to see whether the sacraments are being properly administered is again the officiant. The concentration of your attention might be upon his or her way of proceeding or it might focus upon his or her understanding of the meaning of the sacrament. But in either case it does not focus upon the congregation.¹³⁷

Yoder reports that he is not the first to make these criticisms. Yoder affirms the proposals of Willem A. Visser ‘t Hooft and Stephen Neill to a great degree because they take into account the behavior of the congregation, not just the clergy.¹³⁸ Visser ‘t Hooft proposes three additional marks of the church: witness (*martyria*), service (*diakonia*), and communion or fellowship (*koinonia*). Neill also suggests three additional marks of the church: fire on earth (missionary vitality), suffering, and the mobility of the pilgrim. Yoder builds upon the four additional marks proposed by Menno Simons: (1) holy living, (2) brotherly and sisterly love, (3) unreserved testimony (witness), and (4) suffering (the cross).¹³⁹

There is some overlap in Yoder’s description of these four marks. *Nota 1* “holy living” has to do with the common person living differently (in but not of) the world.

the moral nonconformity of Christians is an indispensable dimension of their visibility. If the church is visible in that these people keep their promises, love their enemies, enjoy their neighbors, and tell the truth, as others do not, this may communicate to the world something of the reconciling, i.e., the community-creating, love of God.¹⁴⁰

Nota 2 “brotherly and sisterly love” is related to the practice of “Binding and Loosing” that later becomes ones of the five practices Yoder emphasizes. Yoder sees the Matthew 18

¹³⁷ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 75-76.

¹³⁸ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 76-77.

¹³⁹ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 77.

¹⁴⁰ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 81.

confrontation procedure as love because it does not leave people in sin but ensures they are treated fairly.

Nota 3 “witness” emphasizes the persistent proclamation of the gospel despite opposition.

here the accent in the definition of witness as a mark of the church is not simply on the holding forth of a message but on the readiness to do so in the face of hostility from the world. Thus the initial and the derived meanings of the word *martyria* are linked.¹⁴¹

Similarly, *nota 4* “the cross” has to do with being willing to suffer for obeying Christ.

The willingness to bear the cross means simply the readiness to let the form of the church’s obedience to Christ be dictated by Christ rather than by how much the population or authorities are ready to accept.¹⁴²

There is quite a bit of overlap in this four-fold outline. Yoder only uses it in this article and is not particularly attached to it: “Menno’s outline will be as good as any other scaffold.”¹⁴³

What *is* significant is what these marks add to classical Protestantism’s *notae ecclesiae* (proper preaching and proper administration of the sacraments) and to the five practices. Unlike the *notae ecclesiae* of Luther and Calvin, these marks do not predominantly depend on correct theology. What does “properly” preaching and administration of the sacraments mean? How much can one deviate from Calvin and/or Luther’s practice and preaching and still be “properly” preaching and administering the sacraments? Nor are Yoder’s marks only practiced by the clergy and not the congregation. If the clergy are properly preaching and administering, does the congregation have any responsibility? Do the formal ritual actions of the clergy carry more significance than the holy living, love and witness of the congregation? A Calvinist or a Lutheran would respond that the human response is indeed insignificant in comparison the sovereign grace of God which the clergy represent. But Yoder points out that the classical

¹⁴¹ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 84.

¹⁴² Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 88-89.

¹⁴³ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 79.

marks' focus on proper preaching and administration have the effect of emphasizing the Sunday behavior of the clergy over the faithfulness of the congregation the other six days. The subsequent addition by the Reformers of the mark of "church discipline" attempts to compensate for this weakness but it still implies a procedure carried out by the clergy. Yoder's mark "holy living" forcefully communicates that all congregation members play an important part in the church fulfilling its identity.

If the church is visible in that these people keep their promises, love their enemies, enjoy their neighbors, and tell the truth, as others do not, this may communicate to the world something of the reconciling, i.e., the community-creating, love of God."¹⁴⁴

Yoder argues that his four marks are *notae missionis* ("marks of mission"¹⁴⁵) because they assume the need to proclaim the gospel to the outsider whereas the two *notae ecclesiae* do not because they were formulated when the church was located within a Christian state.

The four *notae missionis* help fill a gap in Yoder's ecclesiology if one were only familiar with the five practices of the church which he emphasizes often in his later work. Despite the fact that after 1986, Yoder frequently uses the five practices to describe his vision of the church, one cannot understand Yoder's ecclesiology simply by understanding these practices. Yoder makes this clear by describing the practices as "five sample" practices.¹⁴⁶ By using the word, "sample," what Yoder is trying to convey is that his list of five does not intend to be comprehensive. He writes in other place, "there could very well be a sixth or seventh."¹⁴⁷ "There could well be others, but the five should suffice to make the pattern clear."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Yoder, "A People in the World," *The Royal Priesthood*, 81.

¹⁴⁵ Yoder, "A People in the World," *The Royal Priesthood*, 79.

¹⁴⁶ Yoder, "The Paradigmatic Public Role of God's People," *For the Nations*, 33.

¹⁴⁷ Yoder, "The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm," *For the Nations*, 43.

¹⁴⁸ Yoder, *Body Politics*, ix.

The five are intended to illustrate that the internal processes of the churches in the New Testament were freighted with social significance. Yoder argues that if churches today practiced these five practices as they were originally practiced, their life together would speak loudly to the world. His critique here primarily targets people who do not think that processes of church life are particularly important. He wants Christians to examine the way their churches practice conflict resolution, preaching, leadership, baptism and Eucharist and test whether these practices indeed carry the significance they were originally intended to carry. Yoder argues that these practices if practiced faithfully should have significant missionary impact because they are both appealing to outsiders and yet distinctive from the way secular organizations typically function. Because Yoder uses these five practices to challenge the way Christian communities often conduct themselves, this set of five primarily targets the “church gathered.” In other words, it focuses on the way Christians conduct themselves when they are with other Christians. If one were to only focus on Yoder’s five practices, one could get the impression that Yoder feels that only community life matters and that the behavior of the church scattered is relatively insignificant. This is remedied by placing Yoder’s aptly named essay, “A People in the World,” alongside his five practices.

In “A People in the World,” Yoder explicitly addresses the church scattered, whereas with his five practices, he focuses on the church gathered. The five practices describe only times when two or more Christians are gathered. Though they are not clergy-centered, all five of them might be considered Sunday morning practices which would make them susceptible to Yoder’s own critique of the classical marks—that they do not emphasize sufficiently the congregation and the church scattered. The *notae missionis*, address the question: how should the congregation member behave in a school, workplace or neighborhood? They make clear that

Christians' lives are to be ordered by (1) holy living, (2) love, (3) witness, and (4) the cross as God's "people in the world." The five practices, on the other hand, primarily describe the congregation's processes when they are *gathered* on a Sunday morning. How should our time together as a people be ordered so that the fundamental virtues of a disciple are cultivated? Yoder says the community processes should exemplify (1) good conflict resolution, (2) the transcending of prejudices, (3) sharing of resources, (4) appreciating the abilities of others, and (5) listening to one another.

If one read just about the five practices, it might be possible to get the idea that Yoder thinks practicing Eucharist and Baptism are sufficient means by which Christians practice economic sharing (Eucharist) and the transcending of social barriers (Baptism). In other words, one could get the idea that if a church practices Eucharist and Baptism properly when it is gathered, there is no need to practice any other forms of economic sharing and transcending social barriers when it is scattered. Yoder is not saying that. Rather, he is saying that the practices of Eucharist and Baptism carry with them social significance that is too often unrecognized. He does not intend to condemn as insignificant or misguided the attempt by Christians scattered throughout the world to live holy lives. The *notae missionis* of holy living, witness, love and the cross are certainly to be practiced when a Christian is not around other Christians.

2. The Role of the Individual: Yoder's describes the four ecclesial Agents

In addition to the five practices and four *notae*, there is one further heuristic that Yoder presents in his writings on ecclesiology. In an essay "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood," in *The Priestly Kingdom* (1984), Yoder identifies four functions that people in the community carry out. In the pages leading up to this outline, Yoder describes three practices which will later appear in the

Duke 1986 lecture as a set of five. In “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” he calls them “An Open Process” (which he later calls the practice of “the open meeting”), “A Reconciling Process” (which he later calls “binding and loosing”), and “a body needing to have each member do a different thing,” (which he later calls “the multiplicity of gifts”).¹⁴⁹ Though these are the practices that Yoder says should be practiced by the community, in this heuristic Yoder suggests four functions that agents execute in these processes. His descriptions of the *functions* carried out by different *agents* fleshes out the five-practice skeleton. (I use the words functions/agents interchangeably which is consistent with Yoder’s usage).

First, Yoder says, “The community will have among it Agents of Direction.” The “agents of direction” are those who prophesy to the community. Yoder quotes 1 Corinthians 14:3: “One who prophesies talks to others, to their improvement, encouragement and consolation.”¹⁵⁰ And in turn the community reflects on what has been shared. 1 Corinthians 14:29 is quoted “Let two or three of them speak, and the others weigh what they say.”¹⁵¹ More specifically, Yoder defines prophecy as that which “states and reinforces a vision of the place of the believing community in history, which vision locates moral reasoning.”¹⁵² Yoder argues that people can say uniquely insightful things about the church’s place in the world. Too often, Yoder says, people are only valued for their education or background. This leads to hierarchical limitations on who participates in decision making. Other times communities seem guided by psychological assumptions that assume most of the congregation should not be allowed to participate because they will only be speaking out of their own hurts and “issues.” In charismatic churches, people’s

¹⁴⁹ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 22-29.

¹⁵⁰ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 29.

¹⁵¹ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 29.

¹⁵² Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 29.

insights may only be valued as “prophetic” if they are expressed in an ecstatic way. Yoder argues against the hierarchical, psychological, and charismatic assumptions. “God himself, as Spirit, is at work to motivate and monitor his own in, with, and under this distinctive, recognizable, and specifically disciplined human discourse.”¹⁵³ In summary, this is another version of Yoder’s defense of the “open meeting.” Two heads are better than one. Someone may have insight that can significantly edify the congregation.

Second, “The community will be aided by the Agents of Memory.” Yoder believes that someone or various people in the community should perform the function of reminding the community of the relevant Scripture texts which may shed light on the current situation. He cites Matthew 13:52, “Every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storehouse things both new and old.” “Scripture is the collective scribal memory, the store *par excellence* of treasures old and new.”¹⁵⁴

Yoder emphasizes that the community still weighs what has been presented.

The scribe as practical moral reasoner does not judge or decide anything, but he (or she) remembers expertly, charismatically the store of memorable, identity-confirming acts of faithfulness praised and of failure repented.¹⁵⁵

Yoder emphasizes in his writings the non-hierarchical nature of the community. Here he recognizes the value of someone who knows and presents the Scriptures to the community. But still he emphasizes that they “do not judge or decide anything.”

Third, “The community will be guided by Agents of Linguistic Self-Consciousness.”

Yoder argues that there will be people in the community who are sensitive to the proper use of

¹⁵³ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 29.

¹⁵⁴ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 31.

¹⁵⁵ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 30.

words. He cites examples from three texts: James 3, 2 Timothy, and Acts 18. In James 3:1-2, Yoder sees a connection between the role of the teacher and using words carefully.

Not many of you should presume to be *teachers*, my brothers and sisters, because you know that we who *teach* will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. Those who are never at fault in *what they say* are perfect, able to keep their whole body in check (James 3:1-2 TNIV Italics mine).

Yoder points out that Timothy was repeatedly instructed to be sensitive to the use of words.

There is a fine balance when Timothy is invited at the same time to retain ‘the pattern of sound words’ which he had received, and still ‘to avoid disputing about words’ (2 Tim 1:13; 2:16)¹⁵⁶

Priscilla and Aquila help Apollos who “spoke with great fervor” (Acts 18:25) to be more judicious in his speaking.

He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately (Acts 18:26 TNIV).

Citing these examples Yoder makes a good case that an important role within the Christian community is the person who is sensitive and thoughtful about the use of words. As Yoder correctly points out, the “taming of the tongue” (Jas 3:8) in these passages is not about vulgar language or dirty jokes or angry speech as is often assumed. Rather, as is clear in these three examples, “language,” the use of words has a great effect on the community. Yoder writes,

language has a dangerously determining function . . . It is a significant anthropological insight to say that language can steer the community with a power disproportionate to other kinds of leadership.¹⁵⁷

It is useful to recall at this point that Yoder separates the *first* agent who contributes insight into the community’s direction, from the *second* agent who brings forward relevant

¹⁵⁶ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 32, 33.

¹⁵⁷ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 32.

biblical texts for consideration, from this *third* agent who helps untangle what has been brought forward.

The *didaskalos* as practical moral reasoner will watch for sophomoric temptation of verbal distinctions without substantial necessity, and of purely verbal solutions to substantial problems. He will scrutinize open-mindedly, but skeptically, typologies that dichotomize the complementary and formulae that reconcile the incompatible.¹⁵⁸

This third agent is a “cooler head” —someone who can put what has been brought forward into perspective. In all three of the New Testament examples Yoder cites, the thrust of the passage is to lessen conflict: James 3:18 mentions “peacemakers;” Timothy is told not to dispute over words; and Priscilla and Aquila equip more adequately the excitable Apollos. Often people involved in moral discernment have difficulty seeing the various factors that impinge upon a decision. Yoder writes that the agent of linguistic self-consciousness will utilize some of the tools of an academic ethicist who unravels strains of thought, but will do so not to advocate for some pure form of reasoning but rather to help the community appreciate the tapestry of perspectives within the community.

While recognizing the difficulty of constructing a pure type of deontological or utilitarian reasoning, the academic ethicist still sees it as his contribution to call for relative purity of type in order to bring the debates more under control. In a more communal and less monolingual context of discernment, the task of the teacher will rather be the opposite: to contribute to the community’s awareness that every decision includes elements of principle, elements of character and of due process, and elements of utility.¹⁵⁹

Helping the community see that their arguments may be a matter of “missing each other” because of differing assumptions and terminology will certainly lead to conflict that is more productive.

¹⁵⁸ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 32-33. Yoder’s masculine language here is not intended to signify an exclusive male role as his highlighting of Priscilla later in the paragraph attests.

¹⁵⁹ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 36.

As we have seen, Yoder himself regularly reexamines how words have been used and misused. I noted in the second section of this paper how Yoder redeploys and redefines the following terms: practice, mark, sacrament, catholicity and charisma.

Fourth, Yoder writes that “The community will be guided by Agents of Order and Due Process.” So far Yoder has described (1) input being submitted from the entire community about the direction of the congregation, (2) others submitting Scripture for consideration, and (3) others trying to sort out this information. The question emerges, “Who speaks first and for how long and how do all of these people get heard?” Furthermore, as I have pointed out, Yoder suggests that in addition to these agents functioning in the community, Yoder envisions five practices that are operating within the community as well as four *notae missionis* (“marks of mission”¹⁶⁰) being pursued. The functions, practices and marks are to a large part complementary and overlapping but there is still some need to someone to facilitate the various processes underway.

Yoder argues that this limited moderating function is precisely the role the following New Testament vocabulary is intended to describe: (1) those who “oversee,” “supervise” or function as “bishop,” (2) “elder,” and (3) “shepherd.”

A cross-referencing of the varied New Testament usages would seem to indicate that three sets of nouns and verbs covered roughly the same people and gathered roughly the same set of leadership functions. The functions to ‘oversee’ or to ‘supervise’ and the title ‘bishop’ brought into the church the vocabulary of Hellenistic social life. ‘Elder’ was a term evolved from synagogue usage. To ‘shepherd’ describe the function parabolically. For our purposes they may be spoken of as constituting a ‘moderating team,’ whose function is to assure the wholesome process of the entire group, rather than some prerogatives of their own.¹⁶¹

Yoder conflates the title into one long compound noun: “elder/moderator/bishop/shepherd.”¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 79.

¹⁶¹ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 33.

¹⁶² Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 37.

Yoder is in harmony with the consensus opinion among New Testament scholars¹⁶³ that only after the writing of the New Testament (though perhaps begun as earlier as the Pastoral Epistles) did the distinctions among these roles begin to develop. Yoder tacitly argues that these hierarchical developments are part of what he in another essay calls “incompatible deviation”¹⁶⁴ from “the historical baseline of the communities’ origins”¹⁶⁵—at least the Pauline baseline. Rather than being dominant, the “elder/moderator/bishop/shepherd”¹⁶⁶ helps make sure “the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor” (1 Cor 12:23 TNIV).

These people, far from being a monarchical authority, appear in the New Testament in the plural. Their ministry is not self-contained but consists in enabling the open conversational process with which our enumeration of skills began. The moderator or facilitator as practical moral reasoner is accountable for assuring that everyone else is heard, and that the conclusions reached are genuinely consensual.¹⁶⁷

It is important to repeat that in Yoder’s heuristic of four agents the functions are divided. No singular super-agent need fill all four roles simultaneously and comprehensively. The person who (1) gives insight with regard to the direction of the community is not the same person necessarily who (2) submits Scripture for consideration, and may differ from the person, who (3) is the linguistic conscience of the community. Furthermore, the (4) agent of order and due process may step back from these other functions in order to moderate the discussion.

¹⁶³ C. K. Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). Markus Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson, eds. *A Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology in Honour of J.P.M. Sweet* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997). Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984). Ernst Käsemann, “Ministry and Community in the New Testament,” in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 63-94. Gordon D. Fee, “Laos and Leadership under the New Covenant,” in *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 121-146. Gordon D. Fee, “Reflections on Church Order in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 147-162.

¹⁶⁴ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 67.

¹⁶⁵ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 69.

¹⁶⁶ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 37.

¹⁶⁷ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 33.

Yoder does not say that one cannot fill more than one role. A person need not find out what kind of agent they are and seek to only function in that way. Rather, Yoder is playing the role of the agent of linguistic self-consciousness himself—sorting through the variety of roles that people in the community can play so that those roles may be appreciated and filled.

Yoder's four-agent heuristic is particularly useful in that it clarifies that there are *individuals* that fuel the *group* processes. His emphasis is almost always on the latter. He implicitly acknowledges here that the five practices (binding and loosing, baptism, breaking of bread, exercise of multiplicity of gifts, and the open meeting) do not just “happen.” People exercise functions of submitting insight, presenting Scripture, analyzing words, and facilitating due process. Though all participate, not all people do the same functions.

Still, the heuristic has some weaknesses. It takes into account most of the New Testament vocabulary surrounding church leaders: (1) prophets, (3) teachers, and (4) elders/bishops. He does not include deacons but they might easily be placed with the elders/bishops in function 4. A more significant omission is “apostle” because of the enormous influence of Peter and Paul and the others in the New Testament. Gordon Fee writes,

Leadership was of two kinds. On the one hand, there were itinerants, such as the apostle Paul and others, who founded churches and exercised obvious authority over the churches they had founded. On the other hand, when the itinerant founder or his delegate was not present, leadership on the local scene seems to have been left in the hands of “elders,” all expression of which in the New Testament are plural. Thus Paul founded the church in Corinth, and it is to him that they owe their allegiance—so much so that he rather strongly denounces other ‘apostles’ who teach foreign doctrines on his turf (cf. 2 Cor 10:12-18). In the same vein Paul delegates Timothy, and apparently later Tychicus, to straighten out the mess in Ephesus created by some false teachers, who in my view were elders who had gone astray. Timothy is not the ‘pastor’; he is there in Paul’s place, exercising Paul’s authority.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Fee, “Laos and Leadership under the New Covenant,” 141.

To not address the role of the apostles is to leave a tremendous grasp in the way the early church functioned. The churches in the New Testament were enormously influenced by the apostles. They were often the ones providing direction, setting forth tradition, analyzing language, and facilitating process—the apostle Paul being the most obvious example. Paul assumes continuity of message among “all the churches.” The Jerusalem Council tries to systematize and clarify a consensus. Peter refers to Paul’s teaching. Paul went to Jerusalem to confirm the gospel he was preaching. Priscilla and Aquilla correct Apollos. In Yoder’s five practices, there is insufficient acknowledgement that that there is a shared tradition among the apostles that norms all other practice.

After the apostles died out, there was a power vacuum. It is not difficult to see why the catholic tradition developed a continuing source of authority in the succession of bishops to fill this role. Biblicists conceive of apostolic authority as “frozen in time” in the Scriptures. Consider the member statement of the Evangelical Theological Society: “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore *inerrant in the autographs*” (italics mine).¹⁶⁹

Fee writes,

At issue is the whole question of authority structures and how one understands ‘apostolic succession,’ especially so for Protestants of a more congregational or presbyterial church order. For Roman Catholicism this issue has long ago been resolved. The apostolic succession, meaning the authority of the apostles, resides with the clergy and is represented at the local level by the parish priest . . . Although it is seldom put this way, the New Testament functions for Protestants as the apostolic succession.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ The ETS later added the following line to their membership agreement: “God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.” All members must sign this statement about Scripture and the Trinity. “Doctrinal Basis,” *Evangelical Theological Society website*. Cited 9 July 2008. Online: <http://www.etsjets.org/?q=about>

¹⁷⁰ Fee, “Reflections on Church Order in the Pastoral Epistles,” 159.

Because Yoder does not address which agent in the contemporary church fills the role of the apostle, there is a lack of stability and authority in his ecclesiology.

Yoder's lack of accounting for the authority in the New Testament churches of the apostles results in enshrining of Corinthian ecclesiology as normative. In the church at Corinth, there were doubts about Paul's authority as an apostle. Thus, authority seems to be divided in three ways: (1) Paul tries to recover the significance of his authority as an apostle and as their founder; (2) he argues with them on the basis of Scripture; and (3) he cedes some authority to the community—encouraging them to rely on one another (1 Cor 12) and make use of the open meeting (1 Cor 14). Yoder ignores the first and enshrines the latter two. He distributes authority to the other two sources: Scripture and the community. The result is that Yoder's vision of the church may be as dynamic (or one might call it "chaotic") as that depicted in Corinth. Little is settled, every topic must be hashed out in the community by the light of Scripture. As I will argue below in the implications section under the heading "church and ministry in the New Testament," Yoder's ecclesiology would have more stability and depth if he articulated a role for someone who knew the Scriptures well and took responsibility for presenting to them to the congregation. Over time the conclusions of the community form a body of tradition.

Richard Hays also wonders whether a community can exist long term without acknowledges some sort of tradition beyond merely living "strictly by what the Bible said."

The Radical Reformers insisted that they were recalling the faithful to live strictly by what the Bible said, rather than by the body of tradition developed in the church over many centuries. But who is to decide how the Bible is to be interpreted, particularly on contested issues (such as current debates about sexuality)? Is each individual free to decide? How then can there be coherence in the community's life, and how can there be any meaningful practice of church discipline? On the other hand, if the community's leaders guide the church in the process of interpretation, then do the community's decisions take on the status of authoritative traditions that shape the subsequent reading

of Scripture? If so, how is this different in principle from what catholic Christianity has always claimed about the authoritative role of tradition?¹⁷¹

I argue this lack of a theology of authoritative traditions is caused by the exegetical problem of missing the significance of the apostles in the New Testament.

Another problem with the heuristic is that the four functions can only be differentiated with difficulty. For example, Yoder separates elders (function 4) from teachers (function 3). Yoder does not mention that in the New Testament elders sometimes teach. “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1 Tim 5:17).

Yoder also separates teachers (function 3) from those who present Scripture (function 2). Yoder’s emphasis in function 2 is that teachers take words seriously whereas the New Testament often associates the teaching function with teaching the Scriptures. For example, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Perhaps the limitations of these distinctions is why he only uses this heuristic in this essay to my knowledge.

In presenting the agent of memory (function 2), Yoder emphasizes the importance of someone who knows the Scriptures and shares them with the community. This is a very helpful addition to Yoder’s five practices as Yoder typically places an emphasis on the egalitarian dynamic of the community. “Binding and loosing” (moral discernment through dialogue) and the “open meeting” will function best if there are people within the community who know the Scriptures. Otherwise, they will merely be pooling ignorance. However, Yoder strictly limits the importance of the agents of memory. To say that “the scribe as practical moral reasoner does

¹⁷¹ Richard B. Hays, “Embodying the Gospel in Community” *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 74 (2000): 584-585.

not judge or decide anything”¹⁷² understates the New Testament witness that there are people in the community who teach with some authority. The Bereans were commended for testing what Paul said by the Scriptures. “Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11). However, Paul, Peter, Apollos, Timothy, John the elder, Priscilla and Aquila and other elders and apostles did not simply lay out potentially relevant Scripture texts and invite the congregation to make the connections as to their relevance. They persuasively argued for judgments and decisions.

Certainly listeners had the opportunity to reject what had been presented as the phrases about the Bereans indicate in contrast to John Calvin’s Geneva where heresy could receive capital punishment. In this sense, Yoder is right that New Testament teachers certainly did not order those who disagreed with them to be executed. Technically, the teachers “did not judge or decide anything.” Yoder is right to say that at no point was there any cooperation with the state. But I still see in Yoder’s writings on ecclesiology a lack of appreciation for people who have put in time and effort being formed as “scribes”—people like devoted students of the Bible and seminary graduates. Citing Matthew 13:52 as the principle example of an agent of memory in the New Testament and ignoring the numerous examples of apostles and teachers in the New Testament drawing upon the tradition, such as the way Paul does in his epistles or the way Peter does in his preaching in Acts, greatly understates the importance the New Testament places on the value of authoritative tradition.

Certain people, apostles and teachers, were given by the community and by God the responsibility to focus on sound doctrine to a greater extent than others. While Yoder’s

¹⁷² Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 30.

relativizing of ordination fits the New Testament witness which does not formalize leadership in such a way to give the floor just to certain people, there are also people throughout the New Testament who are identified as teachers: Jesus, disciples, apostles, Paul, Apollos, Timothy, teaching elders, and Priscilla and Aquilla. Valuing the teachers who labor among them is part of Paul's vision for the Christian community and is not inconsistent with the multiplicity of gifts, open floor and binding and loosing.

In other words, I am not sure that Yoder gives an account of how these people who participate in the practices of the church grow in their knowledge of the Christian tradition. Should not someone be designated to come prepared to present something from the Scriptures rather than relying on the serendipity and spontaneous processes to produce an edifying time together? Should not there be disciplines that individuals or small groups practice the other six days that deepen them in knowledge of the tradition—like regular Bible study or morning and evening prayer? Without these I have difficulty imagining the open meeting being beneficial over the long term. Yoder's missing of the significance of apostolic authority in the early church and his flawed description of the teaching task result in Yoder not having a strong answer to the question, "How do people get formed in the tradition? How do people learn the Scriptures?" Michael Cartwright confirms that "Yoder offers not explicit moral theory in the way MacIntyre does."¹⁷³

These inadequacies could be remedied by accepting as valid one of the Reformer's marks—the insistence on "proper preaching." There are some people who are identified by the community with particular responsibility to study and communicate Scripture.

¹⁷³ Cartwright, "Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity," *The Royal Priesthood*, 37.

IMPLICATIONS

Finally, I summarize the implications for three subjects this paper intersects.

Theology of Mission—How accessible are Yoder’s practices of the Christian community to outsiders?

In this section, I review the four essential foundations for mission in Yoder’s ecclesiology: (1) The church is to make sure it is doing the practices of the New Testament. (2) “The community of believers is the form of the mission.”¹⁷⁴ The church need not compromise its Christian practices to be relevant. The church should be cognizant of that purpose. (3) The people of God are also to know the language of the outsider. The outsider will sometimes be attracted to the practices when they learn of them. (4) The individual will live in the world like Jesus - thus arousing the interest of some outsiders.

But Yoder does not address often the most difficult conundrums in missiology—how to communicate the gospel, through practices and words, to the outsider. One could read Yoder and assume that “it just happens.” I argue that additional reflection on communicating the message need not degenerate into unfaithful compromise and is part of the church’s task.

First, Yoder’s calls for the development of Christian communities that are rooted in the practices of New Testament churches. This paper has found no problems with the five practices he recommends but maintains that there are many more practices, themes, and ideas that the contemporary church will want to draw on from the Scriptures. Yoder acknowledges that there may be more than the five sacramental practices but this paper goes further and argues that his selection of the five practices is somewhat arbitrary. David Bosch’s treatment of the relevant

¹⁷⁴ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 89.

New Testament material is far more comprehensive.¹⁷⁵ After reading Bosch or any of a number of New Testament scholars,¹⁷⁶ one wonders how Yoder could have picked these five practices as the most central to the life of the church. Care for the sick, for example, seems much more frequently described in the New Testament than the open meeting. His selection of these five practices are probably influenced most by his interests as an ethicist. Each is closely related to moral discernment.

Second, Yoder argues that the church being the church will indeed be missional. Too often church practices are thought to be for the benefit solely of insiders. Yoder argues instead that they “are not ‘religious’ or ‘ritual’ activities, they are by nature ‘lay’ or ‘public’ phenomena.”¹⁷⁷

Yet in each case [practice] that way of interacting in the faith community is so concrete, so accessible, so ‘lay,’ that it is also a model of how any society, not excluding the surrounding ‘public’ society, can also form its common life more humanely.¹⁷⁸

There are not strong boundaries which divide the church’s internal processes and its outreach. “It becomes evident all along this exposition how little it would help if we were to seek to filter these affirmations through the grid of an a priori distinction between the ‘public’ world and some other world.”¹⁷⁹ Yoder is emphasizing that good church practice will inherently be outreaching.

¹⁷⁵ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 15-181.

¹⁷⁶ Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament*. Bockmuehl and Thompson, *A Vision for the Church*. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*. Käsemann, “Ministry and Community in the New Testament.” Fee, “Laos and Leadership under the New Covenant.” Fee, “Reflections on Church Order in the Pastoral Epistles.”

¹⁷⁷ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 370.

¹⁷⁸ Yoder, “The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm,” *For the Nations*, 47.

¹⁷⁹ Yoder, “The Paradigmatic Public Role of God’s People,” *For the Nations*, 28.

Yoder argues reaching others does not mean a church needs to compromise the integrity of their internal life. Yoder believes that “fidelity and relevance” are not mutually exclusive. They need not be “alternatives, in a null-sum trade-off where more of one is assumed to mean less of the other.”¹⁸⁰ The Christian community need not make some sort of calculation about how dirty to get, how sinful to become, what compromises to make, in order to reach out to outsiders. Rather, “the very shape of the people of God in the world is a public witness, or is ‘good news,’ for the world.”¹⁸¹

Yoder criticizes the communitarians for their lack of attention to the public effects of their community practices. “They [the communitarians] pull back on the grounds that only they have already experienced the power and novelty of that threefold evangelical cord in the worship and ministry of the church. They affirm [internal] integrity but at the cost of witness.”¹⁸² They forget Jeremiah’s words to the Jewish people in Babylon: “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile” (Jer 29:7).¹⁸³ God’s people are to live “for the nations.”¹⁸⁴ This is similar to Lesslie Newbigin’s concept of election. “Those who are chosen to be bearers of a blessing are chosen for the sake of *all*.”¹⁸⁵ Yoder criticizes Pietism for missing the fact that the church is intended for mission.

Pietism later sought to fill this gap by creating circles of believers. Yet, without the dimension of outward mission, this type of gathering around common pious experiences

¹⁸⁰ Yoder, “The Paradigmatic Public Role of God’s People,” *For the Nations*, 28.

¹⁸¹ Yoder, “Introduction,” *For the Nations*, 8.

¹⁸² Yoder, “The New Humanity as Pulpit and Paradigm,” *For the Nations*, 49.

¹⁸³ Yoder, “See How They Go with Their Face to the Sun,” *For the Nations*, 53, 65.

¹⁸⁴ Yoder, “Introduction,” *For the Nations*, 3.

¹⁸⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (rev. ed; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 32.

is immediately threatened with stagnation and becomes little more than communal introspection.¹⁸⁶

The people of God are to keep in the mind their ultimate purpose is to reach others.¹⁸⁷

Third, Yoder cites positively the example of the Jews in exile who understood fluently their host culture.

When Jews in Babylon participated creatively, reliably, but not coercively in the welfare of that host culture, their contribution was more serious than ‘bricolage.’ There was no problem of shared meanings, since they had accepted their host culture and become fluent in it. Their own loyalty to their own culture (kashrut, anikonic monotheism, honoring parents, truth telling, work ethic, circumcision) was not dependent on whether the Babylonians accepted it, yet much of it was not only transparent but even attractive to the Gentiles.¹⁸⁸

Yoder emphasizes that the people of God should know their host culture well while still maintaining faithfully their own Christian culture. In the process, *some* in the host culture will be attracted to the church’s practices. But Christians should not attempt to make the entire culture “Christian.”

Jeremiah does not tell his refugee brothers and sisters to try to teach the Babylonians Hebrew. The concern to learn goes in the other direction. Jews will not only learn the local languages; they will in a few generations (for a millennium and a half) be serving the entire ancient Near Eastern world as expert translators, scribes, diplomats, sages, merchants, astronomers. They will make a virtue and a cultural advantage of their being resident aliens, not spending their substance in fighting over civil sovereignty.¹⁸⁹

Yoder urges Christians to function within the culture but to do so with strong Christian commitments.

Fourth, individuals who are part of the church will be characterized by the marks of mission (*notae missionis*) such as holy living.

¹⁸⁶ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 78.

¹⁸⁷ Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 115.

¹⁸⁸ Yoder, “See How They Go with Their Face to the Sun,” *For the Nations*, 72.

¹⁸⁹ Yoder, “See How They Go with Their Face to the Sun,” *For the Nations*, 71.

First of all, in that the moral nonconformity of Christians is an indispensable dimension of their visibility. If the church is visible in that these people keep their promises, love their enemies, enjoy their neighbors, and tell the truth, as others do not, this may communicate to the world something of the reconciling, i.e., the community-creating, love of God.¹⁹⁰

Yoder argues that the Christian community and its people need to live in a holy Christ-like way.

Yoder understands mission to occur when the community equips its people to live in the world as followers of Jesus. “It [the church] is a pastoral and prophetic resource to the person with responsibilities of office.”¹⁹¹ Yoder is saying something very similar to what Lesslie Newbigin says,

I have already said that I believe that the major impact of such congregations on the life of society as a whole is through the daily work of members in their secular vocations and not through the official pronouncements of ecclesiastical bodies. But the developing, nourishing, and sustaining of Christian faith and practice is impossible apart from the life of a believing congregation.¹⁹²

But it is much less clear how the world sees the congregation’s internal practices and are influenced by them.

Sometimes the experience of the Christian community is a *paradigm* in the simple sense. The Christian community does things which the world may imitate . . . Today, even secular business management circles are adopting the concept of decision making through conversation which stems from the Radical Reformation.¹⁹³

“The Christian community is also a *means of influencing* other groups . . . The church as a network of complementary charismata is a *laboratory* of social pluralism.”¹⁹⁴

A few times Yoder wanders from his theological arguments and argues that his theology is not only correct, it is also missionally effective.

¹⁹⁰ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 81.

¹⁹¹ Yoder, “The Biblical Mandate for Christian Social Action,” *For the Nations*, 186.

¹⁹² Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 234-235.

¹⁹³ Yoder, “The Biblical Mandate for Christian Social Action,” *For the Nations*, 185-186.

¹⁹⁴ Yoder, “The Biblical Mandate for Christian Social Action,” *For the Nations*, 188-189. Italics original.

Those who have refused to learn from the New Testament *must now learn from history*; the church's responsibility to and for the world is first and always to be the church.¹⁹⁵

This view of the church commends itself exegetically and theologically. Contrary to the opposing view, it refuses to accept pragmatic grounds for deciding how Christians should relate themselves to the world. And yet after saying this we observe *that this biblical approach is in fact the most effective*.¹⁹⁶

Essentially, he is saying, that not only is participation in the five practices of the church biblically faithful, it also “works.” I often think of this definition of the purpose of the church: “more and better disciples of Jesus”—a shorthand description of the Great Commission. If this is close to correct, it is not surprising that it will be difficult to measure the “success” or “effectiveness” of the church because one would want to gauge both the number of followers and their quality. Yoder points out that the Anabaptist tradition is not responsible for a war unlike most other theological traditions but “lack of participation in war” is only one quality of a follower of Jesus. Surely more evidence would need to be marshaled forward to describe a church as effective beyond its avoidance of war. Yoder of course does not actually want to make a thorough case on sociological qualitative or quantitative grounds that there are more and better Christians if the church has a certain characteristic or practices a certain practice. Sociologists like Christian Smith, Mark Chaves, George Barna, Robert Wuthnow and missiologists like Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh have made some such arguments based on appropriate sample size. But even their conclusions are not specific enough to endorse a certain set of practices as optimal. Yoder's statements on the “effectiveness” of the church should not be considered methodologically rigorous. If one accepts his views, they should be accepted because of their fidelity to the theological persuasiveness.

¹⁹⁵ Yoder, “The Otherness of the Church,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 61. Italics mine.

¹⁹⁶ Yoder, “The Otherness of the Church,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 63. Italics mine.

Most often Yoder stays on firm ground—eschewing results and focusing instead on fidelity to the canonical baseline. He embraces Barth’s approach to “doing theology as if nothing had happened,” i.e. without regard to “what works.”¹⁹⁷

If we can agree that Yoder does not necessarily make a compelling argument that his ecclesiology is comprehensive (I have argued it does not take into account the entire New Testament) and it is not necessarily more “effective” than other ecclesiologies, then we can do what I want us to do, accept what Yoder has written but add to it. It seems to me that Yoder’s practices are precisely powerful because they engage the entire Christian community in reflecting on not only moral issues but the community’s life in general. One of those questions that should arise in the open meeting or in the binding and loosing process, is the way outsiders are treated. A central conversation within the community should be how outsiders can be communicated to by the community without the community losing its Christian character.

Yoder does not want the gospel to be watered down, diluted, “filtered or tailored” and therefore speaks sometimes derisively about translation.¹⁹⁸ He worries that these kind of conversations within the community—questions about relevance and effectiveness and mission—sometimes lead to jettisoning of the community’s Christian essentials. “We need to be more unchristian to reach the unchristian!” “No!” says Yoder. There is not a need to find one pure “language” which all can agree upon—that is a Christianity reduced to “good ideas that make sense to every thinking person.”

At the same time, as is pointed out above, it is appropriate to learn the language of the “Babylonians”—the people around whom you find yourself living. Yoder himself demonstrates

¹⁹⁷ Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 139.

¹⁹⁸ Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 86, 88-89, 114, 116.

how to translate the benefits of the five practices in social process. In that sense, translation is appropriate.

Yoder's constant emphasis on the need for the church to reassess itself echoes the kind of translation Lamin Sanneh's describes.

There are two basic ways to proceed. One is to make the missionary culture the inseparable carrier of the message. This we might call mission by *diffusion* . . . The other way . . . we might call mission by *translation* . . . What is distinctive about this critical reflection is that it assumes, either implicitly or explicitly, a relativized status for the culture of the message bearer.¹⁹⁹

Only by continuing to express its vision in continually fresh ways can Christianity avoid the idolatry of form. Mission as translation seeks to do precisely that.²⁰⁰

Putting the Scriptures in the language of a people group allows them to compare the Christianity they have received against the baseline of the canonical witness. Yoder, I think, envisions little communities checking their lives and their community life together against the baseline of the canonical witness in the open meeting and through the discernment process of binding and loosing.

Yoder is right to place tremendous emphasis on the church being the church. Faithful translation demands deep familiarity with the material being translated. But as Yoder himself says in his criticism of the communitarians, an internal focus is not right. The reflection on how this can be communicated to the outsider is necessary work. Rowan Williams urges George Lindbeck to emphasize more this missional work, "I'd agree entirely, by the way, with Professor Lindbeck that a deeper catechesis in that theology and its images is indispensable, *but I think it is*

¹⁹⁹ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), 29.

²⁰⁰ Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 82.

so because of the testing it will endure in the process of 'playing away from home,' conversing with its potential allies."²⁰¹

Yoder repeatedly sounds this theme: "The community of believers is the form of the mission."²⁰² I wish Yoder would have spelled out more clearly how he envisioned this occurring. How did an outsider learn about the community of believers? Did they wander in from the street, see an open meeting in progress, and were impressed by what they saw? Did a friend invite the outsider for a visit? Or does Yoder picture a completely "pure" community so that outsiders would not be welcome to wander in or come for a visit? In that case, the only way an outsider would know about the what was happening in the community was if someone described it to them in the workplace. "Let me tell you about the five practices we do in our Christian community. Aren't they neat? Want to join?"

It certainly seems to me that these are the logical questions after reading Yoder's words: "The community of believers is the form of the mission."²⁰³ How is my Christian community reaching people? Do we expect people to bring their friends to a worship service? Or do we expect people to have unbelievers in their home for dinner parties in the company of other people from the community to give the unbelievers a taste of Christian community? Or do we have a supplemental program that takes the best of the above like Holy Trinity Brompton's Alpha program (London, UK) that occurs on a Tuesday night at the church building and gives outsiders a taste of the Christian story in the form of an informal talk as well as a taste of Christian community in the form of open conversation over dinner? Any of these approaches could

²⁰¹Rowan Williams, "The Judgement of the World," in *On Christian Theology* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000), 39. Italics original.

²⁰² Yoder, "A People in the World," *The Royal Priesthood*, 89.

²⁰³ Yoder, "A People in the World," *The Royal Priesthood*, 89.

certainly be practiced by a Christian community who practiced the five practices. My point is that the question, “How does the outsider get exposed to the Christian community’s practices?” is a very important one.

To restate this once again: regardless it is essential that individual Christians are living out the way of Jesus in their schools and workplaces. But where are they supposed to bring their nonchristian friends who are interested in getting a glimpse of true Christian community. Is it nonthreatening social gatherings with other Christians? Yes.

Should Christians bring their nonchristian friends to visit the corporate meetings of the community? It is conceivable that some church meetings would be closed to observers but this is extremely rare. Like most churches, there was apparently in Corinth the assumption that some nonchristian observers would be present in the worship services.

So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’ (1 Cor 14:23-25 TNIV).

Many traditions emphasize that Christian worship is for Christians. They question whether anything should be done to take into account nonchristians who are present. Interestingly in this passage, Paul argues that indeed something should be done to “accommodate” outsiders. What is happening in the service should be intelligible to the outsider. The content is not to be diluted—indeed the inquirer is “convicted of sin.” But it should be intelligible. Richard Hays writes

Paul compellingly works out the implications of his concern for unbelievers in verses 23-25: Outsiders who enter and find the whole community speaking in tongues will think that this Christian group is simply one more mystery cult that whips its partisans into a frenzy of frothy enthusiasm . . . if outsiders come and find the members of the community prophesying in clear, sober language, they will encounter the word of the Lord, which will disclose ‘the secrets of the heart,’ that is, their real moral condition

before God . . . Paul envisions that unbelievers who encounter this sort of unparalleled truth-telling in the form of Spirit-inspired utterance will be cut to the heart and brought to ‘bow down before God and worship him.’ . . . In short, Paul sees prophecy as a powerful tool of evangelism, but he sees tongues (in public worship) as a hindrance to making the gospel understood.²⁰⁴

Intelligible speech is valued for its capacity to instruct others, as well as to encourage and console them. One of the major effects of prophecy is ‘that all may learn’ (v. 31).²⁰⁵

The church is responsible to make its worship intelligible, even to first-time visitors, “that all may learn.”

Yoder is right—the church is to be the church. But the church is also to make its practices understandable to the first-time visitor. Yoder is also intent on doing that—explaining how all of the practices can be described in secular social process terms.

Congregations, then, will want to continually reflect on how to make the community’s inherently intriguing internal processes as accessible to the outsider as possible without unfaithful accommodation. This will be a constant issue for discussion by the community as they gather around the reading of Scripture.

Making the practices accessible will entail the removing of extraneous barriers to the outsider. I wrote the following modest suggestions for another paper that I wrote for the Th.D. Seminar: Explorations in Practical Theology.

In the United States, out of every 100 people, two are visiting for the first time.²⁰⁶ Church leaders should be challenged to think about how those two visitors might feel when they walk in and experience Christian worship. Church buildings should have signs that help newcomers easily find their way into the worship space. Bulletins,

²⁰⁴ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 238-239.

²⁰⁵ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 250.

²⁰⁶ “Two out of 100 people sitting in America’s worship services are attending that congregation for the first time.” The U.S. Congregational Life Survey website. “What do we know about first-time worship visitors?” page. Online: <http://uscongregations.org/first-time-visitors.htm>. While this may not seem like many people, it indicates that a church of 100 people, has about 104 first-time visitors per year. If all of them returned and became regular attenders, the church would double in size. A church of 100 at the beginning of the year would have attendance of 204 if everyone came back and became a regular attender.

websites, liturgies and sermons should use everyday language, not Christian jargon. (We want to be teaching people key Christian terms but this is not nearly as important as teaching them what the concepts mean). Music, loud or soft, contemplative or rocking, should be intelligible so that even someone unfamiliar with the genre can enter into what is happening. These ideas are not “marketing,” just good communication. If people are not receiving the message of Jesus because we are not communicating in ways they understand, then we need to do better. When we have been in a church or tradition for a while, we forget what it is like to be new. We need to devise ways of getting honest feedback from visitors on what they experience when they visit. Anonymous feedback from unbelievers and visitors is extremely rare. Of course, a church does not unthinkingly embrace every piece of advice given by unbelievers but soliciting this kind of feedback is extremely valuable. As I have argued, this is critical, theological work. Though it may sound superficial, this is part of welcoming the stranger. If we neglect it, we neglect a, perhaps the, central task of the church.²⁰⁷

I offer these modest suggestions because I am concerned that Yoder’s readers might assume that there is no need to help the outsider who is observing the church’s practices. They think, “the church should be the church” and they leave it at that. I realize that having a sign that correctly says the worship service time is common sense. This is a very simple way to “make accessible the community’s practices.” But similar basic efforts in good communication are often ignored with the justification that “the practices speak for themselves.”

This line of reasoning can also be used to justify more innovative worship services that strive to give a glimpse of real Christian community to the outsider. Consider central quotes from the most significant books describing: emerging churches, missional churches, and seeker churches. In each quote one can see the acknowledgement of the healthy tension of being faithful to the gospel one and making the gospel intelligible to the outsider.

Emerging churches: “Emerging churches are communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Andrew D. Rowell, “A Theology for The Seeker Church Model: To what extent should worship services be adapted to welcome the outsider?” (Duke Divinity School, 2007), 21-22.

²⁰⁸ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 44.

Missional churches: The gospel is always conveyed through the medium of culture. It becomes good news to lost and broken humanity as it is incarnated in the world through God's sent people, the church. To be faithful to its calling, the church must be contextual, that is, it must be culturally relevant within a specific setting. The church relates constantly and dynamically both to the gospel and to its contextual reality. It is important, then for the church to study its context carefully and to understand it. The technical term for this continuing discipline is *contextualization*. Since everyone lives in culture, the church's careful study of its context will help the church to translate the truth of the gospel as good news for the society to which it sent. Moreover, because culture is not neutral, this discipline will assist the church to discern how it might be compromising gospel truth as it lives out its obedience to Christ the Lord.²⁰⁹

Seeker sensitive churches: *The 'invest and invite' strategy inspires everyone to listen more attentively to what an outsider hears.* When outsiders are invited to attend and they actually show up, everything changes. Imagine this scenario. You have worked side by side with an associate for a number of years. You have invested in his life. You spend quality time with him and his family. You have proven to be a trusted friend in his life, and you have encouraged him for several months to visit your church. At the end of your workday one Friday, he announces to you that he is planning to bring his family to visit your church that Sunday. How does that make you feel? Do you begin to wonder about what the church is planning for Sunday? You may even be tempted to call and see how is speaking or what the topic is—just to be sure that everything is going to be just right. How will it affect you as you sit next to him during the service? The fact is, that day will be different for you than a typical Sunday. You will hear everything differently as you try to imagine how your friend is hearing what is being said. You will be listening through the ears of an outsider.

When enough people show up with their friends on a consistent basis, everyone in your church will be forced to listen through an entirely different filter. Everything your church does will be evaluated by a much more critical standard. We have discovered that inviting outsiders effectively keeps us aware and sensitive to how they think and what they need. If we drop the ball on any given Sunday, it is not uncommon for us to get a flood of e-mails with suggestions on how we can improve. People want their friends to have a good first impression of the church.

It puts healthy pressure on us to consider carefully how we program and communicate. That doesn't mean we water down the truth of what we teach, but we are keenly aware of *how* we say what we say.²¹⁰

“How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?” (Rom 10:14 TNIV).

How will outsiders believe if the church has hidden its light under a bushel?

²⁰⁹ Darrell Guder, ed. *The Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 18. Italics original.

²¹⁰ Andy Stanley, Lane Jones and Reggie Joiner, *The Seven Practices of Effective Ministry* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 2004), 149-150.

Church and Ministry in the New Testament—How does Yoder’s selection of New Testament texts affect his stance toward preachers and biblical scholars?

The interpretation of Scripture matters to Yoder. The canonical witness is the baseline by which Christians today should measure their churches and their lives. Yoder is a careful reader of text. In the early 1970’s he grasped the social significance of the Jew-Gentile question earlier than most New Testament scholars. Richard Hays praises to a large extent Yoder’s exegetical efforts.

[Yoder] gives priority to the exegetical task . . . Furthermore Yoder’s interpretation of these texts is informed by detailed and sophisticated interaction with historical-critical scholarship . . . At numerous points, his readings reflect astute—indeed, almost prescient—grasp of important developments in the field of New Testament studies. . . . Not all of his exegesis, of course, is equally compelling . . . Even when we might be inclined to second-guess Yoder’s arguments, however, it must be acknowledged that he is working seriously and deeply at the exegetical task, presenting his findings for all to see and inviting challenges to his exegesis of particular texts.²¹¹

Though Yoder’s exegetical arguments are most often persuasive, there are a few conclusions this paper has sought to qualify.

As discussed above regarding “practices,” arguments can be made on the basis of the New Testament that Yoder’s five practices are not the most well attested practices in the New Testament. Even if one grants that these five practices have significant New Testament warrant, there are many other practices in the New Testament which also need recovery. Thus, Yoder exegetical work falters in what Hays calls the “synthetic task.” Hays’s first procedural guideline is “Confront the full range of canonical witnesses.”

When we begin to seek the unity of New Testament witnesses—whether in general or on a particular issue—all of the relevant texts must be gathered and considered. Selective appeals to favorite prooftexts are illegitimate without full consideration of texts that stand on the opposite side of a particular issue. The more comprehensive the attention to the

²¹¹ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 245-246.

full range of New Testament witnesses, the more adequate a normative ethical proposal is likely to be.²¹²

Hays does not note the same inadequacies in Yoder which this paper identifies but he notes in his comments on *The Politics of Jesus* the possibility that this may be a weakness in Yoder's writing.

Yoder, like Barth, aims to take the entire New Testament canon into account and succeeds to an impressive degree. *The Politics of Jesus*, however, does not aim at comprehensive coverage of the New Testament witnesses . . . If Yoder were attempting to write a systematic book on New Testament ethics (rather than what he has written: a programmatic proposal about Jesus as paradigm for Christian ethics), some of these gaps would have to be filled in.²¹³

Hays is gracious with Yoder because Yoder is not a New Testament scholar and because Yoder does not claim to have written a comprehensive account. But Hays and Yoder would agree that capturing the breadth of the canonical witness is extremely important.

I simply reiterate here that Yoder's five practices are not seen as the five significant ones when New Testament scholars attempt to comb the witnesses of the New Testament for insight into the church and its ministry.²¹⁴ For example, Hays suggests the foci of cross, community, and new creation as a more comprehensive way of summarizing the themes of the New Testament.²¹⁵

Similarly, on the subject of the "hermeneutical task," Hays notes Yoder's unusual selection of Scriptural texts. "While Yoder never denies that the specific *rules* found in Scripture

²¹² Hays, *Moral Vision*, 189.

²¹³ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 246.

²¹⁴ Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament*. Bockmuehl and Thompson, *A Vision for the Church*. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*. Käsemann, "Ministry and Community in the New Testament." Fee, "Laos and Leadership under the New Covenant." Fee, "Reflections on Church Order in the Pastoral Epistles."

²¹⁵ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 193-205.

are binding on the Christian community, he places strikingly little emphasis on them. . . . [and] Like Barth, Yoder eschews the hermeneutical strategy of extracting moral *principles* from Scripture.”²¹⁶ In the paper, I have pointed out Yoder’s emphasis on New Testament social processes (practices) to the exclusion of other datum. Hays and Verhey sketch summaries of the New Testament which serve as barometers for interpretation.²¹⁷ Verhey writes, “In whatever way it remembered Jesus, the community also bore a moral tradition that was never quite reducible to applying a code or trusting an intuition but always called forth discernment.”²¹⁸ Merely identifying New Testament practices should be only the beginning of considering what the church is to be today.

C.K. Barrett’s analysis is particularly helpful because he agrees to a large degree with Yoder’s conclusions but addresses the issues as a New Testament scholar. Like Yoder, a Mennonite who taught at the Roman Catholic institution The University of Notre Dame, Barrett, a United Methodist, taught at a high church institution, the University of Durham which was predominantly Anglican and Anglo-Catholic. In *Church, Ministry and Sacraments in the New Testament*, Barrett, like Yoder in *The Fullness of Christ*, reflects on the leadership of the church as described in the New Testament—beginning with the Pauline literature. Every member was to be a minister.²¹⁹ Functions are emphasized over offices.²²⁰ There was no “local leader” who gathered money, administered the sacraments, oversaw worship or led church discipline in the

²¹⁶ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 248-249.

²¹⁷ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 193. Allen Verhey, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 21-29.

²¹⁸ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 26.

²¹⁹ Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament*, 31.

²²⁰ Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament*, 32.

Pauline churches.²²¹ Spirit-gifting was emphasized.²²² Churches also met in the households of rich people who probably exercised some leadership.²²³ Barrett looks at the issue of presbyters and episkopos in 1 Peter. He wonders if presbyters may have been primarily older people rather than an office. The advice of 1 Peter is the importance of humility in leadership.²²⁴ In the Johannine literature, Barrett sees evidence of apostles, prophets, a leading elder, traveling preachers and witnesses. The criteria for evaluating these leaders is their teaching that Jesus Christ came in the flesh and in their love.²²⁵ In the book of Acts, Barrett again emphasizes the informal nature of leadership: evangelists, prophets, teachers, elders, apostles—not ordained but chosen by people and the Spirit. They are unpaid and part-time.²²⁶ Barrett and Yoder agree to a large extent about the importance of the “multiplicity of gifts” and “the open meeting.”

However, Barrett also points out that the apostles were the authority in their churches while they lived. “A quick impression is thus of a leaderless mob; but it is a false impression. As long as Paul lived his churches had a remarkably strong leader.”²²⁷ While warning of the dangers of people flaunting their gifts, being enriched by them, and creating an aura of superiority, Barrett emphasizes the importance of talented people and people who specialize in their ministries. “A church that rejects the gifts of leadership will greatly impoverish itself; a church that allows them to develop in a worldly way will destroy itself.”²²⁸ Barrett reflects on

²²¹ Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament*, 33.

²²² Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament*, 34-35.

²²³ Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament*, 36.

²²⁴ Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament*, 40-43.

²²⁵ Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament*, 44-48.

²²⁶ Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament*, 49-52.

²²⁷ Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament*, 34.

²²⁸ Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament*, 39-40.

the later development in the Pastoral Epistles of the church into a more formal, leader-oriented institution.²²⁹ Yoder, in contrast, almost exclusively characterizes the nature of the New Testament church structure as flat and nonhierarchical.

Like Yoder, Barrett also wants to reemphasize the social dimensions of the sacraments. Unlike Yoder, however, Barrett takes more seriously the synthetic task of tracing out the various occurrences of the practices in the New Testament. He affirms the ritual and religious importance of the practices which Yoder seeks to downplay, while emphasizes that the practices also have a significant social value. He notes the writer of the book of Acts was likely trying to point out that baptism is not magic because the Spirit and water are usually but not always together.²³⁰ Barrett theorizes that Paul may have infused the two basic practices (baptism of initiation and regular resurrection meals) with greater social cruciform weight because the rituals were causing division in his communities.²³¹ In other words, the reader of Yoder should be aware that there may be other texts in the New Testament that indicate the ritual background of these practices.

Rowan Williams points out that theologies which emphasize the New Testament and play down subsequent church history as flawed are particularly “Protestant.” In Protestant church history, “the shape of the drama is one of primitive catastrophe, a devastating loss at or near the very beginning.”²³² Thus, what is important is the fidelity to that very early tradition before the catastrophe, not institutional continuity. Against the Protestant perspective, Williams argues that

²²⁹ Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament*, 84.

²³⁰ Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament*, 58-62.

²³¹ Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament*, 63-70.

²³² Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2005), 20.

the canon was not initially a rock-solid baseline by which everything could be measured.

“unanimity in the definition of the canon of Scripture, took some time to emerge.”²³³ Williams argues that it would be odd to dismiss those institutional structures that eventually approved the canon as part of the catastrophe. At least the institutions were functionally well enough to recognize the canon! They must not have been totally misled and corrupt! Yoder would likely agree that indeed church history has much to teach the church today and that theology does not *exclusively* calibrate itself by the New Testament baseline. Williams, for example, suggests that the church’s martyrs provide an illuminating foil for today’s church.²³⁴

But even if one does give primary authority to the canonical witness as Yoder insists, it is very important that the interpreter take into account texts in the New Testament that seem conflict with one’s tradition. Barrett, Fee, Brown and Käsemann argue that there was development within the New Testament toward greater institutional formality. The free church interpreter must wrestle with these texts. They too are part of the canonical witness. In other words, if one is going to make the argument that the New Testament promotes an egalitarian type of church structure and meeting, then one must do so taking into account the entire New Testament including the role of the apostles and the more formal structures evident in the Pastoral Epistles. New Testament scholars note both hierarchical and non-hierarchical features of the early church.

Because Yoder does not take into account the authority the apostles played in the New Testament, this leads to a very fluid vision of the congregation. Yoder’s understanding of baptism (1 Cor 1), eucharist (1 Cor 11), the open meeting (1 Cor 14), the multiplicity of gifts (1

²³³ Williams, *Why Study the Past?*, 51.

²³⁴ Williams, *Why Study the Past?*.

Cor 12) and even perhaps the process of moral discernment (1 Cor 5) can be found in 1 Corinthians. It does not take much reflection to conclude that Paul's exhortations to the dysfunctional Corinthian community should not be the only source of ecclesiological reflection. The Corinthian church had a uniquely non-hierarchical flavor with Paul away. It is difficult to know whether the fiercely egalitarian nature of the church was favored by Paul or whether it was merely the situation he had to deal with in the community. It might have been useless for him to impose a group of leaders on the community so his instructions were primarily intended as a stopgap measure until he returned to them. His goal in writing to the community was to direct the chaos but it would not be surprising if later in its institutional life, more structure developed.

Similarly, Acts 2 is often cited as the example of ideal New Testament church life (though not by Yoder). There as well historical context is needed. It was quite early in the church's expansion, the apostles were intimately involved, and the community was still completely Jewish. The point is that the synthetic task is crucial when talking about New Testament forms of ecclesiology.

Along the same lines, because Yoder is trying to emphasize the multiplicity of gifts and the open meeting and trying to free the church from the grips of clergy-centered-preaching ecclesiologies, he does not sufficiently acknowledge the importance of persons in the community who take seriously the task of studying the Scriptures. The descriptive work in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* by Richard Hays and the work of many New Testament commentators exemplify the richness of reading the Scriptures carefully and in their context. It is difficult to find in Yoder's ecclesiology a role for someone who takes the time to do this kind of descriptive and synthetic study.

Allen Verhey notes that it is difficult to interpret the New Testament well given its “silence, strangeness, and diversity.”²³⁵ Yoder envisions the difficulty of Scripture being overcome by the diversity of voices present in the open meeting. However, he describes a spontaneous, extemporaneous dynamic. Where is the study and rigor of reading texts carefully (which Yoder himself does so well in *The Politics of Jesus* and emphasizes is critically important in “The Apostle’s Apology Revisted”)?

As is noted earlier in the paper, Yoder sees the role of the teacher in the community disconnected from that of the “elder/moderator/bishop/shepherd.”²³⁶ Another person, the agent of memory, brings forth the Scriptures but this person “does not judge or decide anything.”²³⁷ A significant contribution to moral discernment is Yoder’s vision of the open meeting and the dynamic process of binding and loosing but the accompanying ecclesiology does not sufficiently identify the importance of identifiable persons in the community who are charged with knowing and reminding the community of the tradition—primarily the Scriptures. “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim 2:2 TNIV).

The Christian community needs people who will devote themselves to reading the New Testament and to presenting to the community their descriptive, synthetic, and hermeneutical reflections on the text. Preachers should be reading the Scriptures carefully in their context and reflecting on the whole message of the book and keeping in mind the larger biblical context. They will also draw on the work of New Testament scholars who have done the work of clarifying difficult texts, explaining background issues, and highlighting common themes as well

²³⁵ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 50-51.

²³⁶ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 37.

²³⁷ Yoder, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 30.

as reflecting on diversity within the canon. All people in the congregation should be encouraged to develop their abilities as interpreters of texts.

In this way, the community will not be “pooling ignorance” but rather having rich edifying discussion. Verhey puts it well,

The rule that we must read Scripture in Christian community is not a license to neglect exegesis, as though we could simply substitute some particular tradition of performance and interpretation for the script. On the contrary, to read Scripture in Christian community requires that we nurture and sustain biblical scholarship as an important contribution to the communal effort to understand and perform Scripture. *We must read Scripture with exegetical care and skill.*²³⁸

Scripture and Ethics—How does Yoder’s emphasis on local and communal deliberation challenge ethical reflection in the church?

Yoder brilliantly shows in his writing how the Christian community should be a place of dynamic moral dialogue. Perhaps it is not surprising that an ethics professor should put ethical deliberation at the center of his vision of what the church should be. He envisions a type of community (reminiscent of 1 Corinthians) which is embroiled in deliberation, controversy, and Scripture. There is never a dull moment in Yoder’s church. James Dunn affirms, “A Christianity that regards the maintenance of and faithfulness to tradition as its highest responsibility is no longer Christianity as defined by the New Testament.”²³⁹

Furthermore, Yoder argues that this dynamic discerning community can demonstrate to the world how life should be lived. His rich vision of the church should persuade readers that the church is not a hierarchical institution to be tolerated but something worth giving one’s life to.

²³⁸ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 61. Italics original.

²³⁹ James D. G. Dunn, “Is there evidence for fresh expressions of church in the New Testament?” in *Mission-shaped Questions: Defining issues for today’s church* (ed. Steven Croft; London: Church House Publishing, 2008), 64.

He shows how different people within the community contribute their *charismata* to the discernment process and how the practices of the church further the development of wisdom.

As this paper has made clear, Yoder places great emphasis on the practices of the New Testament but does not give a thorough rationale why practices must be weighed more heavily than other Scriptural forms. Narrative, parable, apocalyptic, psalm, prophet, and law should also form one's ecclesiology.

However, he argues compellingly from the practices that moral reasoning should be local and communal.²⁴⁰

When dealing personally with the offender, in view of that person's problems, it is not possible to identify as virtues or vices whole categories of behavior without taking part with that person in the struggle and the tension of applying them to this or her situation.²⁴¹

Yoder's envisions discernment which has been prompted by a need in the community. The community then hashes out the issue while sharing meals (Eucharist), despite difficult social prejudices (baptism), in public (the open meeting) with contributions from everyone (the multiplicity of gifts).

The Christian community's discerning dialogue is Yoder's antidote to rigid authoritarianism. The biblicist preacher, (or at worst, a cult leader) tells the listener exactly what to do because it is prescribed in the Bible. They may ignore other texts in Scripture which put that text into context. They may ignore the immediate context of that chapter. They may bungle the hermeneutic work and address a problem the listeners do not have. All five of Yoder's practices undermine the idea that one leader should be demanding unquestioning obedience of the rest.

²⁴⁰ Yoder, "Binding and Loosing," *The Royal Priesthood*, 328-329.

²⁴¹ Yoder, "Binding and Loosing," *The Royal Priesthood*, 333.

Yoder argues persuasively that a person may be wholly committed to the authority of the New Testament—that the Scriptures are the baseline by which all later tradition should be measured—and still maintain that communal “discourse, deliberation and discernment”²⁴² is paramount. In other words, the most passionate advocates of the authority of Scripture should not merely be advocating for their own interpretations but urging Christians to read and discuss the Scriptures with one another.

The most capable readers of texts (biblical scholars, preachers, educators) should be encouraged by the Christian community not just in their knowledge but in their ability to facilitate conversations about the text. Too often the expert in Scriptural interpretation understands their responsibility as informing the average Christian of what the Bible says when in fact Yoder points out that each person in the Christian community has something to contribute to the collective discernment process.

Professors too often write books without listening to those who know the earthy realities of the topics they are addressing. Allen Verhey hits the right note when he says,

Often the best a Christian ethicist (or a book about Christian ethics) can do is to point beyond Christian ethics as a narrowly defined academic discipline and toward the community out of which it lives and speaks, toward the community of those who gather periodically in the name of Christ and who disperse again in Christ’s service.²⁴³

As a member of the Christian community and as a moral theologian, I simply hope that my attention to medical ethics, sexual ethics, economic ethics, and political ethics will contribute to the moral discourse of the churches.²⁴⁴

Biblical studies professors too often lecture their way through New Testament and Old Testament survey courses that consist almost entirely of issues related to background—implicitly

²⁴² Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 36.

²⁴³ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 5.

²⁴⁴ Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 47-48.

teaching students that their insights and questions about the text matter little. Sunday school teachers and youth pastors ignore developmental issues—teaching youth to like everything in the session except the boring Bible part. Thomas Groome’s *Christian Religious Education* is the classic text in the field.²⁴⁵ In it, he argues technically and philosophically that people learn best when they are actively engaged in discussing what is being taught. Groome’s thoughts for the book initially arose as he attempted to teach religion to bored students at a Catholic high school.²⁴⁶ The lecture is insufficient for learning. Groome’s shared praxis model is an ingenious way of coaxing the best out of students but Yoder’s “binding and loosing” discernment process is actually quite similar. Yoder argues the practices are biblical but Groome would argue the dynamic discernment involved have substantial philosophical reasoning behind them.

Preachers too often lecture for 30 minutes and never receive systematic feedback and input from congregation members. Doug Pagitt calls one-directional lecture preaching “speaching.”²⁴⁷ He calls his own approach “progressional dialogue.” Concretely this includes having a Bible study on Tuesday night regarding the upcoming Sunday sermon with a number of people from the congregation. He can learn from them and quote them in the sermon. He also gives ten minutes of open-mic discussion time after his sermon so that people can suggest applications, ask questions, and hear from one another. He also encourages people to participate on a blog about the sermon afterward. Doug emphasizes that the preacher is do as much preaching preparation as a normal preacher. They will still challenge the community. But this

²⁴⁵ Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999). Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980).

²⁴⁶ Groome, *Christian Religious Education*, xiii.

²⁴⁷ Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

approach allows the community to sharpen his insights, point out blind spots, and challenge one another.

Yoder's five practices, which are inescapably rooted in the New Testament, are fundamentally incompatible with a lifeless, authoritarian vision of the church. Young Life has often said, "It is a sin to bore a kid." It is a travesty to teach people that the Christian community is a bore. Some people do not want to go to heaven for fear it will be an eternal church service of which they have attended too many already. The gospel is not a lecture to be endured but a revolution to be joined. Yoder makes that clear.

If we are ever to rescue God's good news from all the justifiable but secondary meanings it has taken on, perhaps the best way to do it is to say that the root meaning of the term *euangelion* would today best be translated 'revolution.'²⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

Today some congregations note that few young people are attending. Sociologist Robert Putnam reports,

survey evidence and denominational reports are generally consistent in showing a rise in church membership from the 1930s to about 1960, followed by a plateau and then a long, slow slump of roughly 10 percent in church membership between the 1960s and 1990s. The percentage of Americans who identify themselves as having 'no religion' has risen steadily and sharply from 2 percent in 1967 to 11 percent in the 1990s.²⁴⁹

He goes on to say that,

In the 1950s roughly one in every four Americans reported membership in church-related groups, apart from church membership itself. By the late 1980s and 1990s comparable studies found that the figure had been cut in half to roughly one in eight. The carefully controlled University of Michigan-NIMH study of change in personal behavior between 1957 and 1976 found a decline of 50 percent in membership in church-related groups.

²⁴⁸ Yoder, "The Original Revolution," *For the Nations*, 166.

²⁴⁹ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 69-70.

The General Social Survey reports that between 1974 and 1996 membership in church-related groups fell by about 20 percent.²⁵⁰

He also mentions that

While the fraction of the population that is entirely disconnected from organized religion has increased, the fraction that is intensely involved has been relatively stable. In other words, religious dropouts have come at the expense of those whose religious involvement was modest but conventional.²⁵¹

Over the last forty years mainline denominations (Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Lutheran, Congregational, American Baptist, and so on) have heavily lost ‘market share,’ while evangelical and fundamentalist groups (Southern Baptist, Pentecostal, Holiness, Assemblies of God, and Church of God in Christ, as well as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons and independent congregations) have continued to grow, although sometimes at a pace slower than before and now barely matching national population growth. While mainline Protestantism still is a significant part of the religious landscape, these congregations are dwindling, aging, and less involved in religious activities.²⁵²

These “dwindling, aging” congregations want to know if there are things they can do to attract them. They try to borrow tricks and tips from churches that seem to be growing. “Start a hip new worship service! Shut down all the programs and start small groups!” they are taught. But usually these initiatives just produce more conflict and plunge the community into deeper despair.

Some of these congregations invite a leader in the denomination or a “church consultant” to facilitate a process of self-evaluation. Though Luther Seminary professor and church consultant Patrick Keifert does not refer to Yoder or New Testament practices and rarely mentions the word “practice,” his advice resonates with Yoder’s.

²⁵⁰ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 72.

²⁵¹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 75.

²⁵² Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 76.

Without the spiritual *practices* for opening leadership to discernment of God's preferred future, most leaders and active members of the congregation experienced the organizational change as the imposition of a new elite who had not earned their trust.²⁵³

Healthy congregations feel ownership of the community's direction. "Absent that shared sense of mission—a deep cultural reality—strategic plans, no matter how well gathered and formed, fail to gain the commitment of energy, time and resources for transforming mission."²⁵⁴ What Keifert has found from experience working with churches, Yoder draws from Scripture.

Here is where the three subjects of this paper addresses coalesce: theology of mission, church and ministry in the New Testament, and Scripture and ethics. Congregations that will read Yoder's *Body Politics* and commit to incorporating these five practices into their community life, will begin to: address the issues in their midst (binding and loosing), share power (the open meeting), draw out the gifts of others (the multiplicity of gifts), share of their selves with one another (Eucharist), and transcend social barriers (baptism). They will find themselves gathered around the Scriptures reflecting on how to follow Jesus as a community.

²⁵³ Patrick R. Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era: A Missional Journey of Spiritual Discovery* (Eagle, Idaho: Allelon Publishing, 2006), 46. Italics mine. He draws more on Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch. "This seeking caused me to learn from the field of missiology, especially missiologists Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch . . . Upon theological reflection, we saw that the principles of the Gospel and Our Culture movement started by Lesslie Newbigin seemed right on target." Keifert, *We are Here Now*, 18, 50. A key text that Keifert uses in his church consulting is Luke 10:1-12. "PMC ['Partnership for Missional Church'] begins with a text that was given to use through our work with our partners: Luke 10:1-12 . . . If you look back over the last couple of chapters and then read Luke 10:1-12, it should be relatively clear to you how profoundly this passage shapes the imagination of PMC. We are sent in pairs; partnering is essential. We depend upon the hospitality of those to whom we are sent. Present in the text are all persons of the Trinity . . ." Keifert, *We are Here Now*, 69-70. "In another book, Keifert reflects on the eucharist in ways that are consistent with Yoder. "I tend to think the church is often at its most inhospitable in public worship, the Spirit nevertheless draws them there. Those churches that respond with hospitality will enjoy growth at many levels, including numerical. Those who exclude these seekers and refuse to take up the challenge of public ministry among strangers will experience the opposite . . . Sunday morning worship has become a moment of evangelism whether Christians like it or not—indeed, whether they are prepared or not. The critical question is thus not whether we will choose to do evangelism but whether the challenge of evangelism that is thrust upon us is being effectively met." Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), x, 3. Like Yoder, Keifert argues that the Eucharist is a place where sharing occurs. Both refer to 1 Corinthians 11 and the hospitality and sharing of a meal.

²⁵⁴ Keifert, *We are Here Now*, 50. Cf. Nancy Ammerman, Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley, and William McKinney, eds. *Studying Congregations* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1998), 19.

And they will want others to experience the life they have together. Their community life will overflow into the world—washing in the outsider. May it happen.

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