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DIASPORA AS MISSION

John Howard Yoder, Jeremiah 29 and the Shape and Mission of the
Church

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Abbreviations of Yoder's work

TRS	<i>Täuferium und Reformation in der Schweiz</i> (1962)
CWS	<i>The Christian Witness to the State</i> (1964)
DPR	<i>Discipleship as Political Responsibility</i> (1964)
TRG	<i>Täuferium und Reformation im Gespräch</i> (1968)
OR	<i>The Original Revolution. Essays on Christian Pacifism</i> (1971)
NTL	<i>Nevertheless: The Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism</i> (1971)
PJ	<i>The Politics of Jesus</i> (1972)
LMS	<i>The Legacy of Michael Sattler</i> , editor and translator (1973)
SC	<i>The Schleithelm Confession</i> , editor and translator (1977)
WWYD	<i>What Would You Do? A Serious Answer to a Standard Question</i> (1983)
PK	<i>The Priestly Kingdom. Social Ethics as Gospel</i> (1984)
WWU	<i>When War Is Unjust. Being Honest In Just-War Thinking</i> (1984)
PP	<i>He Came Preaching Peace</i> (1985)
TFC	<i>The Fullness of Christ. Paul's Vision of Universal Ministry</i> (1987)
DP	<i>A Declaration of Peace</i> (1991)
BP	<i>Body Politics. Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World</i> (1992)
RP	<i>The Royal Priesthood. Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical</i> (1994)
RRN	<i>Chapters in the History of Religiously Rooted NonViolence: A Series of Working Papers of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies</i> (1994)
FN	<i>For the Nations. Essays Evangelical and Public</i> (1997)
THW	<i>To Hear the Word</i> (2001)
PT	<i>Preface to Theology. Christology and Theological Method</i> (2002)
KB	<i>Karl Barth and the Problem of War, and Other Essays on Barth</i> (2003)
JCSR	<i>The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited</i> (2003)

- WL *The War of the Lamb. The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking*
(2009)
- CA *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution* (2009)
- NBH *Nonviolence: A Brief History. The Warsaw Lectures* (2010)
- PWK *A Pacifist way of Knowing* (2010)
- ES *The End of Sacrifice* (2011)
- RC *Revolutionary Christianity* (2012)
- RCD *Radical Christian Discipleship* (2012)
- RCS *Revolutionary Christian Citizenship* (2013)
- RCF *Real Christian Fellowship* (2014)
- TM *Theology of Mission. A Believers Church Perspective* (2014)

Additional abbreviations

BCBC	<i>Believers Church Bible Commentary</i>
BLT	<i>Brethren Life and Thought</i>
CCARJ	<i>Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal</i>
CGR	<i>Conrad Grebel Review</i>
CT	<i>Christianity Today</i>
ESV	<i>English Standard Version</i>
IJSCC	<i>International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church</i>
JRE	<i>Journal of Religious Ethics</i>
JSCE	<i>Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics</i>
JSHJ	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i>
JSR	<i>The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning</i>
JTI	<i>Journal of Theological Interpretation</i>
ML	<i>Mennonite Life</i>
MQR	<i>Mennonite Quarterly Review</i>
NIV	<i>New International Version</i>
NPQ	<i>New Perspectives Quarterly</i>
RRJ	<i>The Review of Rabbinic Judaism</i>
SIR	<i>Studies in Religion</i>
WBC	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>

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INTRODUCTION

Because of formative developments in ecclesiological thought and practice, the fourth century C.E. can be considered as pivotal for the church. Changes in society brought the church into a new situation and confronted her with new questions. A few of the major events of the fourth century were the Edict of Milan (313) which declared a freedom of religion in the Roman Empire, the First Council of Nicea (325) summoned by emperor Constantine the Great, and the Edict *Cunctos Populus* (380) which declared Nicene Christendom to be the official state religion of the Roman Empire. Thus, in the fourth century Christianity changed from an occasionally persecuted minority into a respectable religion within Roman society. This century of the church was essentially about the establishment of Christendom within the Roman Empire and beyond.

The second half of the twentieth century and the first part of the twenty-first might also be considered a pivotal century for the church, at least for western Christianity. But this century is essentially about the decline of Christendom in western society.¹ Some of the same ecclesiological questions have come to the surface as in the fourth century, but from a different perspective; this time not arising from a gain of influence and power, but from the involuntary position of losing them. Alongside the dogmatic questions of the fourth century, the ecclesiological questions could be structured around two main issues. First, what does it mean to be church? As Roger Haight summarizes in reflecting on the fourth century:

In terms of size, extension, complexity, cultural identities, members, self-definition of its faith, sacramental theology, organization-

¹ For Christendom and post-Christendom, see section 1.2.1.

al structure, relation to the “world,” and ideals of the spiritual life, the church went to another period of transformation.²

The transformation to post-Christendom raised ecclesiological questions on basically the same terms: size, extension, complexity, cultural identities, members, self-definition of the church’s faith, sacramental theology, organizational structure, relation to the “world,” and ideals of the spiritual life.³

The newly gained respect and influence of Christianity in the fourth century led to a new approach to the second main issue: the responsibility of the church for the well-being of society. Christians had a reputation of caring for the poor, the sick and abandoned children. They lived and worshipped at the margins of society. This is how they contributed to it.⁴ The rise to power in the fourth century gave new opportunities to influence society for the good. In post-Christendom times the same theme of responsibility has been raised, but from a perspective of loss of power and influence. A major cause for debate in post-Christendom times became the question whether the church should have her own ethical practices and ways of reasoning, independent from society. Some churches and theologians affirm this position.⁵ Others reject this as ‘sectarian,’ believing that the church should have an ethic, not only for the church, but also for society.⁶

² R.S.J. Haight, *Christian Community in History. Historical Ecclesiology*, volume 1 (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 199.

³ There are numerous publications on this topic. See for an introduction Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom. Church and Mission in a Strange World* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004), 1-22.

⁴ See Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996).

⁵ Luke Bretherton mentions theologians such as John Milbank, William Cavanaugh and Oliver O’Donovan who make this move. He calls this move ‘the ecclesial turn,’ see Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics. The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 17. Paul and Waller add theologians like Richard B. Hays, Stanley Hauerwas, Samuel Wells, Bernd Wannenwetsch, Brian Brock, Miroslav Volf, Tom Wright and Tim Keller to the list. See Herman Paul and Bart Waller, *Oefenplaatsen. Tegendraadse theologen over kerk en ethiek* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2012).

⁶ The term ‘sectarian’ is used in the sense of withdrawal from society. See for example James Gustafson’s critique of Hauerwas and Hauerwas’ response in ‘Why the “Sectarian Temptation” is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson’ in *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 90-110. The stance that active Christian participation in society is needed is often referred to as ‘Kuyperian.’

A third question that came to the surface in both centuries is the question of how to relate to Judaism. Starting as a Jewish movement which became gradually more Gentile, the church in her first three centuries was trying to find ways to distinguish herself from Judaism. Judaism was considered an ancient, and therefore respectable, religion. There were fierce theological debates between Jewish and Christian leaders, but power was never an issue because neither of the religious communities had power to exert over the other. This changed in the fourth century, which led to the established Christian church oppressing Jews and Judaism in western society. This oppression varied in severity at different points in time, but often the church played a major part in legitimating and facilitating violence towards the Jewish communities.⁷ The Shoah, the industrial destruction of European Jewry in World War Two, had a major impact on Christianity's consciousness towards the Jewish people. Christendom's power and influence had not prevented Nazi Germany from killing the Jews, but had instead legitimated their ideology.

In post-Christendom times the church in the West has lost influence and became a minority religious group, just like the Jews, who have been in diaspora for the last two thousand years. This minority experience has prompted on the part of the Christians a new interest in Judaism and their experience of what it takes to sustain viable faith communities as a minority.

Thus, in light of dealing with a position of guilt towards the Jewish people, a need to rethink Israel in Christian doctrine and a common situating of both religious groups at the margins, the question of how to relate to Judaism is back on the table.

In his posthumously published book *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003) the American Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder expands an ecclesiology that addresses these three main issues in particular:

⁷ See for example James Carrol, *Constantine's Sword. The Church and the Jews* (Boston: First Mariner Books, 2001).

what does it mean to be church? how should the church feel responsible for the wellbeing of society? and how to relate to Judaism? Working from the centrality of the letter of the prophet Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon, Yoder develops the thesis that Jeremiah 29 represents a turn, a turn to diaspora. From that moment on the people of God, both Israel and the church, are called to an existence in diaspora. According to Yoder, this diaspora lifestyle is the social shape that God uses to reach the nations with His mission. He calls this perspective ‘diaspora as mission,’ and uses it to ground his anabaptist ecclesiology not only in the ‘Anabaptist Vision’ of the sixteenth century,⁸ in the practice of the early church, or in the words of Jesus, but Yoder reaches back even further to Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles.

Yoder’s proposal and the potential to constructively engage the aforementioned ecclesiological questions of this ‘century of the church’ led to the main question of this study:

to what extent is John Howard Yoder’s ‘diaspora as mission’ ecclesiology coherent and helpful for engaging contemporary (post-Christendom Western) ecclesiological questions?

This research is constructed in the following way:

Chapter 1 describes the context of the research: Western Christianity at the beginning of the twenty-first century. What are the main issues regarding the church and its surrounding culture? In engaging relevant ecclesiological and missional literature, this study discerns three major turns: a marginal turn, an ecclesial turn and a missional turn.

Chapter 2 introduces John Howard Yoder and his major publication with respect to this research *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003). A major part of this chapter is dedicated to the question of how to work with Yoder’s theology in light of his abuse of women. In the end I do propose to keep on working with Yoder’s theology, but to critically engage

⁸ *The Anabaptist Vision* (1944) is a pamphlet written by Harold Bender and is famous for his framing of 16th century Anabaptism for 20th century Mennonite church life. Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1944).

it with a hermeneutic of suspicion. I propose that Yoder's work is in need of an empirical testing: how would this theology work out in practice? To do this, the research engages three communities that are inspired by Yoder's diaspora ecclesiology.

Chapter 3 engages Yoder's proposal for a 'diaspora as mission' ecclesiology, and elaborates in particular on three subjects: historiography, Judaism and ecclesiology. One might consider Yoder's proposal a grand narrative, which asks for a certain historiographical approach. This approach is characterized by Yoder as 'evangelical revisionism' and he applies it to his reading of the 'the parting of the ways.'⁹ Yoder's proposal also includes a specific reading of Judaism. This Jeremian *angehauchte* Judaism is, according to Yoder, called to reside as dispersed convictional faith communities all over the world. Yoder reads Judaism, as Daniel Boyarin puts it, 'as a free church.'¹⁰ It is not surprising therefore that Yoder identifies Jewish roots for his ecclesiology and works with the phrase 'the Jewishness of the free church vision.'

Chapter 4 provides a theoretical critique. The question that is addressed in this chapter is 'to what extent is John Howard Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' ecclesiology theologically coherent?' In order to examine this, I describe some relevant aspects of the reception of Yoder's work in contemporary theological studies. I use critical questions raised by Jewish and Christian scholars to test Yoder's perspective, in particular his use of sources, his historical work, his reading of Judaism and the consequences of his ecclesiology.

Chapter 5 explores whether practices that are inspired by Yoder's approach can offer the necessary practical critique. To do so the theology and practice of three Christian leaders and their communities are engaged:

9 'The parting of the ways' is a term coined by New Testament scholar James Dunn to describe the parting of the variety of Jewish and Christian groups into Rabbinic Judaism and the Christian church, in the first five centuries of our era. See section 3.2.

10 Daniel Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church: Footnotes to John Howard Yoder's The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited,' in *The New Yoder*, ed. Peter Dula and Chris K. Heubner (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010), 1-17.

Stuart Murray and Urban Expression Nederland, Shane Claiborne and The Simple Way community, and Mark Kinzer and congregation Zera Avraham. The question ‘what are the helpful and what are the problematic aspects of Yoder’s diaspora ecclesiology when put to practice?’ is analyzed to offer a practical critique to Yoder’s initial approach.

In Chapter 6 the results of this research are presented to answer the central question of the research, to what extent John Howard Yoder’s ‘diaspora as mission’ ecclesiology is first of all coherent, and second, helpful for engaging contemporary (post-Christendom Western) ecclesiological questions. Such an answer is formulated by addressing the specific issues raised above: what does it mean to be church? how should the church feel responsible for the wellbeing of society? and how to relate to Judaism?

A final remark about this study and its author. Although I was raised and educated within reformed theology, I gradually moved towards a more anabaptist approach, to the point that I became a Baptist minister. In the process I discovered that my questions resonated with Yoder’s ‘diaspora as mission’ ecclesiology. They also happen to resonate with several similarities between reformed (liberated)¹¹ and anabaptist ecclesiology. These are, first, the concern for a community of believers as opposed to a more *Volk-skirchliche* approach, second, a missionary awareness, and third, a sense of responsibility within society.

While growing up as the son of a reformed pastor/ church planter in the secularized Roman Catholic south of the Netherlands, I learned at a young age to approach these themes from a post-Christendom perspective. Yoder’s diaspora approach sounded therefore familiar from the beginning.

During the first years of my research for this study I was involved in a church planting initiative. Together with two other families we moved to one of the troubled neighborhoods of Amersfoort in the Netherlands, called Kruiskamp, to ‘seek the peace’ of the neighborhood and plant a

11 De Gereformeerde Kerk (vrijgemaakt). Separated in 1944 from the reformed church on an issue regarding pedobaptism and covenantal security of salvation.

church. We were part of Urban Expression, a missionary agency which focuses on these kinds of neighborhoods ‘at the margins.’¹² Living, praying and working there, I used the work of Yoder to reflect on our processes. His work gave us words to describe the processes we were part of, but also direction to engage theological questions that came to the surface as we sought to be church ‘from scratch’.¹³

Living with Yoder’s theology, I experienced that his approach engaged my ecclesial and missional questions on several levels, from the practices of church (planting) to academic reflection. My personal involvement motivates me to engage Yoder’s work even more critically, on both a theoretical and a practical level. What does it mean to be church? I am convinced and will demonstrate in this study, that Yoder’s ecclesiology can help Western Christians in the twenty-first century answer this question.

12 See <http://urbanexpression.org.uk/> and <http://www.urbanexpression.nl/> (accessed June 2017).

13 I reflected on this process in several publications. See for example ‘Samen een weg vinden als *Urban Expression* in de wijk, met Yoder op de boekenplank,’ in *Samen ontdekken. De uitdaging van de vergader(en)de gemeente: samen de wil van Christus onderscheiden*, ed. Ingeborg Janssen-te Loo, Baptistica Reeks (Amsterdam: Baptisten Seminarium, 2016), 56-73.

1

BEING CHURCH IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WESTERN CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter the context of the research is described: what are the main issues regarding the church and its surrounding culture? What are the main ecclesiological questions? To describe the context of the research I use – among others – the work of Stefan Paas (who describes the West-European context),¹ the work of Darrell Guder (who describes the North-American context),² two recent publications of Pope Francis (which describe a Roman Catholic perspective),³ and two recent publications of the World

1 Stefan Paas is J.H. Bavink Professor of Missiology and Intercultural Theology at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam and Professor of Missiology at the Theological University in Kampen, the Netherlands. He is one of the major theologians in the West-European context to reflect on the church in mission. His publications, both popular and scholarly, focus on church and mission in Western Europe, from the particular context of the Netherlands. In the last fifteen years, Paas has written four major books on the church in mission: Stefan Paas, *Jezus als Heer in een plat land. Op zoek naar een Nederlands evangelie* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2001); Stefan Paas, *De werkers van het laatste uur. De inwijding van nieuwkomers in het christelijk geloof en in de christelijke gemeente* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2003); Stefan Paas, *Vreemdelingen en priesters. Christelijke missie in een postchristelijke omgeving* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2015); and Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West. Learning from the European Experience* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

2 Darrell L. Guder is professor emeritus at Princeton Theological Seminary, and a member of The Gospel and Our Culture Network. Guder is seen as one of the leading voices in conceptualizing and developing the themes of missional church, missional hermeneutics, and missional theology in the North American context. He has published several book on church and mission, of which Darrell L. Guder (ed.) *Missional Church. A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) has become a formative work. Other publications are Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2000); Darrell L. Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness* (Eugene: Wipf&Stock, 2005); and Darrell L. Guder, *Called to Witness. Doing Missional Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2015).

3 I work in particular from *Encyclical Letter Lumen Fidei* (Vatican: Vatican Press, 2013) and *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican: Vatican Press, 2013), Pope Francis' most recent texts on church in mission. Pope Francis represents the Roman Catholic Church in person and theology. In his work he continually refers to and reflects on

Council of Churches (which describe an ecumenical perspective) in particular.⁴ These publications show three major turns in the ecclesiological conversations of the last twenty-five years, and these turns will be part of the conversations for years to come. These are first, a marginal turn, second, an ecclesial turn, and third, a missional turn.

These three turns are recognizable in the work of ecclesiological and missional thinkers, which do engage society and sociological questions, but in particular from an ecclesiological point of view. It is therefore constructive to reflect on each turn briefly from the perspective of a sociologist, and show an outsider's perspective on the issues at stake. I use the work of Polish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman to do so.⁵

1.2 A Marginal Turn

The first turn that comes to the surface in literature on church, culture and mission in the last twenty-five years is a marginal turn. This turn is recognizable in three ways set out below.

1.2.1 *Post-Christendom*

First, from the second half of the twentieth century until the present, the church and Christian culture has been losing part of their influence in

earlier authoritative publications, such as *Ad Gentes* (1965), *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) and *Redemptoris Missio* (1990). In doing so, Pope Francis' work shows consensus, current conversation and vision for the future.

⁴ World Council of Churches, *The Church Towards a Common Vision*. Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013) and World Council of Churches, *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*. Doc. No. GEN 07 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012) are the WCC publications I focus on in particular. These WCC publications build on earlier WCC documents, and on received feedback from the worldwide church community. In doing so these publications show consensus, current conversation and vision for the future.

⁵ I will work especially with his notion of liquid modernity. Bauman has related extensively to postmodernism. In the 1980s and 1990s he worked with postmodern terminology, but from the late 1990s onwards, Bauman started to work with the term 'liquid modernity,' because it described the developments Bauman noticed in a more accurate way. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2000/ 2012); Zygmunt Bauman, *Community. Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001); Zygmunt Bauman, *Culture in a Liquid Modern World* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011); Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times. Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

Western Europe and North America and has moved to the margins. This phenomenon is often referred to as post-Christendom, post-Christianity or (post) secularization.⁶ It has had a major influence on the everyday life of the church, but also on her theological reflection. You might say that one of the most prominent conditions in the work of ecclesiological thinkers – those who reflect on the western context of the last 50 years – is that they work from the perspective of a marginalized church.

This is, for example, clearly visible in the work of Stefan Paas.⁷ In the last fifteen years Paas has written four major books on the church in mission. He did so in two waves. In 2001/2003 he published *Jezus als Heer in een plat land* (2001) and *De werkers van het laatste uur* (2003). In these books Paas argues that the church in Western Europe has to start asking missionary questions about both contextualization (what does the gospel mean in this context?) and practical church life (how do we welcome and integrate new members who have no Christian background whatsoever?). Twelve years later, in 2015/2016, he published *Vreemdelingen en priesters* (2015) and *Church Planting in the Secular West* (2016). The tone has changed in these two publications and this has to do with the twelve-year gap. In these years, secularization has accelerated, in particular in Paas' personal experience,⁸ and he sets out how churches have reacted in vari-

6 See Stefan Paas, 'Post-Christian, Post-Christendom, and Post-Modern Europe: Towards the Interaction of Missiology and the Social Sciences,' *Mission Studies*, 28 (2011): 3-25, for the terminological differences between Post-Christian, Post-Christendom and Post-Modern. Paas proposes to use the term 'post-Christian' to 'not refer to the secularization of institutions, but to changes in the beliefs, motivations and practices of people' (11). 'Post-Christendom' highlights in the first place the collapse of ecclesiastical power in Europe' (14). 'The term "post-modern," finally, is used to explain a wide range of cultural phenomena' (14). Jürgen Habermas, amongst others, uses the term post-secular, to describe the current time in which the modernist dichotomy of reason and faith does not seem workable anymore. See for example Jürgen Habermas, 'Secularism's Crisis of Faith: Notes on Post-Secular Society,' *NPQ*, Vol. 25 (2008): 17-29.

7 Paas is one amongst many others. The whole theological project of Darrell Guder for example, as part of The Gospel and Our Culture Network, is also exercised in light of post-Christendom questions.

8 In his introduction to Paas, *Vreemdelingen en Priesters*, Paas shares from his own experiences as he moved in 2005 from a small town in the Bible Belt of the Netherlands to the city of Amsterdam. This was a culture shock for Paas, as post-Christendom questions became his own existential questions: 'Most of it were social changes, but because people are social beings, you cannot escape the fact that it influences your faith' (10). He describes

ous ways. For example, by denying the situation, by embracing Church Growth models, by planting churches or initiating fresh expressions, by praying for revival or by flirting with Anabaptist ecclesiology, to mention a few. Paas' publications from 2015 and 2016 contain a critical assessment of these responses, in particular of the Church Growth Movement (*Vreemdelingen*, 2015) and the rise of church planting initiatives (*Church Planting*, 2016). In his work, Paas implicitly shows a move from questions regarding 'how can we stop the secularization process?' to questions on 'what does it mean to be a Christian minority in a (post) secular society?'

This process is discussed extensively by Stuart Murray. Murray, writing from a Western European context, describes in his work the effects of post-Christendom on both society and church. In order to discern the effects of post-Christendom it is important to define what Christendom was in the first place. For Murray, Christendom is first, 'a geographical region in which almost everyone was at least nominally Christian.' Second, 'a historical era from the early fourth-century conversion of the Emperor Constantine I to the twentieth century.' Third, 'a civilization shaped primarily by the story, language, symbols and rhythms of Christianity.' Fourth, 'a political arrangement in which Church and state provide mutual, if often uneasy, support and legitimation.' Fifth, 'an ideology, a mindset, a way of thinking about God's activity in the world.'⁹ Post-Christendom, then,

is the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence.¹⁰

In the new era of post-Christendom Murray notes a number of transitions for the church: from the center to the margins, from majority to minority, from settlers to sojourners, from privilege to plurality, from control to

for example how this influenced his way of reading the Bible: 'In this time the realization that the Bible was written by minorities became more important to me' (12).

⁹ Stuart Murray, 'Post-Christendom, Post-Constantinian, Post-Christian...Does the Label Matter?' in *IJSCC*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (August 2009): 198.

¹⁰ Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 19.

witness, from maintenance to mission, from institution to movement.¹¹ As Paas notes, in a reflection on Murray's work, 'here, descriptive and prescriptive features are so intermingled that it can hardly be established what is fact and what is programmatic.'¹² It shows however, that for Murray these transformations are not necessarily seen as a reason to mourn, but also as reasons to rejoice. Not only in terms of facts, but also in terms of program. Celebrating the end of Christendom is, according to Murray, celebrating the ending of its distorting influence of power, wealth and status on the Christian story.¹³ As a missiologist, Murray focuses on the fact that the Christian story, its language and symbols is becoming less and less known in Western Europe and on the challenges and opportunities this gives to the church in Western Europe.

A third thinker who is helpful in understanding post-Christendom is the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. He does not work primarily with the concept of post-Christendom, but uses the term secularization. Taylor offers in *A Secular Age* (2007),¹⁴ alongside two common understandings of secularization (first, a distinction between the public and the private and second, a general decline of religion in practice and belief), a third one. This third understanding of secularization focuses on 'the conditions of belief'. Before the time of secularization, the human condition could hardly be understood without religion. But as the conditions of belief in our secular age change, religion is something that is chosen. Secularization is thus a move away from the commonness of the Christian

11 Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 20.

12 Paas, 'Post-Christian,' 14.

13 Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 21. Murray's critique on the 'Christendom system' is the reason that he prefers the term post-Christendom over post-Christian. The term post-Christian 'undervalues the persistence and quality of Christian faith in contemporary culture,' while the use of the term post-Christendom has this combination of fact and program: 'the end of Christendom might open up space for the recovery of authentic forms of Christian faith' (Murray, 'Does the Label Matter?,' 206).

14 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007).

narrative, from the necessity of religion, to conditions where belief is an option.¹⁵

As we have seen in the work of Paas, Murray and Taylor, the marginal turn of the church has taken place within a changing society and has had profound impact on the practice of the church and on her reflection upon it. The church has to find a way to ask new questions about what it means to be a minority people in a society that is no longer primarily Christian.

1.2.2 Post-Shoah

The second aspect of the marginal turn is an awareness of minority groups who have been victims of Christian domination. This became in particular visible in relation to Judaism and the Jewish people. The Shoah, the industrial extermination of the Jewish people in Christian Western Europe, functioned as a wake-up call. Theologians and churches started to realize that the camps were not an incident but the culmination of two thousand years of Christian antisemitism in Western Europe. This led to a lot of publications on the relation between church and synagogue,¹⁶ on the Jewishness of Jesus and the early church,¹⁷ to a renewed interest in Judaism itself¹⁸ and several attempts to rethink the place of Israel in Christian

15 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, in particular part V, 539-772. See also Charles Taylor, 'The Meaning of Secularism,' *The Hedgehog Review* (Fall 2010): 23-34; Carlos Colorado, 'Review Article A SECULAR AGE by Charles Taylor,' *Touchstone*, May 2010, 56-68.

16 See in the Dutch context for example, the books and pamphlets of the *Verkenning en bezinning* series, the publications of OJEC, or the work of theologians such as Hans Jansen and Simon Schoon.

17 Two major movements in New Testament studies are first the *Heimholung Jesu*, a name for the group of Jewish scholars from the 1940s onward who started to interpret Jesus as a first-century Jew. Scholars such as Joseph Klausner, David Flusser, Geza Vermes, Shalom ben-Chorin and Pinchas Lapide were part of this. A second movement is the so-called *New Perspective on Paul*, which was initiated by E.P. Sanders' book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977). In this book Sanders showed how New Testament scholars need Rabbinic literature to interpret Paul, early Christianity and Second Temple Judaism in a constructive matter. The term *New Perspective on Paul* was coined by James Dunn to describe scholars who work by this principle.

18 See for example in the Dutch context, the rise of 'leerhuizen' (houses of study), where rabbinic literature was studied. The Folkertsma Stichting voor Talmudica published the *Tenachon* series, which was widely used among 'leerhuizen' in a variety of churches.

systematic theology.¹⁹ For missiology and ecclesiology two major questions came to the surface.

The first question is ‘what about mission to the Jews?’ The major approach in Christian theology has been that of supersessionism: the church has replaced Israel as the people of God.²⁰ The Jewish people are therefore the object of mission just like any other people in the world.²¹ This approach, on the one hand, failed to do justice to the biblical narrative about the Jewish people as God’s chosen people. After the Shoah some theologians developed a ‘two ways’ perspective: both Judaism and Christianity are appropriate ways to God.²² It was therefore inappropriate to evangelize the Jewish people. This approach, on the other hand, failed to do justice to New Testament Christological claims, which describe Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah of the Jewish people. Over the last twenty-five years several theologians have been working on an approach that avoids these two poles. Pope Francis, for example, reflects in *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) on the relations of the church with the Jewish people and he gives a well-formulated summary of over sixty years of reflection on the subject.²³ He describes how Christians and Jews believe in the same God and share convictions and concerns.²⁴ Therefore, ‘dialogue and friendship with the children of Israel are part of the life of Jesus’ disciples.’²⁵ It is inspiring to read scriptures together as faith communities and work together ‘for justice and the development of peoples.’²⁶ Some beliefs are unacceptable to Judaism, Pope Francis understands, but though the church cannot refrain from proclaim-

19 See for example the work of R.R. Ruether (*Faith and Fratricide*, 1974), Paul van Buren (*A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality*, III volumes, 1980-1988), F-W Marquardt (*Dogmatik*, VII volumes, 1988-1997).

20 See Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 1-21.

21 Carrol, *Constantine’s Sword*, 237-310.

22 An example is Paul van Buren’s work *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality*, especially volume III, *Christ in Context* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

23 *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), 184-186 (paragraph 247-249). Pope Francis is building on earlier documents such as *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions of the Second Vatican Council, 1965.

24 *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), 184-186 (paragraph 247-249).

25 *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), 185 (paragraph 248).

26 *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), 185-186 (paragraph 249).

ing Jesus as Lord and Messiah,²⁷ that should not prevent Christians and Jews from reading and working together.

Pope Francis also reflects on the second question, which came to the surface later in the twentieth century: what can we learn from the Jewish experience in diaspora?²⁸ The Jewish people have functioned as minority groups for centuries and found ways to sustain religious communities. Christian theologians discovered that marginalization helps in asking the right questions, and that Jewish communities had a lot of experience in doing just this.²⁹ A new interest in biblical themes such as diaspora and exile was developed as a helpful approach to being church in post-Christendom times.³⁰ Pope Francis emphasizes that this second question does not only have pragmatic motivations (because of the diaspora experience Christians can learn from Jews) but also profound theological ones (because God continues to work among the Jewish people, Christians should learn from them).³¹

1.2.3 Mission from the margins

Churches in general have felt responsible for the poor, to educate and evangelize them.³² In the era of colonization churches and mission agencies felt responsible for evangelizing non-western peoples.³³ This has often been done from a position of power and wealth. It is therefore fair to say that mission has often been understood as ‘a movement taking place from the centre to the periphery, and from the privileged to the marginal-

27 *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), 185 (paragraph 249).

28 This question became more prominent as it became clear the church was moving into post-Christendom times, especially from the 1980s onwards.

29 See in particular the work of postliberal theologians, such as John H. Yoder, George Lindbeck, Stanley Hauerwas, Robert Jensen.

30 Most well-known examples are the works of Walter Brueggemann and Stanley Hauerwas.

31 *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), 184-186 (paragraph 247-249).

32 See for example *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), in particular chapter 4 ‘The Social Dimension of the Gospel,’ where Pope Francis reflects on the poor in society and how the gospel is good for the poor. He does so by referring to and reflecting on many papal publications from the 20th and 21st centuries.

33 For an overview, see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), in particular 226-230.

ized.³⁴ *Together Towards Life* (2012), published by the World Council of Churches, describes a shift in the concept of mission from ‘mission to the margins’ to ‘mission from the margins.’³⁵ This shift is the third aspect of the marginal turn. It is the result of various insights. One insight is that living on the margins provides a particular perspective on the gospel that is more difficult to grasp from the centers of power.³⁶ Another is that people at the margins (who were mostly viewed as recipients of missionary action) in fact often act as agents of the gospel.³⁷ Therefore, *Together Towards Life* states that their experiences and visions are crucial for re-imagining mission and evangelism today.³⁸ This shift makes clear that objects and agents of mission are no longer clearly distinguishable in classic frames such as western and non-western, center and periphery, the powerful and those at the margins. All are called to be agents of mission and all are in need to be the object of mission as well.

In short, the marginal turn consists of a turn for the church who finds herself at the margins instead of the center of western culture, a new awareness of minorities that suffered under Christendom, in particular the Jewish people, and finally, a shift from ‘mission to the margins’ to ‘mission from the margins.’

1.2.4 Zygmunt Bauman and the marginal turn

Bauman discerns in our times a passage from the ‘solid’ to a ‘liquid’ phase of modernity. He states:

That is, into a condition in which social forms (structures that limit individual choices, institutions that guard repetitions of routines, patterns of acceptable behavior) can no longer (and are not expect-

³⁴ *Together Towards Life* (2012), 2 (paragraph 6).

³⁵ *Together Towards Life* (2012), 2 (6), 6-19 (paragraph 36-54).

³⁶ *Together Towards Life* (2012), 7 (38).

³⁷ *Together Towards Life* (2012), 7 (paragraph 38-42). Urban Expression and some New Monastic communities work from the same perspective. Not a mission for the margins, but from the margins. Not working for the people, but with the people. See also section 5.2 and section 5.3.

³⁸ *Together Towards Life* (2012), 2 (6), 7 (paragraph 38-42).

ed) to keep their shape for long, because they decompose and melt faster than the time it takes to cast them, and once they are cast for them to set.³⁹

Social constructions become liquid and people change from citizens (who seek their own welfare through the well-being of the city) into individuals (who have to solve their own problems and are skeptical about the common cause).⁴⁰

From the perspective of liquid modernity it is difficult to speak about marginalization of the church, because this terminology works from the perspective of two given social constructs or institutions, namely 'society' or 'the state' versus 'the church.' The major change is the change in size: the church's influence becomes smaller in relation to that of the state. Bauman, however, maintains that all social constructs become liquid, including church, state and society. They are no longer a given: 'none of the consecutive forms of social life is able to maintain its shape for long.'⁴¹ We might work with the word marginalized, as long as we remember that all social constructions and institutions have become liquid, and therefore 'marginalized,' not just the church.

1.3 An Ecclesial Turn

The second prominent turn which comes to the surface in ecclesial literature of the last twenty-five years is what you might call 'an ecclesial turn.' This term already exists in ecclesiological literature, and is used to describe the particularity of the church, especially the particularity the church lives and reasons from. It is helpful for this research to take a closer look at the term.

In his introduction to *Christianity and Contemporary Politics* (2009), Luke Bretherton mentions theologians such as John Milbank, William Cavanaugh and Oliver O'Donovan as examples of scholars who make a

39 Bauman, *Liquid Times*, 1.

40 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 36-37.

41 Bauman, *Culture*, 11.

move towards ‘theological politics’. They do so by reasoning from the particularity of the church, as they emphasize that the church has a distinctive politics and is itself a particular polity.⁴² Bretherton calls this ‘the ecclesial turn’.⁴³

Following Bretherton, Herman Paul and Bart Wallet use the term ‘ecclesial turn’ to describe a common move that is made by the different theologians they interviewed for *Oefenplaatsen* (2012).⁴⁴ Theologians such as Richard B. Hays, Stanley Hauerwas, Samuel Wells, Oliver O’Donovan, Bernd Wannenwetsch, Brian Brock, Miroslav Volf, Tom Wright and Tim Keller were included. These ‘ecclesial turn theologians’ differ in many aspects, but according to Paul and Wallet they do share certain characteristics: (1) Ecclesial turn theologians reason from the particularity of church, faith and practices. (2) They call for an *ad fontes* of Scripture, sacraments and tradition. Ecclesial turn theologians like to talk about the narrative of Scripture and emphasize the importance of theological exegeses. ‘Finding our place in the Biblical story’⁴⁵ is more important than historical critical reading of the text. (3) Sacraments are seen as central because they incorporate people in a new (eschatological) reality, as their narrative becomes part of God’s redemptive story. (4) Ecclesial turn theologians are inspired by a retrieval of tradition as an inspiration for the church here and now. (5) Scripture, sacraments and tradition shape the practices of the church. The particularity of the church is not based on her ideas or opinions, according to the ecclesial turn theologians, but in her way of life.⁴⁶ This is how Paul and Wallet read the shared characteristics of the ecclesial turn. For this re-

⁴² Bretherton, *Christianity*, 17.

⁴³ Bretherton, *Christianity*, 17. Bretherton is not the first one to use this term. In his work on Christology, *Christology from Within and Ahead: Hermeneutics, Contingency, and the Quest for Transcontextual Criteria in Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) Mark L. Y. Chan, for example, uses ‘the ecclesial turn’ or ‘the turn to the Bible’ to describe the focus on corporate knowledge and tradition within postliberalism or ‘the so-called New Yale Theology,’ 145.

⁴⁴ Paul and Wallet, *Oefenplaatsen*.

⁴⁵ See Craig G. Bartholomew, Michael W. Goheen (eds.), *The Drama of Scripture: Finding our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

⁴⁶ Paul and Wallet, *Oefenplaatsen*, 12-14.

search I want to highlight three, in part overlapping, issues that are helpful in describing the turn toward the church.

1.3.1 The particularity of the church

First is the particularity of the church. This particularity concerns the church's own sources and practices, and the epistemological and hermeneutical conditions she works from. This neo-Barthian⁴⁷ attitude is also recognizable in theological movements such as postliberal theology⁴⁸ and Radical Orthodoxy,⁴⁹ and they do partly overlap. It shows that the affirmation of the particularity of the church is currently high on the theological agenda. This emphasis on particularity does however raise questions about the relationship of the church to her surrounding society.

To highlight a few of these, although Paul and Waller applaud the retrieval of the tradition of the church, they wonder to what extent the language of tradition can relate to the language of science, literature, philosophy and politics. Is it not too demanding for the tradition if the church has to become the source of a counternarrative?⁵⁰ Could a hermeneutical perspective on the languages not be a more helpful approach?⁵¹

The particularity of the church lies in her way of life, according to the ecclesial turn theologians Paul and Waller interviewed. The church is

47 You might call this approach Barthian in the sense that – just like Barth – these theologians do not take the epistemological and hermeneutical of a given culture for granted, but call for a particularity of the church.

48 'Postliberal' is a term used to refer to the 'Yale school' of Christian theology and cultural criticism. It reaches back to radical visions of, for example, Karl Barth, Luther and Calvin, and Thomas Aquinas, and proposes doctrinally warranted and community-based readings of Scripture. Well-known postliberal theologians are Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, Peter Ochs, Stanley Hauerwas and Robert Jenson. See sections 4.2 and 4.4.

49 Radical Orthodoxy is a post-secular approach to theology, associated with the University of Cambridge. Major names in this school of theology are Graham Ward, John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock. See James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy, Mapping a Post-secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) for an introduction and overview.

50 As John Milbank proposes in *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1990/2006).

51 Paul and Waller work with Rowan Williams' approach here, Rowan Williams, 'Saving Time: Thoughts on Practice, Patience and Vision,' *New Blackfriars* 73 (1992): 319-326. (*Oefenplaatsen*, 19,20).

therefore seen as a community where Christian virtues are exercised and embodied: the church is itself a particular polity. But, with Augustine and Luther, Paul and Wallet wonder how the church at the same time can maintain its graceful character as a community where people can stumble and fall.⁵²

The language of particularity sometimes leads to accusations of sectarianism, or the objection that ecclesial turn theologians lack a constructive theology of society or a theology of the state, and are mainly focused on the church 'as polis'.⁵³ Although Paul and Wallet do not endorse these accusations, they do agree that the question of how the politics of the church relate to the politics of the state needs further reflection.⁵⁴

1.3.2 The locality of the church

The second central issue is a new focus on the locality of the church. This focus has, on the one hand, to do with a growing awareness of place as a hermeneutical factor.⁵⁵ On the other hand, churches have started to realize that, as Guder states, 'the local particular community is the basic missional structure of the church.'⁵⁶ This latter insight has led since the 1990s to many publications on how the local church can be more effective, more seeker friendly, more missionary focused, or whatever transformation seems necessary. The local church should thus function as the first line in the battle against secularization.⁵⁷ Recently the focus has shifted to

⁵² Paul and Wallet, *Oefenplaatsen*, 20.

⁵³ Paul and Wallet mention language such as: alternative, contrasting, counter (*Oefenplaatsen*, 21).

⁵⁴ Paul and Wallet, *Oefenplaatsen*, 22.

⁵⁵ The theological importance of place became more prominent at the beginning of the 21st century and resulted in a stream of publications on the subject. See for example John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003); Graig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); Leonard Hjalmarson, *No Home Like Place: A Christian Theology of Place* (Skyforest: Urban Loft Publishers, 2015).

⁵⁶ Guder, *Missional Church*, 222.

⁵⁷ See for example Paas, *Werkers van het laatste uur* (2003), which is written with the question of how can churches be more welcoming to entrants to the Christian faith in mind. Guder also, in his *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (2000), dedicates a chapter to 'converting the church: the local community.' In *Church Planting in the Secular*

the insight that the church in western society will be a minority church in future years, and that local churches have to find ways to be church in their particular contexts.⁵⁸ This creates new opportunities. *Together Towards Life* (2012) for example, describes how this resonates with the early church of Acts, that ‘today’s changed world calls for local congregations to take new initiatives,’ and how local congregations can be contextual churches in the most practical sense of the word.⁵⁹ A second part of this shift to the local church, is a corresponding shift to this being the place from which churches begin to initiate their thinking. Previously, church life was often determined on a national or global level and this level described how local churches could be local representatives of the denomination.⁶⁰ The shift away from this gave not only more space to local congregations to contextualize, but in the process local congregations were even seen as a source for ecclesiological understanding for the national or global church. This is visible for example in Paas’ work as he describes how local church plants can be ‘biotopes of renewal’ for translocal denominations.⁶¹

1.3.3 *The centrality of liturgy*

The third major issue in the ecclesial turn is the centrality of liturgy. In recent ecclesiological literature it has become a commonplace notion that liturgy shapes community life, and shapes the particular practices of the

West (2016) Paas gives an overview of reasons to plant churches, and one of these is church planting as a method to grow, as a method to evangelize the world and fight secularization, 47-49, 111-180.

⁵⁸ Paas, *Vreemdelingen en Priesters* (2015), 39-60.

⁵⁹ *Together Towards Life* (2012), 12-13 (paragraph 72-78)

⁶⁰ This is for example visible in the initiation of The Gospel and Our Culture Network. As Guder explains, ‘We have addressed North American culture by trying to “discern the shifting worlds so radically reshaping our lives and the places where God is at work in them.” We have probed the gospel by searching for “fresh ways in which the gospel gives us resources for a confident witness to Jesus Christ.” We have sought to aid North American churches in developing “new forms of mission-shaped churches as the Spirit calls us to be faithful people of witness.”’ (Guder, *Missional Church*, 7-8.) This aiding was done by a study of literature on the subject and publishing books that could help local churches develop missional communities. In other words, a classic top down approach: from the Network to the local church and from (biblical theological) theory to (ecclesial) practice.

⁶¹ Paas, *Church Planting*, 224-241. See also *Together Towards Life* (2012), 12-13 (paragraph 72-78).

church.⁶² Several ecclesial turn theologians, as interviewed by Paul and Wallet, even regard liturgy as the source of ethical reasoning for the church. A formative publication for this reading of liturgy has been *Torture and Eucharist* (1998) by William T. Cavanaugh.⁶³ In this book Cavanaugh reflects on his experiences in Chile in the 1980s, when the state tortured people and the Chilean church did not really have an answer to this terrifying situation. Cavanaugh states that this was due to a deficient theology, which claimed the realm of the church as spiritual, while – inevitably – the rest was left for the state.⁶⁴ Cavanaugh's book is an attempt to describe how the church becomes a political entity by celebrating the Eucharist. He writes in his introduction:

We become Christ's body in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is true "politics," as Augustine saw, because it is the public performance of the true eschatological city of God in the midst of another City which is passing away. In this book I try to display a kind of Eucharistic counter-politics which forms the church into a body capable of resisting oppression.⁶⁵

Cavanaugh was a student of Stanley Hauerwas, who is a prominent representative of this line of reasoning.⁶⁶ Although Cavanaugh's book is written in an extreme context, the question he raises remains the same for a Western context: how can the church be church? By celebrating liturgy, state Hauerwas and Cavanaugh. This is the place where Christians – as community – are trained to be Christlike.

The final issue in the ecclesial turn is thus the centrality of liturgy. Although Hauerwas' and Cavanaugh's approach is not undisputed,⁶⁷ litur-

⁶² *Together Towards Life* (2012), 12 (paragraph 74).

⁶³ William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist. Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

⁶⁴ Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 11-18; Paul and Wallet, *Oefenplaatsen*, 9-12.

⁶⁵ Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 14.

⁶⁶ *Torture and Eucharist* is Cavanaugh's doctoral dissertation completed at Duke University under Stanley Hauerwas. For Hauerwas' position, see for example his *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) and Samuel Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny. The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 1998).

⁶⁷ For example, is their approach not in danger of a moral instrumentalization of the liturgy? See Paul and Wallet *Oefenplaatsen*, 18, 73-91; Bernd Wannewetsch, *Political*

gy is widely seen as a shaping factor in the practices and community life of the church.⁶⁸

1.3.4 Zygmunt Bauman and the ecclesial turn

In several of his publications Bauman affirmatively quotes Eric Hobsbawn, who stated: ‘Never was the word “community” used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades when communities in sociological sense became hard to find in real life.’⁶⁹ Bauman links this to another quote, by Jock Young, who in response to Hobsbawn’s work noted: ‘Just as community collapses, identity is invented.’⁷⁰ This has been a major theme throughout Bauman’s work since the late 1990s, that as everything becomes liquid, the search for community becomes stronger; community that is difficult to find,⁷¹ because of who we have become,⁷² or because of the unreal idealistic hopes that are projected upon the idea of the community.⁷³ Bauman describes a couple of dilemmas that come to the surface. For example, between the citizen and the individual. The citizen, who seeks his own welfare through the well-being of the city, and the individual, who is skeptical about common cause, are each-others worst enemy.⁷⁴ We have become individuals, but we long to be part of a community, to be citizens. Another dilemma is that between safety and freedom. In a community these two values are in tension, because ‘safety without freedom amounts to captivity, and freedom without safety instils chronic uncertainty and threatens a nervous breakdown.’⁷⁵

Worship (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52-53; Paas, *Vreemdelingen en Priesters*, 238n27.

68 *Together Towards Life* (2012), 12 (paragraph 74).
 69 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 171; *Community*, 15.
 70 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 171; *Community*, 15.
 71 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 169.
 72 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 36.
 73 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 171.
 74 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 36.
 75 Bauman, *Culture*, 20-21.

Although Bauman on several occasions expresses his hope in constructive community life,⁷⁶ he mostly describes two opposite shapes of community which are not that constructive. First is the community of the communitarian gospel, which is an ideal community that should solve all of the individual's problems. 'The ideal community is a *compleat mappa mundi*: a total world, supplying everything one may need to lead a meaningful and rewarding life.'⁷⁷ This is often an ethnic or ethnic-like community,⁷⁸ which '(in the name of all the goodness such community is assumed to offer) demands unconditional loyalty and treats everything short of such loyalty as an act of unforgivable treason.'⁷⁹ This ideal community has violent tendencies, outward and inward. Bauman uses, for example, the work of René Girard to describe the patterns of such tendencies.⁸⁰ On the other side of the spectrum is the cloakroom community. The participants come, take off their coats, enjoy the spectacle and put their coats back on, and leave. The spectacle alone made the community, and only for that time.⁸¹ Bauman also calls this kind of gatherings 'carnival communities.'⁸² These are very light communities, which have no pretensions to help people become the individuals they are supposed to be (the painstaking process of becoming an individual *de jure* into an individual *de facto*).⁸³ Although these communities do not suffer from totalitarian tendencies, conversely they do not help either, but they are part of the problem of liquidity.⁸⁴

The question is of course where Christian communities and the discourse on Christian community life fits within his picture. Is the ecclesial

76 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, xviii-xix; Bauman, *Community*, 149-150: 'If there is to be a community in the world of individuals, it can only be (and it needs to be) a community woven together from sharing and mutual care; a community of concern and responsibility for the equal right to be human and the equal ability to act on that right.'

77 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 172.

78 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 172-176.

79 Bauman, *Community*, 14.

80 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 194-199.

81 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 199-201.

82 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 200-201. In *Community*, 65-73, Bauman describes the same sort of light community by referring to Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, 'the Aesthetic Community.'

83 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 39.

84 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 201.

turn a symptom that ‘communities in sociological sense became hard to find in real life’?⁸⁵ Just like Bauman, ecclesiological scholars see on the one hand the totalitarian, nationalistic or ethnic tendencies in community life; community as the resolution of all our identity problems. On the other hand, they acknowledge the various light versions of community, the ‘cloakroom’ versions, which lead to ‘bonds without consequences’ which require no ‘ethical responsibilities’ or ‘long-term commitments.’⁸⁶ Just like Bauman we hope for communities that are neither totalitarian nor ‘cloakroom’, that demonstrate very little gap between ideal and practice. But just like Bauman we now know this is not simply a given in liquid times.

1.4 A Missional Turn

The third prominent turn that comes to the surface in ecclesial literature of the last twenty-five years is what might be called ‘a missional turn.’ To be clear, what is not being discussed here is mission in the sense of the support of missionaries or organizations overseas, but mission as the missionary calling of the local church in Western Europe and the United States. As a result of post-Christendom developments churches have been confronted with missionary questions. What does the gospel mean in our context? How do we witness to the good news, embody the kingdom and communicate it in our particular context? How do we welcome and integrate new Christians into our churches?⁸⁷ These questions on the practical level have led to reflection on a more fundamental, theological level: what does it mean to be church in the Western culture of the twenty-first century?⁸⁸ The main answer churches and theologians have discovered is that the church is missionary by her very nature.⁸⁹ Two theological terms

85 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 171; Bauman, *Community*, 15.

86 Bauman, *Community*, 71.

87 See for example Paas, *De werkers van het laatste uur* (2003).

88 See for example Paas, *Vreemdelingen en Priesters* (2015) which is written with this question in mind.

89 The work of Stefan Paas, Darrell Guder, Pope Francis and the publications of WCC, amongst many others, take this as the starting point of ecclesiological reasoning: the church is called to be missional.

give a good insight into the processes and the questions at stake. The first is the relatively new term ‘missional’ and the second is the older term ‘missio Dei’.

1.4.1 Missional

The term missional, a neologism, was developed in the United States within The Gospel and Our Culture Network. This network emerged in the late 1980s as an American version of the British discussion on gospel and culture. The British discussion was initiated by the publication of Lesslie Newbigin’s *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for Churches* (1983). Newbigin confronted Western Christianity with the fact that because of the secularization of western culture, the church was in a missionary situation. This had major implications for the church and the church had to start asking questions of a missionary nature to find out what these implications were. This challenge was the reason for the founding of The Gospel and Our Culture Network.⁹⁰ The purpose was to raise ‘the theological issues that needed to be addressed if the Western Church was to be faithful to its missionary mandate.’⁹¹ One of the first fruits was the publication of the volume *Missional Church. A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (1998). As Darrell Guder recalls fifteen years later, ‘the “al” added to “mission” was intended to focus attention on the essentially “missionary nature” of the church.’⁹² Since then the term ‘missional church’ has become a theological commonplace.⁹³ There is debate in various contexts as to what it means to be a missional church. That the church is called to be missional is however hardly disputed. This is in short the missional turn the Western Church has made since the 1970s.

90 Guder, *Missional Church*, 3-7.

91 Guder, *Called to Witness*, xiii.

92 Guder, *Called to Witness*, xiii, see also 65.

93 Guder, *Called to Witness*, xii.

1.4.2 *Missio Dei*

The second term, *missio Dei*, has a long reception history throughout most of the twentieth century into the twenty-first. It is helpful to describe the process of the reception of the term, because it gives insight into how a missional turn was made within the various churches.

Missio Dei, which can be translated as ‘the mission of God,’ has been interpreted in different ways. The classic description of the term comes from David J. Bosch’s *Transforming Mission – Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (1991).⁹⁴ Bosch describes how before the First World War mission was often reflected on within the setting of one of the several versions of the doctrine of grace. This changed after the War. One of the major voices in this process, was Karl Barth. In a paper in 1932 he articulated mission as an activity of God himself.⁹⁵ In 1933 Karl Hartenstein ‘gave expression to a similar conviction.’⁹⁶ According to Bosch, Barth’s influence reached a peak at the Willingen Conference (1952) where, although the term *missio Dei* was not used, mission came to be understood as deriving from the very nature of God:

The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another “movement”: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.⁹⁷

Mission is no longer primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God and the church is an instrument for that mission. At the Willingen conference, Hartenstein, Wilhelm Anderson and Lesslie Newbigin played a key part in this development.⁹⁸ After Willingen,

⁹⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (1991).

⁹⁵ Karl Barth delivered the paper ‘Die Theologie und die Mission in der Gegenwart’ at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932. See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 389.

⁹⁶ Karl Hartenstein, *Die Mission als theologisches Problem. Beiträge zum grundsätzlichen Verständnis der Mission* (Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1933), see Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

⁹⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

⁹⁸ Stephan B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for Today* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 290. See also Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today’s Mission* (Edinburgh: House Press, 1963).

the *missio Dei* concept gradually underwent a modification. Mission came to be seen as ‘God’s turning to the world in respect of creation, care, redemption and consummation.’⁹⁹ The church came to be seen as moving from an instrument of mission, to being a partner in mission, to being irrelevant or even an obstacle for that mission. The major theologian in this line of thinking was Johannes Hoekendijk. For him *missio Dei* progressed from the conviction that the world sets the agenda for the church¹⁰⁰ to the perspective that ‘God needs no help in “articulating himself”: the church’s missionary efforts only get in the way.’¹⁰¹ Bevans describes how this perspective reached its peak at the 1968 meeting of the WCC at Uppsala, Sweden, ‘where the church was often ridiculed and where the church itself was seen as an area for mission.’¹⁰² Bosch states that these developments of the *missio Dei* concept ‘meant a development contrary to the intentions of Barth and Hartenstein.’¹⁰³ According to Bosch, Hartenstein had hoped, by introducing the term, ‘to protect mission against secularization and horizontalization, and to reserve it exclusively for God.’¹⁰⁴

Roman Catholic theology was influenced by this Protestant move towards Trinitarian ecclesiology and missiology.¹⁰⁵ At the Second Vatican Council (1965) some major changes in ecclesiological thinking appeared. As Bevans describes, ‘The church was now understood as a people, a communion, and mission was conceived as the participation in the dynamic communion of God’s triune life, that is, the church was a sacrament of salvation, a sign and instrument of God’s saving presence toward and within all of creation.’¹⁰⁶ *Ad Gentes*, the Vatican II decree on the missionary activ-

99 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 391.

100 See J. C. Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out?* (London: Westminster Press, 1966).

101 Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants*, 291.

102 Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants*, 291.

103 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 392.

104 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 392.

105 Yves Congar in his commentary on *Ad Gentes*, as quoted in Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants*, 289.

106 Summarizing Vatican II’s *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants*, 286.

ity of the church, was grounded in the same Trinitarian theology.¹⁰⁷

After Uppsala (1968) the *missio Dei* theology reached a dead end, both in Protestant and Roman Catholic circles. According to Bevens, it was because of the WCC's 'secular' interpretation of the *missio Dei* that the trinitarian approach of *Ad Gentes* did not make a stronger impact on the Catholic missiological scene.¹⁰⁸ Since the 1980s, however, there has been a revival and renewal of Trinitarian ecclesiological and missiological thinking in Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal theology.¹⁰⁹ Bevens concludes that 'it is possible to say that the understanding of mission as rooted in the trinitarian mission of God in the world is once again at the forefront of missiological thinking.'¹¹⁰

Although according to David Bosch 'it is inconceivable that we could revert to a narrow, ecclesiocentric view of mission',¹¹¹ the *missio Dei* approach is still subject to discussion. Two examples of a recent critique are, first, Peter Pikkert's *The Essence and Implications of Missio Dei* (2017).¹¹² He questions from an evangelical point of view the evangelical approach of *missio Dei*, as articulated by missiologists as David Bosch, Christopher Wright and Scott Enquist. Pikkert questions subsequently the development of a missional hermeneutic based on *missio Dei*,¹¹³ the pejorative portrayal by *missio Dei* proponents of earlier missiological models,¹¹⁴ and consequences of the *missio Dei* approach for soteriology and ecclesiology.¹¹⁵ In short, Pikkert states that '*missio Dei*'s doctrinal imprecision leads to a host of problems,'¹¹⁶ devaluating typical evangelical issues,

107 Bevens and Schroeder, *Constants*, 286-288.

108 Bevens and Schroeder, *Constants*, 291.

109 Bevens and Schroeder, *Constants*, 291; Peter Pikkert, *The Essence and Implications of Missio Dei. An Appraisal of Today's Foremost Theology of Missions* (Ancaster: ALEV Books, 2017), 19-28.

110 Bevens and Schroeder, *Constants*, 291.

111 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 393.

112 Pikkert, *Essence* (2017).

113 Pikkert, *Essence*, 29-40.

114 Pikker, *Essence*, 41-46.

115 Pikkert, *Essence*, 47-68.

116 Pikkert, *Essence*, 58.

such as the sinfulness of man, divine judgement and hell as motives for mission, the centrality of the cross, and so on.¹¹⁷

A second example is the work of John G. Flett (2010).¹¹⁸ He offers both a dogmen-historical reconstruction of the *missio Dei*, in which he questions the relationship between Barth, Hartenstein, the Willingen Conference and the early formulation of *missio Dei*, and a systematic theological critique. Flett shows that the three major themes within the *missio Dei* concept (mission as being sent by a missionary God, mission as oriented to the kingdom of God and the church as missionary by her very nature) do not derive from this Trinitarian position, but came to the surface and were later connected to the Trinity. He notices therefore: ‘*missio Dei* claims to provide a Trinitarian framework for concepts that do not draw on that doctrine.’¹¹⁹ *Missio Dei*, in that sense, is not a constructive concept. According to Flett, it serves first of all a critical function: ‘grounding mission in the doctrine of the Trinity distances the Western mission enterprise from every colonist association.’¹²⁰ Flett’s major point however, is that the *missio Dei* concept is very uncritical to the most fundamental Trinitarian question: how does the ontology of the Trinity relate to its economy? How does the statement that God is a missionary God (where missionary functions as one of God’s attributes, i.e. ontologic) relate to his sending (i.e. economic)?¹²¹ After historically disconnecting Karl Barth from the origins of the *missio Dei* concept, Flett does return – via the Cappadocians – to Barth’s work to face the Trinitarian questions the *missio Dei* approach raises.

The twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries showed ‘the emergence, spread, near-death and resurrection of the *missio Dei*.’¹²² The three basic statements deriving from the *missio Dei* position, ‘God is

117 Pikker, *Essence*, 47-68.

118 John G. Flett, *The Witness of God. The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of the Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

119 Flett, *Witness*, 36.

120 Flett, *Witness*, 36.

121 Flett, *Witness*, 1-34.

122 This is the title of Pikkert’s second chapter (Pikkert, *Essence*, 15-18).

a missionary God,' 'the church is missionary by her very nature' and 'the church participates in God's mission' have been questioned and highlighted in different ways. Key subjects of discussion are, as we noted above in the two recent examples, the systematic theological consequences of the concept, or the effects within the practices of the church. But even the most severe critics of *missio Dei* agree with the basic statement that the church is called to be missional.

1.4.3 Zygmunt Bauman and the missional turn

In his foreword to *Liquid Modernity* (2012) Bauman refers to Ulrich Beck, who speaks of 'zombie categories' or 'zombie institutions,' which are 'dead and still alive.' Beck names family, class and neighborhood as the foremost examples of 'zombie categories.'¹²³ We might add church to this list as well. It is dead and still alive. It is an institution that has become liquid, just like the rest of society. The solid shape, influence and language has become liquid, now as one 'culture in a world of diasporas.'¹²⁴ For church and mission this has many consequences, but a significant one is that the practices of the church in liquid modernity are no longer recognizable as church practices. It is dead and still alive. What is dead and what is alive needs to be discerned. The zombie terminology however shows that church and mission cannot take anything for granted, but have to find ways to verbalize and explain what the practices mean.

1.5 Conclusion

Engaging recent ecclesial research and publications I recognized three turns: a marginal turn, an ecclesial turn and a missional turn. Subsequently, I used the work of Zygmunt Bauman to reflect on each of these turns from a sociological perspective. This chapter has thus been used to describe the social and ecclesial context in which this research is done.

¹²³ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 6-8.

¹²⁴ This is the title of fourth chapter of Bauman, *Culture*, 51-70.

The next chapter introduces John Howard Yoder, his main publication for the purposes of this research *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003), and offers a critical hermeneutic to work with his theology.

2 INTRODUCING JOHN HOWARD YODER

2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces first of all John Howard Yoder and *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003), the main publication in respect to this research (section 2.2). A major part of this chapter is dedicated to the question of how to work with Yoder's theology in light of his abuse of women (section 2.3). To address this question this chapter describes the situation, and some responses and proposals as to whether or not it is possible to still work with Yoder's theology. In the end I propose to keep on working with Yoder's theology, but to critically engage it with a hermeneutic of suspicion. I propose that Yoder's work is in need of an empirical testing: how would this theology work out in practice? To do so, Chapter 5 engages with three communities that are inspired by Yoder's diaspora ecclesiology.

2.2 John Howard Yoder and *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003)

One of the main Anabaptist scholars of the twentieth century is without a doubt John Howard Yoder (1927-1997). Born, raised and educated as a Mennonite, he inherited the conviction that Christians are called to form contrasting – nonviolent – communities, where Christ is followed as Lord. As part of the Mennonite Central Committee¹ Yoder came to Europe af-

¹ Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is a relief, service, and peace agency representing fifteen Mennonite, Brethren in Christ and Amish bodies in North America. Started in the 1920s to offer aid to starving Ukrainian Mennonites, they expanded their activities to peace work all over the world. After the war MCC sent volunteers to Europe. Yoder was one of them.

ter the war and later studied at Basel under Karl Barth.² Yoder gained his PhD in historical research on the conversation between Anabaptism and magisterial Reformation in Switzerland.³ Karl Barth and Anabaptist history and thought would remain the context of his theological work for the rest of his life.

In an already classic work on Yoder, *The Politics of the Cross* (2001),⁴ Craig Carter calls the Anabaptist Vision⁵ and the theology of Karl Barth the *historical context* of Yoder's thought, Christology the *source*, eschatology the *context* and ecclesiology the *shape* of Yoder's social ethics. This line is clearly recognizable in Yoder's work, from his earliest publications to his last. It might be said that Yoder's scholarly work over the years is expanding and deepening this very early theological intuition: because Jesus is Lord, the church is to exist as minority communities shaped by an ethic of *Nachfolge* (imitation of Jesus).

One of Yoder's first published articles was 'The Anabaptist Dissent – The Logic and Place of the Disciple in Society' in the newly launched *Concern* pamphlet series.⁶ In it, Yoder describes the difference between a 'responsible' (read: Constantinian) view, and a 'sectarian' (read: Anabap-

2 Karl Barth was not Yoder's doctoral supervisor. Barth taught Systematic Theology and Yoder did his PhD in Church History. He did however take five courses and five colloquia with Barth. He also took courses with professors in other fields: Oscar Cullmann (New Testament), Walter Eichrodt (Old Testament), Walter Baumgartner (Old Testament), amongst others. Yoder was a critical student of Barth and the story goes that the evening before his doctoral examination, he delivered the paper 'Karl Barth and the Problem of War' personally to Karl Barth (KB, ix-x).

3 TRS (1962), followed by TRG (1968).

4 Craig A. Carter, *The Politics of the Cross. The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), 13-28.

5 Yoder's professor at Goshen College, Harold S. Bender, wrote an important booklet called *The Anabaptist Vision*. Bender described the Anabaptist vision as 'first, a new conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship; second, a new conception of the church as brotherhood; and third, a new ethic of love and nonresistance' (Bender, *Anabaptist Vision*, 20). Yoder was critical of this recovery of the Anabaptist Vision, especially of Bender's program to work this out in relation to the Mennonite Church in the United States. Yoder felt that the Anabaptist Vision was not an affirmation of the Mennonite Church, but rather a judgment on current Mennonite faith and practice. With some other young Mennonites, he started the Concern group (1952) to relate to questions of Christian renewal.

6 John Howard Yoder, 'The Anabaptist Dissent – The Logic and Place of the Disciple in Society,' *Concern*, No. 1, June 1954, 45-68. In 'Selected Bibliography of John H. Yoder on Ecclesiology and Ecumenism' compiled by Mark K. Nation, this is mentioned as his first article. See RP, 375.

tist) view. The sectarian view is labeled like this because of ‘its refusal to assume responsibility for the moral structure of non-Christian society.’⁷ According to Yoder such a refusal corresponds closely with New Testament teaching, and with the practice and eschatological way of thinking of sixteenth-century Anabaptists. This first article is a plea for the particular place of non-conformist minority communities within the whole of society and the political witness these communities have, without any use of violence.

From this moment on, Yoder addresses his theological work to deepening and expanding this perspective historically⁸ and theologically: *The Christian Witness to the State* (1964) and *Discipleship as Political Responsibility* (1964) were related to the Niebuhr debate;⁹ *The Politics of Jesus* (1972) made an apology for Christology as a source of ethics; *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (1984), *Body Politics* (1992) and *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (1994) described the church as the locus of God’s acting in the world; *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (1997) focused on the calling of the church to be minority communities of witness.

Although Yoder, under the influence of Millard Lind and other AMBS colleagues,¹⁰ already at an early stage connected the free church ethics with the faith of biblical Israel,¹¹ it took a meeting in Buenos Aires in 1971 to link it to the faith and calling of contemporary Judaism. Yoder was invited by Rabbi Marshal Meyer, head of the Rabbinic Seminary of Buenos Aires, to a meeting of Jewish, Catholic and Protestant theology teachers. This meeting ‘provoked a line of thought’ that would even-

7 Yoder, ‘Anabaptist Dissent,’ 46.

8 See for his historical foundation TRS, TRG, and for his translations of early Anabaptist writings, LMS, SC.

9 For the Niebuhr debate see Earl Zimmerman’s overview in Earl Zimmerman, *Practicing the Politics of Jesus. The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder’s Social Ethics* (Telford: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007), 70-100.

10 AMBS in Elkhart, Indiana, was called the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries while Yoder worked there. It changed from Seminaries to Seminary a few years later, and then to ‘Anabaptist’ in 2012.

11 OR, chapter 4 ‘If Abraham Is Our Father’, 85-104, 181n 5. PJ, 84n10, 87,107n14.

tually lead to the perspective on Judaism and free church as published in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003).¹² Following the key time in Buenos Aires, Yoder sought opportunities to further develop his thinking on the link between contemporary Judaism and the ethics of free church. He reached out to determine whether there were any possibilities for either a sabbatical or a scholarship that would allow him to spend more research time on the subject.¹³ This resulted in a sabbatical taken at Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem in 1976. The collected materials from this¹⁴ were presented in a series of lectures at the Theology Department of the University of Notre Dame (October 1977), at Bethel College (1982) and at Earlham School of Religion (1985).¹⁵

Yoder was very reluctant to publish his papers and lectures. Many papers were circulated for years with the warning ‘not for publication!’. However, during the time Yoder worked with Mark Nation and Michael Cartwright to publish *The Royal Priesthood* (1994) and *For the Nations* (1997),¹⁶ he also tried to find out if his work on the Jewishness of the free church vision was worthy of publication. This did not work out the way he had hoped, and finally he gave up on the project.¹⁷ In the meantime this material was already being used by colleagues such as Stanley Hauer-

12 See letter from Yoder to Steven Schwarzschild, November 18, 1971 (Box 201); letter from Yoder to Rabbi Marshal Meyer, July 19, 1972 (Box 201); letter from Yoder to Rabbi Hayim Goren Perlmutter, February 7, 1994 (Box 211); JCSR, 35, n2.

13 Yoder wrote a proposal for a study project for Goshen Biblical Seminary called ‘The Jewishness of Apostolic Christianity and the Renewal of Western Christendom’ in 1972. He also sent various letters with requests for a place to study, but also for funding, for example to Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer (letter September 13, 1972, Box 136), to Rabbi Dr. Louis Jacobs from London (letter September 25, 1972, Box 132), and to Rabbi Dr. Eugene Borowitz from New York (letter September 25, 1972, Box 132).

14 Yoder wrote a research outline ‘The Jewish Pacifism of Jesus’, dated October 20, 1975 (Box 133), and a paper ‘The Jewish Jesus and the Church/ Synagogue Split’, dated December 1975 (Box 133).

15 The content of these lectures is the basis for what would become JCSR.

16 See ‘Memo to cherished advisors’, from J.H. Yoder, May 1995 (Box 201), Subject: ‘Renewed and updated projection of how to continue my task of getting stuff out.’

17 He approached Elisabeth Yoder, a freelance editor. She read his material, asked questions and proposed another structure for the material. See their correspondence February – April 1995 (Box 201). In a letter to Duane Friesen, July 3, 1996 (Box 201), Yoder writes ‘I have given up on the possibility of making a real book out of my Menno lectures on Judaism, which have been lurking guiltily in my files for years.’

was and James McClendon Jr.,¹⁸ and was sought after by other colleagues such as Paul van Buren.¹⁹ Finally the material was posthumously published as *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003), edited and introduced by Michael Cartwright, in the post-liberal series 'Radical Traditions.'²⁰

The posthumous publication of Yoder's work on Judaism and the free church vision might suggest that this work was only a side interest. This, however, is not the case. After the meeting in Buenos Aires in 1971 the subject was at the top of Yoder's theological agenda. He kept track of relevant literature, read many theological and popular magazines on the subject,²¹ participated in or initiated different study groups at different universities,²² organized lectures with Jewish scholars at, for example, AMBS and the University of Notre Dame,²³ and made several attempts to get funding for a research project on the subject.²⁴ He kept working on developing his argument in interaction with Jewish scholars such as Steven

18 James McClendon Jr., *Doctrine. Systematic Theology. Volume 2* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), where McClendon notices 'Regrettably, Yoder's parallel work on Christianity and Judaism has not yet been offered for publication. I propose here to summarize this work (using unpublished material),' 351-354.

19 See letter Paul van Buren to Yoder, May 5, 1978 (Box 136): 'Dear Dr Yoder, Jim McClendon of CDSP has called my attention to your essay "Tertium Datur" as being along lines which I am presently pushing. I would be much obliged if you could send me a copy. 'Tertium Datur' was one of the lectures presented at the University of Notre Dame in October 1977.

20 Radical Traditions is a series edited by Stanley Hauerwas and Peter Ochs.

21 His personal archives show copies of more than 25 different magazines, newsletters, etc. relating to the subject that he read on a regular basis: magazines and newsletters about for example Jewish pacifism (Shalom); Jewish faith and life (Sh'ma); the situation in the Middle East (Palestine Human Rights Campaign, Shalom centre, Journal of Palestinian studies, The Other Israel, Voices for Peace, Jerusalem Palestinian Weekly); Zionist magazines (OzweShalom); Messianic Jewish magazines (Jews for Jesus); Jewish-Christian Dialogue (The Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies); The Shoah (Philadelphia Coordinating Council on the Holocaust), and so on (Box 134). Yoder and his wife even requested information from a Kibbutz in 1970 about the possibilities of following an Ulpan Program (see the letter from Kibbutz Aliya Desk, February 20, 1970 [Box 134]).

22 See for example Yoder's letter to Pinchas Peli, November 20, 1980 (Box 133), in which he invites Peli to join 'an informal group' at Notre Dame to look at the possibilities of a common writing project.

23 For example, Rabbi Everett Gendler at The Shalom Consultation at AMBS, October 31 and November 1, 1980; David Flusser at AMBS, October 24-28 1983; Steven Schwarzschild and Pinchas Lapide at Notre Dame.

24 Yoder applied, for example, for the Rockefeller Foundation Humanities Fellowship in October 1983. The project he proposed was called 'The Jewishness of Apostolic Christianity and the Renewal of Western Christendom' (Box 132).

Schwarzschild, Jacob Neusner,²⁵ Pinchas Peli,²⁶ Charles Primus and Reuven Kimelman.²⁷ He did so in personal encounters or in correspondence. His published and unpublished material was read by some Jewish scholars, who in personal correspondence acclaimed or criticized it.²⁸ Yoder also looked for input to his argument in interaction with colleagues at AMBS and with other scholars such as Robert Wilken, Franklin Littell²⁹ and Daniel Smith.³⁰ But even in the midst of all this interaction, Yoder was driving forward his own agenda and developing and grounding the theological intuition he had had from the beginning. So in his theological method there is no real dialogue with the theological data, but rather a checking whether the material is usable to strengthen his own free church vision.³¹ At certain moments Yoder felt frustrated that he did not find the time nor the funding to research the subject more thoroughly, not just because of the urgen-

25 See for example the letter from Jacob Neusner to Yoder, February 9, 1982 (Box 133), where Neusner responds on Yoder's question about the pacifist character of rabbinic Judaism. In it Neusner also questions Yoder's method. Neusner describes his own approach and adds: 'This is different from collecting and arranging sayings – all of them taken out of whatever context might have produced them and imparted meanings to them. I tend to think your marks on the traits of Judaism too apologetic, but they are also one-dimensional.'

26 See for example Yoder's letter to Pinchas Peli, November 20, 1980 (Box 133).

27 See for example their correspondence from January 1989 (Box 110).

28 Some examples: David Novak writes in his letter to Yoder of October 23, 1984 (box 132) that he has been 'an admirer of your work for a long time'. Yoder mentions in a letter to the chair of Notre Dame University, June 18, 1985 (Box 132) that Pinchas Lapide is interested in the Jewish perspectives in Yoder's gospel exegesis of PJ.

29 See for example a letter from Yoder to Franklin H. Littell, August 29, 1978 (Box 132), where Yoder answers Littell's question of whether the Anabaptists shared the dominant attitudes of their times towards the Jews by answering that Anabaptists sometimes got the accusation of being Judaizers because their insistence on holy living. This is also a nice example of how Yoder frames questions or data into his own mold.

30 Daniel Smith was a former student of Yoder. He gained his PhD in Old Testament and became professor in Old Testament and Peace Studies. They shared an interest in pacifist aspects of Judaism. There is a lot of correspondence in Yoder's archive about plans to translate texts from Jewish pacifist thinkers into English, about recent discoveries, about checking new theological perspectives, about feedback on each other's articles. Yoder wrote a couple of recommendation letters for Smith and their correspondence is informal and friendly. Daniel Smith also became a student and friend of Steven Schwarzschild. Although this is not so clear from Yoder's published work, from his archives and correspondence one gets the impression that Daniel Smith is a major influence on Yoder's development of his perspectives on Judaism and Free Church, especially from the 1980s onwards.

31 For an extensive description of Yoder's attitude in this, see 2.3.3.2 below.

cy of the matter, but also because the lack of research time made him feel an amateur on the subject.³²

2.3 How to Work with Yoder's Theology in Light of his Abuse of Women

2.3.1 *A history of violence*

For years there had been rumors about John Howard Yoder's sexual violence against women. I remember when I first heard about these accusations and the revulsion I felt. The man who helped me significantly in discovering how to do theology, in how to read the Bible, author of *The Politics of Jesus* (1972), the main voice of peace theology in the twentieth century, had a history of violence against women? I felt a wide range of emotions, but most of all, I felt betrayed. Many theologians had the same experience and felt the same sense of betrayal. Ted Grimsrud's reflections in his blog series on the topic are a good example of this.³³

Despite several publications in various media, only parts of the story were out in the open.³⁴ Therefore, until recently many theologians thought it was possible to ignore the subject of Yoder's life and just work

³² Something he, on the other hand, also could use as a theological argument, see JCSR, 46. See also the letter from Yoder to Steven Schwarzschild, Pinchas Peli, Charles Primus, September 26, 1979 (Box 133).

³³ As published on his website <https://thinkingpacifism.net/john-howard-yoder/>. I am referring to a series of posts beginning July 31, 2013—"Reflections from a chagrined Yoderian: Part 1—Introduction, Part 2—Sexual violence, Part 3—Yoder's sexual violence, Part 4—Yoder's theology, and Part 5—Where to now?" (January 2018). Gerald Schlabach wrote an article regarding this, using a very appropriate title: "Only those we need can betray us" <http://www.geralschlabach.net/2014/07/10/only-those-we-need-can-betray-us-my-relationship-with-john-howard-yoder-and-his-legacy/> (January 2018).

³⁴ Local newspaper The Elkhart Truth published an extensive series of articles on the issue, written by Tom Price. "Theologian cited in sex inquiry" The Elkhart Truth, June 29, 1992; "Theologian's future faces a "litmus test": Yoder's response to allegations could determine standing in field" The Elkhart Truth, July 12, 1992; "Theologian accused: Women report instances of inappropriate conduct" The Elkhart Truth, July 13, 1992; "A Known Secret: Church slow to explore rumors against leader" The Elkhart Truth, July 14, 1992; "Yoder's actions framed in writings" The Elkhart Truth, July 15, 1992; "Teachings tested: Forgiveness, reconciliation in discipline" The Elkhart Truth, July 16, 1992. From 2013 onwards several scholars started to work on the subject. Two examples are Ruth Elizabeth Krall, who published *The Elephants in God's Living Room. Volume Three. The Mennonite Church and John Howard Yoder. Collected Essays* (2013, <https://ruthkrall.com/downloadable-books/volume-three-the-mennonite-church-and-john-howard-yoder-collected-essays/>). Paul Martens et al. started to publish several articles on the subject. What

with his theology. This, however, changed. The January 2015 issue of the Mennonite Quarterly Review published the most extensive overview of the history of Yoder's abuse of women, and the responses of Mennonite institutions such as AMBS to this behavior.³⁵ The results of this study by Rachel Waltner Goossen are 'sobering.'³⁶

It describes how since the 1970s Yoder had written articles on sexuality, singleness and the church that proposed a practice of 'affirmative affection' within the family of the church. Single people especially would benefit from this perspective and their needs would be met.³⁷ Yoder started 'experimenting' with 'sisters' from the 1960s onwards.³⁸ Yoder used his writings and the 'experimental' and 'radical' character of his proposal to seduce and harass women.³⁹ He abused at least a hundred women, from the 1960s to the 1990s.⁴⁰ Despite critical response to his articles, warnings

had actually happened had to be constructed from archives, interviews with those involved and several published testimonies, and was not easily accessible.

35 Rachel Waltner Goossen "'Defanging the Beast': Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse,' *MQR*, January 2015, 7-80. Other helpful overview articles are Ruth Krall *Elephants*, vol. 3, 171-216 and 327-378; Paul Martens, et al., 'Scandalizing John Howard Yoder,' 2014 (accessed January 2018) <https://theotherjournal.com/2014/07/07/scandalizing-john-howard-yoder/> and Brian Hamilton and Kyle Lambelet 'A Dark Theme Revisited: How to Read Yoder's Sexualized Violence' (2015, unpublished, used with the authors' permission).

36 John D. Roth, *MQR*, January 2015, 5.

37 See Yoder's papers on singleness, 'Singleness in ethical and pastoral perspective' (1974), 'A call for aid' (1974) and 'Single dignity' (1976).

38 'Sisters' is the terminology Yoder used to address single women he wanted to participate in his 'experiment.' See 'A call for aid' (1974). Hauerwas writes that Yoder 'began "experimenting" sometime in the Sixties' (Stanley Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child. A Theologian's Memoir* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 244).

39 In a letter to Marlin Miller, his supervisor at AMBS at the time, Yoder explains what this experiment consisted of: superficial touch as a natural greeting, discussion of possible deeper meaning of touch, more meaningful.... touch; may be a handclasp, a hug, or a brief kiss...., Same expressions as above but they become an expectation May be added a closed door, lap-sitting, a less fleeting kiss. Token partial disrobing, total disrobing, specific touching of penis/pubis, exploration of partial/interrupted arousal/intermission. "Other variables," Yoder continued, "cut across these": Whether just once as a threshold experience or repeated; whether done alone or with others present; whether the token nudity was a few minutes or longer. (Yoder to Miller, Dec. 6, 1979, AMBS Marlin E. Miller Files on John Howard Yoder, X18-001, as referred to by Waltner Goossen, *MQR*, January 2015, 7-8).

40 The number a hundred is mentioned by Waltner Goossen. See also Rachel Waltner Goossen 'The failure to bind and loose: Responses to Yoder's sexual abuse' (2015) (accessed January 2018) <https://themennonite.org/feature/failure-bind-loose-responses-john-howard-yoders-sexual-abuse/>. Krall summarizes a list of Yoder's behavior as experienced by women (see Krall, *Elephants*, 197-199). Waltner Goossen's research shows that this list

to leave women alone,⁴¹ the forced participation in several discernment groups,⁴² even his expulsion from AMBS in 1984, he did not change his behavior nor revise his perspective on sexuality as developed in the single-ness articles.⁴³

From 1992 to 1996 Yoder underwent a disciplinary process by his home church, Prairie Street Mennonite Church (Elkhart) and the regional conference that held his ministerial credentials, the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference. His theological friends Stanley Hauerwas, James McClendon and Glen Stassen urged him to commit to the process. After four years Yoder was restored to his teaching vocation. His ministerial credential was not, however, reinstated.⁴⁴

In the end, this process left AMBS and the Mennonite Church USA dissatisfied.⁴⁵ Yoder declined to write a public statement of apology, although Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference officials had hoped he would.⁴⁶ Hauerwas and Nation had written to the Yoder Church Discipline Committee in July 1994 that Yoder ‘may not quite understand why

must also include penetration, despite his writings on the subject, which excluded this from ‘affirmative affection,’ because Yoder considered this ‘marital.’ At least in theory. (Waltner Goossen, ‘Defanging,’ *MQR*, January 2015, 31).

41 Both in the person of Marlin Miller and others.

42 It concerns the following discernment groups:

1. Covenant Group, Goshen Biblical Seminary, 1980-1984

2. Confidential Task Force, Goshen Biblical Seminary, 1982

3. Board of Elders, Prairie Street Mennonite Church, 1986

4. Prairie Street Mennonite Church/JHY Task Force, 1991-1992

5. Church Life Commission, Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference, 1992-1996

6. Accountability and Support Group, Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference, 1992-1996

7. Executive Board, Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference, 1992-1997

See Waltner Goossen, ‘Defanging,’ *MQR*, January 2015, 14.

43 Waltner Goossen describes how in December 1997, a week before his death, Yoder approaches a woman, by email, ‘twenty-five years younger, whom he had never met, but noticed at a conference’ and invites her for a ‘confidential exchange’ to discuss a theological matter. Yoder kept repeating the same pattern towards women from the 1960s until his death in 1997 (Waltner Goossen, ‘Defanging,’ *MQR*, January 2015, 79).

44 Waltner Goossen, ‘Defanging,’ *MQR*, January 2015, 60-73.

45 Paul Martens, et al., *Scandalizing*, 2014. The Indiana-Michigan Conference was a constitutive conference of the (Old) Mennonite Church, one of the two denominations that merged to become MCUSA in 2001.

46 Waltner Goossen, ‘Defanging,’ *MQR*, January 2015, 73.

the women are hurt. He may believe his theory about sexuality is right.⁴⁷ This did not change during the process, throughout which Yoder showed a ‘continuing resentful hostility.’⁴⁸ This might also explain the lack of precise language in the press announcement:

The ASG’s final report stated that Yoder made significant changes in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to bring closure to the process. They also report that Yoder has gained greater awareness of and appreciation of forgiveness in the faith community. The Church Life Commission commends Yoder for participating in the process to its conclusion.⁴⁹

This statement is unclear about Yoder’s progress but it implies between the lines that the church feared that Yoder might leave the Mennonite church, thus depriving them of their star theologian.

Many questions and unresolved issues prompted Mennonite Church USA and AMBS to start a third discernment process in 2013.⁵⁰ It focused on getting the story straight, ongoing healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, and discerning how to deal with Yoder’s theological legacy in light of his persistent violence against women.⁵¹ Waltner Goossen’s study is part of this process.

47 Waltner Goossen, ‘Defanging,’ *MQR*, January 2015, 77.

48 Krall, *Elephants*, vol. 3, 102. She also reports on this: ‘Individuals close to the denomination’s work with Yoder reported that he was recalcitrant, resistant, and often hostile to the church’s efforts to challenge and to curtail his behavior. His intellectual brilliance was used in the service of defensiveness and denial. He held on, during much of the discipline process, to those theological and ethical rationalizations which supported his prior behavior. (Krall, *Elephants*, vol. 3, 232.)’

49 Krall, *Elephants*, vol. 3, 103-104 and 104-108 for Krall’s critical questions regarding the process and the statement.

50 Yoder was disciplined by AMBS, which resulted in his firing in 1984 (the first process), and from 1992-1996 by his home church, Prairie St. Mennonite Church (Elkhart) and the regional conference that held his ministerial credentials, Indiana-Michigan Conference (the second process).

51 In a shared statement the AMBS staff explained: ‘We regret the hurt that was inflicted by this flawed man and an accountability process that while good intentioned and effective in part, didn’t go far enough to heal all wounds. We commit ourselves as faculty of AMBS to ongoing healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation in God’s beloved community, while acknowledging that not everyone fully trusts Yoder’s repentance. We will teach from Yoder and others who provide helpful theological perspectives with enhanced alertness to our own failures and a keen attentiveness to what in us contributes to life abundant and

The damage Yoder's behavior caused is devastating, first of all to the lives of the women he violated. Waltner Goossen reflects:

The harms to women were varied and deeply personal. Some women remained in the Mennonite church, but others, disillusioned by their denomination's seeming inability to confront Yoder, left. Some redirected their careers away from pastoral ministry or church administration. While women and their allies bore the costs of alienation from a church that had earlier nurtured them, the losses were not only personal. Some, critical of institutional responses to Yoder's abuse, asked whether Mennonites produced so few female theologians because Yoder's legacy pushed women away from seminary study and onto alternative vocational paths.⁵²

Several scholars point to a missing generation of female Mennonite theologians as a result of Yoder's behavior.⁵³

But Yoder's history of sexualized violence has also been damaging to the credibility of the peace theology he so profoundly articulated. In his famous *The Anabaptist Vision* (1944) Bender argued that Anabaptists see the essential nature of Christianity as 'the transformation of life through discipleship.'⁵⁴ Theory and praxis were kept close together: the gospel is visible in the practices of the Christian community.⁵⁵ Yoder worked from the same perspective. The gospel is not an idea or a vision, but 'the will of God for human socialness as a whole' that is prefigured in the practices and politics of the church. As Yoder famously stated: 'the people of God is

what stands in need of God's ongoing redemption' (accessed January 2018) <https://www.ambs.edu/academics/teaching-scholarship-yoder>.

⁵² Waltner Goossen, 'Defanging,' *MQR*, January 2015, 73.

⁵³ Lisa Schirz, 'Afterword: To the Next Generation of Pacifist Theologians,' in *John Howard Yoder: Radical Theologian*, ed. J. Denny Weaver (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), 385; and Karen V. Guth 'Doing Justice to the Complex Legacy of John Howard Yoder: Restorative Justice Resources in Witness and Feminist Ethics,' *JSCE*, Volume 35, Number 2 (Fall/Winter 2015): 132, referring to Barbra Graber, 'What's to be done about John Howard Yoder?' (accessed January 2018) <https://www.survivorsstandingtall.org/single-post/2017/12/29/Whats-to-be-done-about-John-Howard-Yoder>

⁵⁴ Bender, *Anabaptist Vision*, 33.

⁵⁵ See also Jamie Pitts, 'Anabaptist Re-Vision: On John Howard Yoder's Misrecognized Sexual Politics,' *MQR*, January 2015, 154.

called to be today what the world is called to be ultimately.⁵⁶ Both Bender and Yoder state that the gospel is made visible in, or, even more strongly, that the gospel is the practice of the Christian community. If this is the case, ‘the seeing’ of the church ‘may be judged in light of its doing and vice versa.’⁵⁷

2.3.2 *Three options?*

This leads to the main question of this section: how should we relate to and work with Yoder’s theology in light of his sexual violence against women? Yoder’s case is of course very interesting from a biographical point of view. To reflect on how ‘biography’ works as ‘theology’ for example. Or to reflect on how theology, church and academia create an environment in which a star theologian gets away with sexual violence against women for over thirty years. Or to engage questions of power balances, patriarchy, and so on. My question, however, is specifically directed at how to work with his theology in light of his troubled life. If Yoder’s life (his practice) turned out to be so violent, how does one relate to and appropriate his theology of nonviolence? There have been several responses to this question.

The first option is to stop reading Yoder’s work because it has lost its credibility. This option is also sensitive towards Yoder’s victims, in that it will prevent them from running into his texts in scholarship or in the academy.⁵⁸ It is, however, difficult to work on ecclesiology and nonviolence

⁵⁶ BP, ix.

⁵⁷ Pitts, ‘Anabaptist Re-Vision,’ *MQR*, January 2015, 154.

⁵⁸ See Gerald Mast, who refers to ‘the physicality of texts, their capacities to hurt and to harm, as well as to help and to heal. The texts that Yoder authored and that continue to circulate are not merely representations of ideas but events of persuasion. To assign and discuss a text authored by Yoder, or for that matter by any author, has as much potential for both help and hurt as the actions of a live human being. That is because we are textual creatures, knit together both by genetic code and symbolic action. As such, we who teach and write about Yoder are obligated to exhibit as much curiosity about the reception of Yoder’s theological ethics by different types of audiences as we do about the production of such theological texts by an author named Yoder.’ (Gerald J. Mast, ‘Teaching John Howard Yoder: Author, Disciple and Sinner,’ *ML* 2014, volume 68 (accessed January 2018) <https://ml.bethelks.edu/issue/vol-68/article/teaching-john-howard-yoder-author-disciple-and-sin/>).

without referring to Yoder's oeuvre, as he is the main voice of anabaptist theology in the twentieth century.

The second option is a quarantine of stained theology and behavior, so the rest of Yoder's work is safe and useful. Hamilton and Lambelet observe, despite differences in their accounts, a similar strategy in the way Hauerwas,⁵⁹ Nation⁶⁰ and Grimsrud⁶¹ try to separate Yoder's work from his personal life. First, Yoder's behavior is framed as a form of sexual experimentation. Second, Yoder's experimentation is then analyzed with reference to his well-documented social awkwardness. Third, despite all of this he did submit himself to the process of accountability and was reconciled. Fourth, his writings on sexuality and his behavior can be quarantined from the rest of his work.⁶² For various reasons, however, this strategy does not work. Yoder's behavior should be described as sexualized violence,⁶³ and violence is central to his theological concerns. His perspective on sexuality is part of his basic framework of ecclesiology, his other major theological concern. It is therefore impossible to separate his behavior and his single-ness and sexuality articles from the rest of his theological work.⁶⁴

A third option is to work with Yoder's theology, while using his theology against him and showing how he failed or could have more fully

59 See for example Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child*, 242-247.

60 See for example Mark Thiessen Nation, with Marva Dawn, 'On Contextualizing Two Failures of John Howard Yoder (2013) (accessed January 2018) <https://emu.edu/now/anabaptist-nation/2013/09/23/on-contextualizing-two-failures-of-john-howard-yoder/>.

61 See for example Ted Grimsrud, 'Reflections from a Chagrined "Yoderian" in Face of His Sexual Violence,' in *John Howard Yoder. Radical Theologian*, ed. J. Denny Weaver (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), 334-350.

62 Hamilton and Lambelet, 'A Dark Theme,' 9-11.

63 Krall argues that abuse and rape should be interpreted as sexual violence. She concludes: 'Thus, sexual abuse is more about abuse and violation than it is adult deprivations of sexual pleasure and satisfaction per se. This means that acts of sexual abuse, therefore, are primarily about violence and only secondarily, in the service of violence, about sexuality.' (See Krall, *Elephants*, vol. 3, 5-6, 21.) Hamilton and Lambelet argue along the same line, using the work of Susan Brownmiller and Judith Vega. They further state that 'a mistaken understanding of sexualized violence leads to a misdiagnosis of the hermeneutical impact of Yoder's behavior on his writing' (Hamilton and Lambelet, 'A Dark Theme,' 2-3, 11).

64 Hamilton and Lambelet argue 'with other feminist scholars,' that "the personal is political." This means two things. First, Yoder's 'personal' history is integral to his 'public' legacy. Second, Yoder's 'public' ideas are complexly but inseparably related to their 'personal' meaning. In other words, an author and his life ought not to be separated but interpreted in relation to each other. (Hamilton and Lambelet, 'A Dark Theme,' 8.)

developed his own theological commitments. Paul Martens, David Cramer, Jenny Howell and Jonathan Tran, for example, show how Yoder sinned against his own definition of what violence constitutes.⁶⁵ Karen Guth, on the other hand, points to Yoder's memos on feminism.⁶⁶ Although he did not fully develop it in his theology or live it out in his life, these memos clearly place feminism at the heart of Christian identity and the church's political witness, she argues. Working out a feminist peace theology is, in her perspective, the best way to deal with Yoder's legacy.⁶⁷ This might also lead to a fruitful collaboration between feminist and postliberal theologies.⁶⁸ Using Yoder's theology against him is, however, a limited approach, and does not give enough distance and space to critically engage his work because it requires adopting Yoder's framework and conditions.

2.3.3 Yoder's work and the powers

The thoughtful article 'Scandalizing John Howard Yoder' concludes with the question: 'If we are not going to abandon Yoder's theology after all that has happened, and if we want to make use of it in light of those happenings, how can we do so?'⁶⁹ The authors suggest that it is still possible to use aspects of Yoder's work to describe his life. One of these aspects is, for example, his theology of the powers as described in *The Politics of Jesus* (1972). Working with Berkhof's *Christus en de machten* (1953), Yoder describes 'the powers' as (1) created for good, (2) fallen and corrupted, and (3) redemptively still used by God in God's providential restoration of creation. I would like to pick up this suggestion to address the question of whether and how we can work with Yoder's theology in light of his abuse

⁶⁵ Paul Martens, et al., 'Scandalizing,' 2014. They are working with Yoder's unpublished paper 'Fuller Definition of "Violence"' (1973).

⁶⁶ Both unpublished: 'Feminist Theology Miscellany #1 Salvation through mothering?' (April 1988) and 'Feminist Theology Miscellany #2 What kind of feminist was Jesus?' (October 1990).

⁶⁷ Karen V. Guth, 'Doing Justice,' 119-139.

⁶⁸ Karen V. Guth 'The Feminist-Christian Schism Revisited' *JSR*, Volume 13, Number 2 (November 2014).

⁶⁹ Paul Martens, et al., 'Scandalizing,' 2014.

of women. I will use Berkhof's description of the powers, not as theological method, but as a frame to describe how Yoder's theology is (1) created for good, (2) fallen and corrupted, and (3) might redemptively still be used by theologians who work on peace theology.

2.3.3.1 Created for good

It is not difficult to describe how Yoder's theology was created for good, for it had a profound impact on several generations of theologians, church leaders, church planters, activists and others.⁷⁰ Yoder is the main voice of peace theology in the twentieth century. He offered three decades of well-articulated response to Reinhold Niebuhr, thus creating space for the particular place of the (peace) church in society.

2.3.3.2 Fallen and corrupted

In order to examine the ways in which Yoder's theological work is fallen and corrupted I, first work with Jamie Pitts' description of the 'symbols' in Yoder's life that function as powers. Second, I will describe how his theology backed him up, and third I will describe how his sexuality papers are not very different from the rest of his work. From these three points I identify several problems with Yoder's approach which were exposed by his history of violence. Describing the fallenness in careful detail may help formulate how Yoder's work can be used for good.

Symbolic violence. Jamie Pitts states that Yoder was able to act out his violence and get away with it, because the revival of the Anabaptist Vision had not resulted in a critical questioning of patriarchy in Mennonite churches and institutions.⁷¹ To outline the (patriarchal) position of power Yoder worked from, Pitts works with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of how dominant people are able to stay in positions of power, even through

⁷⁰ To mention a few from the different categories: Stanley Hauerwas and James McClendon (theologians), Stuart Murray (church planter), Shane Claiborne (activist), all show that they are significantly influenced by the work of Yoder.

⁷¹ Pitts, 'Anabaptist Re-Vision,' *MQR*, January 2015, 153-156.

changing times and in face of challengers of those very positions. Bourdieu uses the concept of ‘symbolic violence’ to describe how those in power use symbolic resources to stay in a position of power, and make it seem ‘natural, legitimate and beneficent.’⁷² Pitts recognizes ‘three sets or clusters of symbolic capital’ that Yoder used for his ‘intellectual seduction.’⁷³

- 1 *Authority Symbols.* Yoder’s ‘religious and intellectual authority as Mennonite church leader and internationally recognized scholar’ legitimized his access to the women he met.
- 2 *Technical Symbols.* Yoder’s technical expertise as a biblical interpreter, theologian and historian, legitimized his reading of the church as ‘first fruit’ and his perspective on affirmative affection as ‘cutting edge,’ through which he tried to seduce women into his ‘grand, noble experiment.’
- 3 *Political Symbols: Yoder as ‘Radical.’* Yoder used the language of ‘socio-political radicalness’ in his major publications such as *The Original Revolution* (1971) and *The Politics of Jesus* (1972), and he used the same language for his ‘experiment.’

In his argument Pitts shows that Yoder’s history of violence against women and his writings on sexuality are not to be separated from the rest of his life and theology, because the latter made the former possible.

How Yoder’s theology justified his behavior. It is disturbing that Yoder used sexual violence and, in that sense, sinned against his own non-violent theological commitments. But what if he had not sinned against his own theology? What if his theology enabled or justified his behavior? This would be even more disturbing, but in several instances this appears to be the case.

72 Pitts, ‘Anabaptist Re-Vision,’ *MQR*, January 2015, 156-158. For an extensive argument on Yoder’s theology from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu, see Jamie Pitts, *Principalities and Powers. Revising John Howard Yoder’s Sociological Theology* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013).

73 Pitts, ‘Anabaptist Re-Vision,’ *MQR*, January 2015, 162-168.

This is most obvious in his infamous writings on sexuality.⁷⁴ His writings on singleness proposed a new practice of ‘non-genital’ ‘affirmative affection’ within the family of the church,⁷⁵ while his writings on marriage assume that biblical marriage is permanent, even in cases of adultery.⁷⁶ I get the impression that in this way his theology granted him freedom to act promiscuously, while his wife could not leave him, except, at least in Yoder’s reading, on non-biblical grounds. These articles were never published and have been severely criticized. The following writings, however, are considered to be major contributions to his ecclesiology and theology of nonviolent presence in the world.

First, Yoder’s writings on reconciliation within the church, called ‘Binding and loosing’ appeared in several publications with minor variations.⁷⁷ In his reading of Matthew 18, binding and loosing meant not only to forgive, but also to enter a process of discernment. However, his insistence that the first step in the process should be a personal meeting

74 When Yoder’s sexuality papers, or singleness papers, are discussed, the papers in the following list are referred to. They were not published, but written for either ‘student’ use, or as a discussion paper. Often at the top was the note: ‘Not for wider circulation, reproduction or quotation.’ So when I say published I mean put to paper for internal AMBS purposes.

‘When is marriage not a marriage?’ (1974, revised from 1968, published at age 47/ 41), including chapter 2 ‘When is adultery or rape a marriage?’

‘When is adultery a marriage’ (1974, published at age 47)

‘Singleness in ethical and pastoral perspective’ (1974, published at age 47)

‘A call for aid’ (1974, published at age 47)

‘What is “adultery of the heart”?’ (1975, published at age 48)

‘Single dignity’ (1976, published at age 49)

‘Intergenerational affection’ (1977, published at age 50)

‘Is homosexuality a sin? How not to work on a question’ (1978, published at age 51)

‘Rethinking Remarriage’ (1984, published at age 57)

They can be viewed as one corpus of papers, because all of these articles relate to each other. Yoder connects these articles himself as offering one perspective, see for example in ‘A call for aid,’ where he links his singleness papers to his marriage papers.

75 See especially ‘Singleness in ethical and pastoral perspective’ (1974), 7; ‘A call for aid’ (1974), 1-3; ‘What is “adultery of the heart”?’ (1975), 4; ‘Single dignity’ (1976), 5; and ‘Intergenerational affection’ (1977).

76 See especially ‘When is marriage not a marriage?’ (1974), 8; ‘When is adultery a marriage’ (1974); and ‘Rethinking Remarriage’ (1984), 1. Yoder refers to this position as the Hebrew ‘realistic’ or ‘ontological’ view.

77 See for example RCF, 74-78 (a version from 1959); RC, 13-22 (a version from 1966); *Concern* no. 14 (1967); PP, 116-122 (a sermon on the subject from 1982); BP (1992), 1-13; RP (1994), 323-358, etc.

between victim and perpetrator blocked the process, for his victims were afraid to identify themselves, and even more, to be in the same room with him. In endless discussions with discernment groups and Marlin Miller, president of AMBS at the time, Yoder used his intellectual brilliance and theological reasoning to justify his own position and the problematic character (in his perspective) of the attempts to enter a reconciling process without this first step.⁷⁸ Waltner Goossen shows how Yoder's use of the rule of 'binding and loosing' could delay the discernment processes for years. In his case 'binding and loosing' did not lead to reconciliation or discernment for the community. It led to one individual holding the whole process hostage. In his own view, however, Yoder was obedient to his reading of Matthew 18.⁷⁹

A second subject under discussion is Yoder's perspective on 'revolutionary subordination' as described in *The Politics of Jesus* (1972). In his testing of the issue of the ways in which the ethic of the apostles might be similar to that of Jesus,⁸⁰ Yoder discusses the so called 'Haustafeln'.⁸¹ He observes that those who are called to subordinate, namely women and slaves, are addressed as moral agents, unlike the surrounding Roman culture. From this revolutionary perspective they are called to subordinate,

78 Waltner Goossen, 'Defanging,' *MQR*, January 2015, 39-44. Krall concludes, reflecting on the whole process, 'I have decided – as have some of Yoder's victims – that his insistence upon a literal enforcement of the Matthew Rule of Christ text was another public rationalization which allowed him to continue doing what he was already doing – harassing a wide variety of women all around the world. Such an obsessive or literalist approach to this text was yet another way to bully other churchmen – his institutional supervisors and conference ministers – into a refusal to act.' (*Elephants*, vol. 3, 373. See also 232.)

79 See Waltner Goossen, 'Defanging,' *MQR*, January 2015, 39-48, 52-54; Martens, et al. 'Scandalizing,' Hamilton and Lambelet 'A Dark Theme,' 13-14; Paul Martens, 'The Theological Coherence of Yoder's "Grand, Noble Experiment": A Cautionary Tale about Realizing the Eschaton' (not published, used with author's permission); Mast, 'Teaching Yoder.' J. Alexander Sider, 'Friendship, Alienation, Love: Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder,' *MQR*, July 2010, 436-438, relates to a binding and loosing text of Yoder in PP (1985) in which he describes the goal of this rule as 'pardon with no prerequisites or follow-up.' Sider points to the highly problematic psychological consequences of this way of applying Matthew 18, which is part of an overall problem with Yoder's work, as he demonstrates in this article.

80 PJ, 187.

81 'Haustafeln' is a German term that is used to refer to the listing of rules in the letters of Paul. Also called 'Household precepts.' They have the reputation to serve a conservative, patriarchal agenda, which Yoder questions in this chapter.

just as Jesus did.⁸² This is ‘a renewed way of living within the present.’⁸³ Already in the 1980s Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza critically argued that, with this perspective, women are called to take their experience as it comes, rather than actively seeking to improve it.⁸⁴ Yoder’s linking of revolutionary subordination with Jesus’ suffering even makes it worse, according to Schüssler Fiorenza. This ‘suffering paradigm’ is dangerous, because it ‘heads off any attempt to overcome an unjust setting.’ When suffering is faithfulness this paradigm can become ‘an ideological instrument used to maintain the plight of oppressed people groups.’ When suffering is faithfulness, the effort to change the situation is unfaithfulness, and rebellion against the will of God.⁸⁵ In the second edition of *The Politics of Jesus* (1994), Yoder reacted to Schüssler Fiorenza’s critique by trying to show that they share the same agenda: ‘What the Haustafeln texts project is a tactic for change in the light of the new Christological reality.’⁸⁶ John Koyles stresses that the problem is that Yoder never works out or shows how ‘exactly this practice could engender change.’⁸⁷ Just like his sexuality articles, this chapter on ‘revolutionary subordination’ is part of his ‘radical’ ecclesiological project. Saying ‘no’ to Yoder’s behavior would then not only mean being no longer part of his ecclesiological experiment, but also having the action seen as a form of unfaithfulness. This cornered his victims even more.⁸⁸

82 PJ, 171-179.

83 PJ, 185.

84 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone. The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 81-83.

85 As interpreted by John Patrick Koyles, *The Trace of the Face in the Politics of Jesus. Experimental Comparisons Between the Work of John Howard Yoder and Emmanuel Levinas* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013), 49.

86 PJ, 192.

87 Koyles, *Trace*, 54.

88 On this Ross writes (from a womanist perspective): ‘Yoder does not see lack of choice in regard to social status as contradicting his ethical theory.’ Rosetta E. Ross, ‘John Howard Yoder on Pacifism’ in *Beyond the Pale. Reading Ethics from the Margins*, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Michael A. de la Torre (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 203. Hanna Heinzekehr argues along the same lines as she notices that subordination is not revolutionary but helped Yoder act as he did. See Hanna Heinzekehr, ‘Can Subordination Ever Be Revolutionary? Reflections on John Howard Yoder,’ (2013) (accessed January 2018) <http://mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/can-subordination-ever-be-revolutionary-reflections-on-john-howard-yoder-2/>. Hamilton and Lambelet state on this: ‘His construal of Christian nonviolence as voluntary self-subordination even to illegitimate

The final texts I want to mention are his writings on capital punishment.⁸⁹ As Stephanie Krehbiel⁹⁰ and Ruth Krall observe,⁹¹ Yoder wrote these texts in the early 1990s, during his submission to the disciplinary process. In these texts he reads the need for punishment as a Girardian need for scapegoating. He writes:

More recently, men as a class have come to be vulnerable in a new way, as a compensation for pain and suffering by women, when that pain can be blamed upon the prior patriarchal tilt of our society. Here, too, to understand would be better than to bewail. We should expect the genesis (whether in phylogeny or in ontogeny) of women's need to punish to be different from what drove male avenger's in primitive culture.

He adds in a footnote:

There should be room, logically, for the objection that beneficent patriarchal care, properly understood and benevolently exercised would not be harmful; that what has hurt women has been the violation, not the implementation of proper fatherly caring. This excuse would, however, not change the retaliatory dynamics, since the root of the power of the punitive drive is located not merely in a mistake the stronger party made but in the weaker party's anger.

In his argument he scatters phrases like 'women's need to punish' and 'the weaker party's anger' against the background of the bigger picture, in which he functions as the Girardian scapegoat of his denomination.⁹²

and destructive authorities (...) reveals a profound inattention to the social and psychological dimensions of the exercise of power. (Hamilton and Lambelet, 'A Dark Theme,' 14.)

⁸⁹ *You Have it Coming*, published as ES (2011).

⁹⁰ Stephanie Krehbiel, 'The Woody Allen Problem: How Do We Read Pacifist Theologian (and Sexual Abuser) John Howard Yoder' (2014) (accessed January 2018) <http://religiondispatches.org/the-woody-allen-problem-how-do-we-read-pacifist-theologian-and-sexual-abuser-john-howard-yoder/>.

⁹¹ Krall, *Elephants*, vol. 3, 103.

⁹² See Krall, *Elephants*, vol. 3, 103, with reference to this capital punishment writings: 'He used, in the preparation and rough draft writing of this complex manuscript, his formidable intellectual ability to create a beginning argument for his status as his denominational Church's victim.'

These are a few examples of how Yoder's theology enabled and justified his behavior and position.

The sexuality papers as typically Yoderian material. Although in the past some scholars suggested that Yoder's sexuality papers could be read as an aberration from the rest of his work, a closer look shows that this is not the case.⁹³ There are several reasons why this set of papers can be seen as not differing much from his other work, both in style and concern.

First, Yoder's perspective on sexuality as described in these papers are part of his basic framework of ecclesiology. In other words, his sexuality papers are ecclesiological papers. They deal with the shape of the community, Yoder's main ecclesiological focal point:

Biblical morality does not begin by asking about the status of individuals. It begins by asking about the shape of the community.

With regard to sexuality, it then must begin by asking about the shape of the family.⁹⁴

These papers show three major ecclesiological moves that can be recognized in the rest of Yoder's ecclesiological work. First, Yoder's 'the possibility of a messianic ethic' approach. The church is called to live according to Jesus' teaching and example. In this particular case, the way Jesus related to women is how the church now should relate to women.⁹⁵ Second is the language of 'first fruits,' and other 'radical' and 'revolutionary' language to describe the idealized eschatological presence of the church.⁹⁶ Third is Yoder's labeling of the women he approached for his 'experiment' as 'her-

93 This is what Hamilton and Lambelet called quarantine. They referred to the work of Hauerwas, Nation and Grimsrud. Another example of intuitively separating Yoder's work on sexuality from the rest of his work is visible in Schlabach's article 'Only those we need can betray us,' where he writes 'Soon afterward I went to the AMBS library and read the unpublished paper(s) that Yoder had written exploring some kind of new Kingdom sexuality bullshit,' while in fact most of Yoder's material was of course eschatological in nature.

94 Yoder, 'Is Homosexuality' (1978), 6.

95 'The Possibility of a Messianic Ethic' is the first chapter of PJ, in which Yoder makes a case for Jesus' teaching and example as the source of ethical reasoning for the church. See for example, 'Single Dignity' (1976), 4, where Jesus' attitude to women is described as an example for the church.

96 See for example, 'Single Dignity' (1976), 4, where Yoder notes: 'If then such thoughts do bother one, the liberation which the gospel offers is still ahead of us.' See also Martens, 'Theological Coherence' and Pitts, *Principalities*, xv.

meneutic community,' language he commonly used for the practices of the church.⁹⁷ This demonstrates that Yoder's papers on sexuality are in fact papers on the practices of the church, and should be read as such.

Second, the sexuality papers show the same theological method as the rest of his ecclesiological work. Jamie Pitts summarizes the logic of Yoder's argument like this:

Yoder first identified the inadequacies of historical understandings [of singleness and sexuality] by comparing them with Scripture. Jesus' life and teachings, as gleaned from biblical exegesis, supply the core norm. That norm is then traced into the apostolic church [in this case to Paul's teaching on the priority of singleness] to reinforce its plausibility as an interpretation of Jesus' life and teachings and to illustrate its possible historical realization. Once the norm is established on biblical grounds, and its superiority over historical rivals secured, its implications for Christian discipleship are enumerated at length and with impressive logical rigor.⁹⁸

This logic is recognizable in his other ecclesiological writings. The words between brackets could be replaced by 'Constantinianism,' 'non-violence,' 'communal moral discernment,' and so on, and a fair account of the logic of Yoder's writings on these subjects would equally emerge. In this regard Yoder's writings on sexuality are in line with his other writings on ecclesiology and do not differ that much.

The third similarity that becomes apparent is that the sexuality papers show the same lack of dialogue as we see in the rest of his work. The discernable pattern is that Yoder works from a theological intuition, and takes several years to support it, historically, exegetically and logically. He reached out to many people to discuss his work. But when Yoder asked for feedback or dialogue, what he in fact was looking for was support to make his argument stronger. Feedback that does not substantiate his intuition

97 Yoder, 'Call for Aid' (1974), 1.

98 Pitts, 'Anabaptist Re-Vision,' *MQR*, January 2015, 164-165.

is either ignored or dismissed ('you are asking the wrong question'). This pattern is visible in both his writings⁹⁹ and in the personal experiences of colleagues and students of Yoder.¹⁰⁰ With respect to his sexuality papers and abusive behavior this was clearly visible in his conversations with Marlin Miller, who tried on several levels and for several years to enter into a constructive dialogue with Yoder on the subject. This failed because Yoder was able to outsmart and dismiss Miller's argument.¹⁰¹

Yoder hardly ever changed his mind on a subject. This was also the case in his work on sexuality. We see his one idea explored and expanded in his writings on sexuality from the 1960s to the 1980s. His many con-

99 See for example chapter two of 'When is Marriage', 16, which is 'a follow up communication to those who have commented on my earlier text'. He starts his response by stating 'Some obvious objections arise, with which that draft did not attempt to deal.' He communicates two things in this one sentence. First, your feedback is obvious, that means, of course I have considered your feedback even before you gave it to me. Second, my draft did not attempt to deal with the objections you are raising, in other words: you are asking the wrong questions. This is an example of an attitude that is visible throughout his writings. As Jamie Pitts pointed out in a conversation on this (in May 2018): 'And as helpful as the "Patience as Method in Moral Reasoning" essay is, it is also an argument for not engaging in dialogue: "I'm right and eventually you'll see that"' (PWK, 113-132). See on this also Andrew Brubacher Kaethler's 'The Practice of Reading the Other: John Howard Yoder's Critical and Caricatured Portrayal of Scholasticism' in *Power and Practices. Engaging the Work of John Howard Yoder*, ed. Jeremy M. Bergen and Anthony G. Siegrist (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2009), 47-64.

This pattern is also recognizable in Yoder's ecumenical writings, in which he presents the Anabaptist tradition as the true Christian position, and so one that does not need to learn from others. If he recognizes similarities between Anabaptism and other Christian traditions, it is in order to suggest how those traditions should assimilate to Anabaptism. See for example RP, part III: 'Ecumenical Responses,' 221-320.

In the same way, Yoder did little writing on other people's theology. He mostly referred to the Bible, history, and the practical outworking of his ideas. See on this for example, Ted Grimsrud, 'Reflections,' 345-346.

100 Yoder was infamous for a lack of serious response to the questions of his students. He often responded with either 'that's a false dichotomy' or 'you are asking the wrong question'. Colleagues had to put up with this as well. Willard Swartley (New Testament scholar at AMBS and former colleague of Yoder) told me in a personal conversation (in 2015) an anecdote about *The Politics of Jesus*. Although published under Yoder's name, this was actually a group effort. A team of theologians at AMBS had been working on the project together. Swartley told me that he gave Yoder feedback on his reading of 'forgive us our debts', which in Luke has the formulation 'forgive us our sins.' This was not backing up Yoder's economical argument. According to Swartley, Yoder could not really deal with this and ignored the feedback. Swartley published on this (Yoder's reading of Luke) in Willard M. Swartley, 'Smelting for Gold: Jesus and Jubilee in John H. Yoder's *Politics of Jesus*,' in *A Mind Patient and Untamed. Assessing John Howard Yoder's Contributions to Theology, Ethics, and Peacemaking*, ed. Ben C. Ollenburger and Gayle Gerber Koontz (Telford: Cascadia Publishing House, 2004), 288-302.

101 Waltner Goossen, 'Defanging,' *MQR*, January 2015, 36-37.

versations with colleagues, but also with the women he victimized, and even his conversations with the Disciplinary Commission, never changed his mind.¹⁰²

There is, however, one slight difference that comes to the surface in reference to the rest of his work. This difference lies in a sense of restraint. Besides a restraint in publishing this material,¹⁰³ there was a restraint in using sixteenth-century sources to support his argument. Jamie Pitts describes how Yoder's vision of radical discipleship was based on three primary sources: 'Biblical exegesis that described Jesus' life and teachings and the early church's conformity to them; theological arguments that clarified Jesus' logical coherence and normative force; a historiography that demon-

102 Krall has a similar perspective: 'Yoder's tenacious commitment to his core theological, ethical, and ecclesial ideas about nonviolence and Christian discipleship remained consistent throughout his long academic career. It appears his ideas about human sexuality, female sexuality, singleness, and male domination of women did so as well.' (Krall, *Elephants*, vol. 3, 202) Part of the problem was that Yoder was used to people disagreeing with him. He considered himself a radical theologian and critical feedback seemed only to strengthen this image.

103 In a letter to Marlin Miller and Ross Bender, his supervisors at AMBS at the time, April 19, 1977, he reflects on his work on 'affirmative affection' and shows insight in the controversy his work provokes. He sums up the following objections:

First, *The notions are new and unacceptable*. He then adds a most interesting comment. *I am accustomed to dealing responsibly with ideas which are unacceptable to many.*

Second, *Dealing openly with these ideas at a place such as AMBS would be seen as scandalous.*

Third, *The notion proposed of "non-genital" or "non-erotic" or "familiar" sexuality is morally unacceptable and psychologically harmful.*

Fourth, Others, he notes, may see his interest in this area as *an extension of my own "problems."* *They may well be, without necessarily meaning that the ideas I have come to are false. This is why your critical concern should be brotherly as well as theoretical.* (Roman additions by Krall, see *Elephants*, vol. 3, 202.)

He did however publish one article on homosexuality, which shows (albeit in a slightly hidden fashion) his perspective on 'affirmative affection.' (J.H. Yoder 'Is Homosexuality a Sin, How Not to Work at a Question' in *Findings of Consultations One and Two on Human Sexuality and Homosexuality*, ed. J.R. Mumaw [Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Medical, Association and Mennonite Nurses Association, 1979]). Yoder also had the intention to publish a book on marriage, together with Stanley Hauerwas, but this somehow did not work out. What is fascinating is that Yoder suggested writing the book under a nom de plume (Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child*, 242-243). Yoder was in general slow in publishing his material. Most of his work is published because colleagues suggested he should do so. JCSR was the one project he really pushed and tried to get the material published, but this did not really work out. I have not found any record that he was keen to bring his sexuality material to publication as well. That is why I conclude there was a slight restraint in publishing this material.

strated how Jesus has and has not been followed through time.¹⁰⁴ In Yoder's sexuality papers we see plenty of reasoning from the first two sources, but a reluctance to draw from the third. Gerald J. Mast wonders if there is a possible influence on Yoder from early Anabaptist practices of sexual utopianism,¹⁰⁵ such as the Davidites¹⁰⁶ and the Dreamers.¹⁰⁷ One theme in anabaptist sexual utopianism, as described by Lyndal Roper in his reflection on the events in Münster, is an interest on the part of male leaders in managing or redeeming female sexuality.¹⁰⁸ The resemblance with Yoder's interest in the intimacy of unmarried women is striking.¹⁰⁹ As a specialist in sixteenth-century Anabaptism, Yoder had knowledge of and access to these sources.¹¹⁰ Moreover, Mast describes how, according to one of Yoder's former students, Yoder shared an interest with Donald Durnbaugh in 'the

104 Pitts, 'Anabaptist Re-Vision,' *MQR*, January 2015, 164. See also Ross who summarizes Yoder's method as follows: 'his method may be characterized as ethical historiography because careful historical analysis supported his theological assumptions. His historical analysis included biblical study, which Yoder used not as literal history but as a means for examining historical developments in early Christianity. The early church was, for Yoder, the paradigmatic moral context for determining specific and general guides for Christian action.' She calls this Yoder's theo-ethical system. (Ross, 'Yoder,' 201.)

105 Gerald J. Mast 'Sin and failure in Anabaptist Theology' in *Radical Theologian*, ed. Weaver, 356-357.

106 The Davidites were '(followers of David Joris) who apparently engaged in communal nudity without arousal in order to prove their triumph over lust' (Mast, 'Sin', 356).

107 The Dreamers were those 'who by contrast sought to redeem sexual intercourse in the context of spiritual marriages that were regarded as trumping their official, worldly marriages (Mast, 'Sin', 356). See also Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil. Witchcraft, Religion and Sexuality in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994), 83-88.

108 Roper works with Otthein Rammstedt's and Ronnie Hsia's explanation that 'in a city with a vast majority of single women and wives deserted by their husbands, it made sense to incorporate them within the institution which was the fundamental unit of the civic polity, the household.' They argue that the reformers of Münster were inspired by the principles of the household craft workshop. Instead of an ongoing orgy of lust and violence, as Münster is often perceived, the polygamy was initiated by an interest to take care of the sexuality of women within the city. The reformers of Münster did so within the context of (extended) marriage. (Roper, *Oedipus*, 89-90.) The comparison with Yoder's interest to take care of the sexuality of women within the church is striking, as Mast notices, although Yoder proposes different solutions. He did not want to take care of it by extending marriage, but by seeing the church as an extended family.

109 Mast, 'Sin,' 356.

110 Yoder wrote his dissertation on sixteenth-century Anabaptism in Switzerland (published as *Täuferium und Reformation in der Schweiz*, 1962). He kept working and publishing on the subject throughout his academic career.

sexual irregularities of the radical streams in Pietism and Anabaptism.¹¹¹ Because he did not reflect on these sources explicitly in his sexuality papers, we do not definitely know how he related to them. I suspect he did not use them as a source because these ‘sexual irregularities’ were considered a scandalous part of the anabaptist heritage.¹¹² In other words, they would not have made a strong argument. The eschatological and experimental character of these practices might, however, have strengthened Yoder’s self-understanding as a radical non-conformist eschatological thinker.¹¹³

Alongside this slight restraint in referring to sixteenth-century anabaptist sources, we should consider Yoder’s sexuality papers as part of his basic framework of ecclesiology, comparable in style, concern and content with his other ecclesiological work.

Some overall problems with Yoder’s approach. If, as we established, we cannot quarantine Yoder’s life and theology, his sexuality papers and the rest of his ecclesiological writings, but have to see it as one corpus, then some overall problems with Yoder’s approach become apparent.

The first is that Yoder does not engage in any real dialogue, as mentioned above. He felt compelled to find his own way against the grain of the (theological) universe. This was effective in his writings on the nonviolent practices of the church and her place in society (for example), but worked out violently in his writings on singleness and ‘affirmative affection.’ It was almost impossible to make Yoder change his mind.

Second, the concept of violence and nonviolence that Yoder worked with was mainly focused on war and peace, and the role of church and state in these affairs. He had a limited conception of other forms of vio-

111 Donald Durnbaugh is a famous Church of the Brethren historian. Mast notes: ‘this interest remained merely historical for Durnbaugh, but for Yoder became part of his pursuit of what he called “Friendly Relations” with “Sisters” who shared his radical vision’ (Mast, ‘Sin,’ 357).

112 ‘Scandalous’ is a word used by Yoder himself in a letter to Marlin Miller, April 19, 1977 (see Krall, *Elephants*, vol. 3, 202).

113 As Mast suggests (Mast, ‘Sin,’ 356-357). This is clearly visible in for example in Yoder’s paper ‘Call to Aid.’

lence, for example on violence within communities or interpersonal violence, such as sexual violence. He did reflect a bit on the issue in his paper ‘Fuller Definition of “Violence”’ (1973), but this paper was not published, nor did Yoder really engage this fuller definition of violence in the rest of his work.¹¹⁴

Connected to this is Yoder’s elaboration of a theology of the powers. Inspired by Berkhof’s *Christus en de machten* (1953), Yoder worked with this theology to describe the state and how God – although the state was fallen – providentially could use it for the good.¹¹⁵ He failed, however, to apply this theology to fallen dynamics within communities such as the church, as for example Walter Wink did.¹¹⁶

Connected to this is Yoder’s perspective of evil. For Yoder evil is perceived in a church-world dichotomy, not in the heart of every person and community. As Yoder stated in *The Politics of Jesus* (1972):

The challenge to which the proclamation of Christ’s rule over the rebellious world speaks a word of grace is not a problem within the self but a split in the cosmos.¹¹⁷

Yoder’s concept of evil, whether it be formulated as violence, the powers that be, or as evil itself, was primarily expressed within a church–world dichotomy. This is understandable in light of his agenda since the 1950s to formulate a reply to Niebuhr’s framing of pacifist churches, just as it is understandable that as a theologian influenced by Barth, Yoder inherited a suspicion of Pietism’s emphasis on the individual believer’s heart as the

114 ‘Fuller Definition of “Violence”’ (1973). When Yoder takes the linguistic approach to the meaning of violence, he states: “‘Violence’ is thus meaningless apart from the concept of that which is violated. That which is violated is the dignity of some being. (...) In the Latin languages the verb “to violate” is the same as the verb “to rape”: it refers to the purity or integrity or self-determination of a woman.’ (3) There is enough in this definition to elaborate on, especially regarding sexual violence, but Yoder failed to do so. Krehbiel states that this is a wider problem of the way Mennonites teach nonviolence. She sees a patriarchal pacifism as a cause of this. (Krehbiel, ‘Woody Allen.’)

115 PJ, 195.

116 Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be. Theology for a New Millennium*. (New York: Galilee Double Day, 1998).

117 PJ, 161.

main object of the gospel instead of the cosmos.¹¹⁸ Peter Dula, reflecting on this issue, suggests that Yoder might fear that ‘moral psychology, the attempt to understand why the good is difficult, can become an excuse for why the good is unachievable.’¹¹⁹ This is also understandable, but it results in Yoder’s approach falling short in finding words for and theological reflection on evil within the power dynamics of the church and between individuals, even between brothers and sisters. This lack of language for interpersonal evil made it more difficult to address .

Third, Yoder does not seem to be aware of the reality of power inequalities within church and academia. His insistence on his particular reading of Matthew 18, for example, (‘binding and loosing’) in the ‘discernment processes,’ shows little understanding of the power dynamics between a victim of violence and his/her perpetrator.¹²⁰ Furthermore, his insistence on women’s consent in the discernment processes shows an unwillingness or inability to understand that even though consent was not explicitly denied, behavior could still be violent¹²¹ because of power inequalities. These inequalities could be physical or connected with Yoder’s position and status, but they made the violence possible, and the fact that he was able to continue his actions for the most part for over thirty years.

Yoder perceived himself as a minority theologian, and from this perspective he wrote his ecclesiology. But this is more of a historical minority position than a real-life experience for Yoder. As a white, middle-class, well-educated male, who taught at a prestigious Roman Catholic university, this minority perspective was a theological ecclesiological axiom rather than everyday experience. This might be the reason that Yoder hardly

118 Another factor might be Robert Friedmann’s critique of Pietism’s influence on Anabaptism, published while Yoder was a student at Goshen College. See Robert Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety through the Centuries: Its Genius and Its Literature* (Goshen: Mennonite Historical Society, 1949).

119 Peter Dula gives this, and the inheritance from Barth, as an explanation of why the ecclesiology has to drive out psychology in Yoder’s work. See Peter Dula, ‘Psychology, Ecclesiology and Yoder’s Violence,’ *ML* 2014, volume 68 (accessed January 2018) <https://ml.bethelks.edu/issue/vol-68/article/psychology-ecclesiology-and-yoders-violence/>.

120 Waltner Goossen, ‘Defanging,’ *MQR*, January 2015, 39-54.

121 Waltner Goossen, ‘Defanging,’ *MQR*, January 2015, 41.

addressed the issue. However, Yoder's writings on sexuality, his sexual violence against women and the use of his theology and position to justify his behavior and delay 'discernment processes' show that he actually benefited from this lack of attention to power imbalances within church and academia. By writing from a self-proclaimed theological minority position, Yoder could ignore the real power issues.

Yoder has a highly idealized reading of the practices of the church, but gives little attention to what they mean in everyday life. What does it mean to choose to be nonviolent in the face of random or systematic violence? What are the social and psychological consequences of nonviolence for oppressed groups? What does it mean for a person to forgive someone who has attacked or abused them? Yoder is very eloquent in describing which groups in history were faithful to the politics of Jesus and which were not, but what is the sociological and psychological price for such a faithfulness? And who pays this price? The community as a whole? Or the weaker part of the community? The women? The poor? Yoder barely addresses these questions of power and social economy, while they are fundamental for an understanding of what constitutes the practices of a community.¹²²

Fourth, Yoder has hardly any theological place for the self. J. Alexander Sider argues that there is a pattern in Yoder's theology of moving away from the self to the social dimension of a community practice.¹²³ After examining three of Yoder's texts on the practices of the church, he concludes:¹²⁴

At precisely the point where such practices shape the psyche, Yoder

122 This is a fundamental lack in Yoder's ecclesiological approach. There is a way in which his very ecclesiology prevents him from asking these questions. If the church must be egalitarian, then you can dismiss attention to unequal power dynamics as effects of 'the world' and 'Constantinianism,' etc., as 'not the true church.' Although this idealism can serve as a critical lever for change, it can lead one to neglect power issues that are actually there.

123 Sider, 'Friendship,' *MQR*, July 2010, 417-440.

124 Sider works with a passage from OR, the account on baptism in BP, and a sermon from PP on 'binding and loosing.'

turns away from undertaking the exposition of a rational psychology and points to the task of the community, which he describes in social process terms.¹²⁵

This hinders a theological reflection on selfhood, according to Sider. Peter Dula elaborates on Sider's article by stating that for Yoder to refuse 'to think theologically about any selves makes it a lot easier to avoid thinking about his own self.'¹²⁶ This was necessary for Yoder not only because he was in flight from himself, but because he was in flight from his victims, concludes Dula, because 'self and other are always necessarily intertwined.' Dula sees a connection between a theological denial of (self) and other, and a denial of (self) and other in Yoder's sexualized violence against women.

From a personal experience of being violated, Andy Alexis-Baker also reflected on this lack of space for personal narrative.¹²⁷ He discovered that Yoder's work does not give words to the complex sociological and psychological processes that victims of violence face. He concludes:

Lacking any space for personal narrative, Yoder could not help me tell the story in any other way than as one of triumph over violence. He could not help me tell the ongoing story, where I needed therapy, where I needed introspection, where I internalized patterns that were destructive to me. I could not heal as a "Yoderian" focused solely on the politics of Jesus. I have to break the chain and find another way beyond his work that emphasizes the terror and trauma of, for example, Holy Saturday, which I first encountered in Hans Urs von Balthasar. Victims must be able to tell the dark and forbidden tales of unresolved internalized violence so we can find new identities in Christ, who also experienced trauma.

125 Sider, 'Friendship,' *MQR*, July 2010, 438.

126 Dula, 'Psychology,' *ML*, 2014, vol 68.

127 Andy Alexis-Baker 'Prison, Sexual Assault, and Editing John Howard Yoder: One Man's Story' (accessed January 2018) <http://www.ourstoriesuntold.com/stories/prison-sexual-assault-and-editing-john-howard-yoder-one-mans-story-by-andy-ab/>.

Both Yoder's history of violence, and the reflections of victims, scholars and others, demonstrate how Yoder's lack of a theology of self, or a lack of space for personal narrative, creates a flawed theology, one that has too few words for the everyday consequences of violence in the life of communities or persons.

The aforementioned overall problems with Yoder's approach come down to a problem with present day reality. Yoder is very much at home in a historical reality, which he can read and interpret according to the theological idea he is pursuing at that very moment. He is very eloquent in explaining what are faithful and faithless practices in light of the politics of Jesus, but he has hardly any words for what it means to engage these practices in real life.¹²⁸ Yoder has a theory, an impressive theory, a highly idealized theory, but without reflection on the (sometimes messy) embodiment of this theory, the theories are at risk of functioning in a way that leads to violence instead of peace.

2.3.3.3 Redemptively still used

It has been established that it is not possible to work from a quarantine of Yoder's life and theology, or a quarantine of his sexuality papers from the rest of his ecclesiological work. A number of overall problems with his approach have been noted which could be summed up in the conclusion that Yoder is a genius as a theorist, but fails to reflect on the everyday character of his ecclesiology, or offer tools to do so. Furthermore, his lack of reflecting on the concrete practices of the church caused several serious flaws in his theory. His theology offered peace, but resulted in violence. How might his theology still be used redemptively?

128 Even when Yoder has the assignment to reflect on the present state of affairs, such as was the case for his article 'Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality' (1969), he makes the choice to do so by interpreting (recent) history. He explains 'The way I have chosen to seek to interpret the present is through its recent history, i.e. through the last century.' And 'The story which I tell stops at about the mid '50's so as not to refer to any present company.' (See Yoder, 'Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality' [Lecture presented at Goshen Seminary Forum, 6 February, 1969]).

I suggest that to work responsibly with Yoder's ecclesiology is to work with the main question (in addition to the exegetical, historical and systematic theological questions): What are the practical implications of this (theoretical) proposal?

We need a hermeneutical process in which (1) Yoder's theory is embodied in concrete practices, (2) these practices are critically reflected upon and (3) the results are brought back to the theory. In other words, besides 'Biblical exegesis that described Jesus' life and teachings and the early church's conformity to them; theological arguments that clarified Jesus' logical coherence and normative force; a historiography that demonstrated how Jesus has and has not been followed through time,'¹²⁹ we need a fourth source of theological reasoning: the practices of the believing community.

The (ana)baptist theologian James McClendon suggested something similar over forty years ago in his *Biography as Theology* (1974). McClendon considers the church to be a community of convictions. He states:

What is noteworthy, however, is that the realm of convictions is just the realm with which theology, too, is concerned. The best way to understand theology is to see it, not as the study about God (for there are godless theologies as well as godly ones), but as the investigation of the convictions of a convictional community, discovering its convictions, interpreting them, criticizing them in the light of all that we know, and creatively transforming them into better ones if possible.¹³⁰

This shows a helpful way forward in working with Yoder's ecclesiology. McClendon writes that if theology does not enter into the actual shape

¹²⁹ As summarized by Jamie Pitts in Pitts, 'Anabaptist Re-Vision,' *MQR*, January 2015, 164.

¹³⁰ James Wm. McClendon Jr., *Biography as Theology. How Life Stories Can remake Today's Theology* 2d. ed. (Eugene: Wipf&Stock Publishers, 2002), 20. For McClendon convictions is a key term. He wrote *Convictions. Defusing Religious Relativism* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1994) together with James M. Smith as an exercise in how to do theology beyond foundationalism. They proposed theology as a discipline that describes and reflects on the convictions of communities. Convictions are defined by McClendon

of the lives of the people in its community of concern, it is after all irrelevant to these lives.¹³¹ As this discussion has demonstrated, it might even be harmful. According to McClendon, we engage these communities by biography.¹³² Though he only gives examples of biographical descriptions of individuals in community,¹³³ his approach might also be used in analyzing the communities themselves.

To work with Yoder's theology is thus to ask how it is embodied within actual communities, discovering and interpreting how it works out, criticizing the practices in the light of all that we know, and creatively transforming them into better ones if possible.

The criteria for 'all that we know' are the common tools of the theologian: exegetical, historical and systematic theological questions. Yoder's life and theology has however, exposed some serious flaws, which I suggest should be addressed explicitly:

- Violence. We need to use insights on the dynamics of violence from scholars of sociology, psychology, and feminist studies. One of the main insights for our purpose is that misogyny, abuse and rape are forms of violence, and that they infect the whole of the community. Other questions we need to engage are: What does it take to recover from violence? What does it take to respond in a nonviolent way? What is needed spiritually, socially and psychologically? Who is gaining and who is paying within a community that wants to live a nonviolent life in a violent world?¹³⁴

and Smith as '*A conviction (as we use the term) means a persistent belief such that if X (a person or community) has a conviction, it will not easily be relinquished and it cannot be relinquished without making X a significantly different person (or community) than before.*' (Italics McClendon and Smith, 5.)

¹³¹ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 21.

¹³² McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 67-88.

¹³³ In *Biography as Theology* McClendon describes the lives of Dag Hammarskjöld, Martin Luther King Jr., Clarence Leonard Jordan and Charles Edward Ives. In *Ethics: Systematic Theology Volume 1*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), he describes the lives of Sarah and Jonathan Edwards, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Dorothy Day.

¹³⁴ See on this Schirz, 'Afterword,' 382-385, where she argues that (a) suffering requires empowerment, and (b) that suffering must be a voluntary choice.

- Power balances. Analysis of power-structures, including hidden and indirect ones, is a way of discerning reality. In communities with a highly idealistic agenda, such as church communities, it is necessary to ask the question who is paying and who is gaining in pursuit of these ideals.¹³⁵
- Sources of the self. This is the question of the individual, of personhood, within a convictional community. What does an individual in the community need to participate in the communally embodied convictions of the community? What does it take to recover from violence? What does it take to forgive, to reconcile? Is this available? What are the spiritual resources for the individual and for the community?¹³⁶

2.4 Conclusion

After introducing John Howard Yoder and *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003), I addressed the question ‘in what way is it justifiable to work with Yoder’s theology in light of his abuse of women?’ In the previous paragraph I argued that Yoder’s theology suffers from some serious overall flaws. It can be used for good, but is in need of a practical critique. To work constructively with Yoder’s ecclesiology, we need this fourth source of theology: the practices of an actual community. This practical critique is the focus of Chapter 5. Before turning to that, I engage Yoder’s ecclesiology on his own terms (Chapter 3) and offer a theoretical critique (Chapter 4).

¹³⁵ See on this Mast, ‘Sin,’ 367-370.

¹³⁶ See on this Mast, ‘Sin,’ 361-362, where Mast argues that we need an epistemology of the heart, and Pitts, *Principalities*, xv-xvi, where Pitt emphasizes personal spiritual integrity as vital for theological and ecclesiological practice.

3

HISTORIOGRAPHY, JUDAISM AND THE FREE CHURCH VISION

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes Yoder's perspective on what he calls 'the Jewishness of the free church vision'. The similarities Yoder notices between the social life of (minority) faith communities from Jewish and Anabaptist backgrounds are, in his opinion, not coincidental. Both communities share the same calling. This is a calling to be dispersed over the world. God uses the shape of this dispersion to bless the world. Yoder calls this a calling to 'diaspora as mission.'¹

What is Yoder aiming at in this particular theological project? Yoder's lifetime work has been describing an Anabaptist ecclesiology and theology, as not only reasonable in line with the New Testament and the early church's witnesses, but as one most faithful to Jesus' ministry. He did so in his early work, for example in *The Christian Witness to the State* (1964) and *Discipleship as Political Responsibility* (1964), by arguing that nonviolent communities have – on their own terms – an impact on society as a whole. Later he argued for a Christological approach to ethics, for example in his *magnum opus* *The Politics of Jesus* (1972). In the last twenty years of his teaching and publishing Yoder focused on the missionary impact of peaceful communities on the world, as visible in *The Royal Priesthood* (1994) and *For the Nations* (1997). His focus on 'Judaism' can be seen as an attempt to show that the message of Jesus (and communities that embody Jesus' nonviolent convictions) did not suddenly drop out of a blue,

1 JCSR, 22,33,171,183,190,197n9

Marcionite sky,² but was part of the narrative and practices of Judaism since Jeremiah. It is Yoder's conviction that this should strengthen the free church approach to ecclesiology.

This chapter will investigate Yoder's method of reasoning and the development of his argument on what he calls 'the Jewishness of the Free Church Vision.' Section 3.2 describes Yoder's perspective on historiography and how he applies this method to 'the parting of the ways';³ section 3.3 describes the Jewish narrative – according to Yoder – and it unfolds a free church perspective on Judaism; section 3.4 describes how this leads to Yoder's perspective on 'the Jewishness of the free church vision'. The chapter closes with some preliminary conclusions. In chapter 3 some critical questions are raised, but they are fully engaged in chapter 4.

3.2 *Tertium Datur: It Did Not Have to Be*

A famous quote says that history is written by the victors.⁴ This is true for the historiography of nations, but also for the historiography of the church. There is always the risk of interpreting the course of history as the

2 Marcion of Sinope (c.85-c.160) was an important figure in the early church and infamous for making a strong distinction between the God of the 'Old Testament' and God the Father of Christ. Making a strong distinction between the Hebrew and Christian Bible in terms of message or image of God is therefore referred to as 'Marcionite.'

3 The parting of the ways is a term for the process of schism between the groups that were later called 'Christians' and 'Jews'. The term has been popularized by the title of James Dunn's book on the subject, *The Parting of the Ways*. The problem with this term is that it suggests that 'the separation of Christianity from Rabbinic Judaism could be identified as taking place at a particular time or place, as though there was only one "parting of the ways".' That is the reason why the second edition is entitled *The Partings (plural) of the Ways* (James Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways. Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*. Second Edition [London: SCM Press, 2011], Preface to the Second Edition, xi.). Despite its lack of fully expressing the complexity of the process the term parting of the ways will be used to refer to the subject. Yoder uses the phrase 'The Jewish-Christian Schism' most of the time. By doing so he emphasizes that Jews and Christians are essentially part of one community, as schism is a term used for scissions within the church. In other words, Yoder does not refer to Judaism as a different religion to Christianity. He does however state that schism is not the most accurate term because it is used when an institutional structure is torn apart by conflict. That is not how Yoder reads the parting of the ways. There was never a split at the top, analogous of the later schisms of the church, he argues (JCSR, 117n4).

4 The origins of this saying cannot be accurately determined and it has been variously attributed to a Latin proverb, Napoleon and Winston Churchill. Whatever its origins, it aptly expresses the need for caution in approaching historical material.

logical outcome, the only possible way. There is always the risk of a determinist attitude in describing history: things had to go as they did.⁵ If that is the case, the conquerors are justified and, in case of church history, the course of history is sanctified: this must have been the will of God.

Yoder proposes a more contingent approach to historiography. In order for Yoder to develop his argument on the correlation of Judaism and the free church, he needs a critical historiography, a historiography that first of all does not take the course of the events for granted. And secondly, a historiography which finds a way to critically evaluate the decisions made *back then* and finds the necessary criteria to do so. Yoder calls this perspective ‘evangelical revisionism’.⁶ For Yoder historiography matters, not only because of the task to describe the past in a truthful manner, but historiography can be a way to see how God is in charge of history and how we are called to be a faithful community right *here and now*. In what follows, Yoder’s evangelical revisionist perspective on historiography will first be engaged, and second, the way in which Yoder applies this historiography to describe the ‘Jewish-Christian Schism’.

3.2.1 *Evangelical revisionism*

Yoder has written extensively about historiography, from his early work to his latest. He developed his ideas about evangelical revisionism in the context of the Niebuhr debate, in which pacifist Mennonites were accused of an a-historical and irrelevant presence in American society, the so called ‘sectarian stance’.⁷ Many Mennonites were paralyzed by this dilemma of ‘irrelevant’ nonviolence versus ‘responsible’ civil participation (with a possible use of violence). Yoder pointed to the special significance of history

⁵ In JCSR, 31 Yoder asserts: ‘The historian demonstrates his expertise by making that necessity evident.’

⁶ John Howard Yoder, ‘The Burden and the Discipline of Evangelical Revisionism’ in Louis Hawkley and James C. Juhnke (eds.), *Nonviolent America. History through the Eyes of Peace* (North Newton: Bethel College, 1993), 21-37.

⁷ CWS, 5-8.

and the necessity for an evangelical revisionism to supersede the dilemma, which in Yoder's words,

has tended almost to bring us (the Mennonites) to the point of a deep theological dualism, believing that God has two distinct wills, one for Mennonites and one for other people; or that there are two different kinds of historical truths, the realistic truth which looks the way Niebuhr describes it and the subjectively warped vision of the nonresistant individual.⁸

What does an evangelical revisionist historiography ask for, according to Yoder? First of all, a basic *attitude*: evangelical revisionism is a nonviolent historiography. This means a commitment to truth and love (of the intellectual enemy). Even when the intellectual opponent holds a position that must be consciously rejected, the evangelical revisionist is called to an attitude of careful and respectful (historical) reasoning.⁹

3.2.1.1 *Evangelical revisionism as a contingent historiography*

Evangelical revisionism is also a *method*. A revisionist historiography is first of all a contingent historiography. Yoder emphasizes that decisions made back there and then matter:

The living human history matters because moral choices are not only real, but important; they make a difference for how the world is to go and what is to happen to our neighbors.¹⁰

Therefore, historiography should take notice of the specific choices people faced, and the decisions people made. In doing so a revisionist historiography does not consider the point we are in history *now* as the only logical

⁸ John Howard Yoder 'The Search for a Nonresistant Historiography' (a memorandum to Mennonite historians, December 21, 1965), 2. See especially his early publications CWS (1964), DPR (1964), OR (1971).

⁹ Yoder, 'Burden,' 22. Miroslav Volf follows the same line of thinking in *The End of Memory. Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 39-65 and emphasizes the importance of the truthfulness of our memories, even when we remember the evil that is done to us.

¹⁰ Yoder, 'Burden,' 23.

outcome. Yoder summarizes this method in a very short phrase: *it did not have to be*.¹¹

This requires a change of focus from the victors to everyday people and even the 'losers' of history. An historiography of the losers and outcasts of history will show new and beautiful things about the human condition which could not be seen by writing from the perspective of the powerful and the victors.¹² This careful reading of history will show, in Yoder's argument, certain 'middle-level aphorisms about the nature of things.' Yoder distinguishes the following: (1) the sword is not the source of creativity, (2) manhood is not brutality, (3) if you wish for peace, prepare for it, (4) war is not a way to save a culture, and (5) social creativity is a minority function.¹³

In these 'aphorisms' Yoder shows that a reading of history is never value free and that the mindset of American creeds like 'if you wish for peace, prepare for war' or the 'myth of redemptive violence'¹⁴ is one point of view from which to describe history, but that an alternative reading is possible.

3.2.1.2 *Moral criteria in historiography*

A further key aspect for an evangelical revisionist historiography is that it finds criteria by which the choices *back then* are critically evaluated. If moral decisions made in history are important, how are they to be valued? Because Yoder wants to evaluate events and decisions made *within history*, there must be criteria 'themselves part of history yet discernible within

11 JCSR, 63.

12 In Yoder's words history needs to be reread 'not merely that every generation must claim the right to begin writing world history over from scratch, nor that in particular the children of the bourgeois cannot get out of the nest without soiling it, but that at certain points there is specifiable good news about the human condition, the goodness or the newness of which those hitherto have been controlling the storytelling had not yet appropriated.' Yoder, 'Burden,' 22.

13 Yoder, 'Burden,' 23; OR, 160-162 'discerning the patterns of providence.'

14 A phrase coined by Walter Wink, who shows in his work that this is the dominant narrative (myth) in American culture. See for example his *The Powers that Be* (1998).

it.¹⁵ For Yoder this criterion is the incarnation, the person and ministry of Jesus.

Although Yoder does not explain why he uses the term ‘evangelical’, a controversial term in Christian America, this focus on the incarnation as criterion for discernment might be the reason. If that is the case ‘evangelical’ should be read as ‘according to the good news of Jesus’ person and ministry.’¹⁶ In various writings Yoder finds different entry points into this Christological criterion.

Yoder opens, for example, ‘Historiography as a Ministry to Renewal’ (1997) by quoting Hebrews 13:7-9 and concludes:

The ministry of remembrance, which is the task of the historian, is thus at heart a Christological task. Its vocation is to trace the sameness of Jesus across the generations.¹⁷

The incarnation is a moment *in history* that changes everything. From that moment on truth must be communicated in the language of concrete history: the word has to become flesh, the truth has to be embodied by living communities. If that is the case, both faithfulness and apostasy are real possibilities. There will always be changes and developments in church life and mission. How can these changes be described and evaluated? For the evangelical revisionist historian the criterion is the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

In *The Royal Priesthood* (1994) Yoder came to a similar conclusion by reading Revelation 5:7-10.¹⁹ The Lamb is the only one worthy to take the scroll and unroll it. This means that the Lamb is in charge of history. Subsequently, because of the worship setting of Revelation 5, Yoder de-

15 RP, 132.

16 Yoder, ‘Burden,’ 22 n5.

17 John Howard Yoder, ‘Historiography as a Ministry to Renewal,’ *BLT* 43 (1997): 216-28.

18 Yoder, ‘Historiography,’ 217.

19 RP, 128.

scribes historiography from an evangelical revisionist perspective as ‘to see history doxologically’:

To see history doxologically is to be empowered and obligated to discern, down through the centuries, which historical developments can be welcomed as progress in the light of the Rule of the Lamb and which as setbacks.²⁰

As mentioned before, Yoder formulated criteria to discern the meaning of particular events, ‘themselves part of history yet discernible within it.’²¹ According to Yoder this criterion is the incarnation. The Lamb of God is at the same time the man, the Jew Jesus.²² In other words

The will of God is affirmatively, concretely knowable in the person and ministry of Jesus. Jesus ... is to be looked at as a mover of history and as the standard by which Christians must learn how they are to look at the moving of history.²³

Because ‘the incarnation’ is a too broad a term to be a working criterion, Yoder gives some ‘doxological rules of thumb’:²⁴ these are ‘an epistemological privilege of the poor,’²⁵ speaking truth to power,²⁶ the place of inno-

20 RP, 132, also FN, 140.

21 RP, 132.

22 Yoder stresses the Jewishness (or the non-docetic approach) of this perspective: ‘It is after all a most Hebraic way to put the question, to say that what has come into being in the course of history (the ‘fallenness’ of the Church) has to be critiqued within history (in the dialogical events of restitution) on the grounds of criteria from the same story.’ (JCSR, 139.) ‘Still deeper perhaps is the Jewishness of the very idea of apostasy. In contrast to the assurance of “having made it”, salvation being achieved not only in God, but already in history in the form of an indefectible institution, or that of an irresistible apologetic demonstration, I suggest – only as an hypothesis, but as a serious one – that it befits far more the Hebrew earnestness about the refractoriness of history to deny that God has given his people any such blank cheque. Indefectibility belongs then only to his promise, never becoming negotiable as our appreciation of it.’ (JCSR, 140).

23 PJ, 233.

24 Yoder, ‘Burden,’ 34.

25 Yoder, ‘Burden,’ 34.

26 Yoder, ‘Burden,’ 35-36.

cent suffering,²⁷ a unity of ends and means.²⁸ In brief, Yoder's evangelical revisionism looks like this:

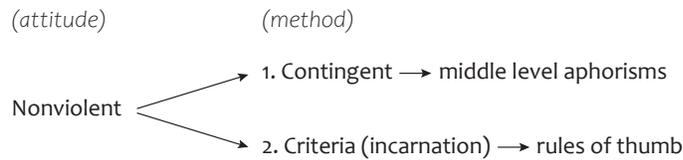


Fig.1. Representation of Yoder's evangelical revisionism

3.2.1.3 *The aim of evangelical revisionism*

In his focus on historiography Yoder wants to stay away from the gnostic or docetic heretic: the Gospel is not a degree of good news about the world of ideas or about a spiritual realm. It is about God acting in history. It is about the calling of his people to follow him as Lord in that acting in history. The sheer existence of nonviolent alternative communities is influencing the course of history, even if Niebuhr would deny it.

But Yoder also wants to stay away from what he calls the 'Constantinian' heresy: the course of events is determined by God anyway. Yoder argues that the course of events is often created by decisions, inspired by narratives the powerful and the nations tell themselves. Evangelical revisionism gives rules of thumb to question the so-called logical outcome of the events and the choices and moral reasoning that led to these events in the first place.

3.2.1.4 *Evangelical revisionism amongst other revisionisms*

In elaborating his historiographical argument, Yoder hardly relates to any historians or historiographical 'schools' with regard to method.²⁹ Look-

²⁷ Yoder, 'Burden,' 36.

²⁸ Yoder, 'Burden,' 36-37.

²⁹ In 'Burden' Yoder refers a couple of times to the work of Charles Chatfield, an historian who published mainly on the subject of pacifism, but he does not engage with him regarding method, (23n8, 25n11). In 'Historiography as a Ministry to Renewal' Yoder refers to Franklin Littell, who draws on Arthur Lovejoy's work. He does so to refute that evangelical revisionism is a form of 'primitivism' (217, 218, 223). In the same article Yoder

ing at the historiographical developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries however, Yoder's approach is in line with the 'nouvelle histoire' (new history) initiated by the French journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*.³⁰ In the late nineteenth century the impact of social theory and the heritage of Kantian and Hegelian ideas led to major discussions on method. This *Methodenstreit* had a different impact in different countries.³¹ Following the work of the French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) who 'reacted against any attempt to see history and sociology in contrasted categories, "as if they were two disciplines using different methods,"'³² Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch founded the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* in 1929. In this journal Febvre and Bloch criticized first of all the tendency of historians mainly to write the history of the victors and of major events (*histoire événementielle*) instead of the long-term (*longue durée*) history of everyday life. Second, they sought to combine historiographical, sociological and geographical approaches.³³

This approach called 'nouvelle histoire' or simply 'Annales', gained influence after World War Two outside of Europa and developed further. According to Peter Burke in his introduction to 'The New History', seven characteristics emerge when compared with 'old history'. To mention a few from his list: first, the new history is concerned with every human activity instead of being essentially concerned with politics. Second, the new history is concerned with the analyses of structures instead of considering history as essentially a narrative of events. Third, new historians are concerned with a history 'from below' instead of offering a view from above. Fourth, new historians know they cannot avoid looking at the past from

refers to Weber's 'routinization', on account of Weber's church types, but he does not relate his evangelical revisionism to Weber's historiographical method (in ideal types) (218, 223).

30 Michael Bentley, *Modern Historiography. An Introduction*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 81-92, 103-115; Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 1-23; Reginald De Schryver, *Historiografie. Vijfentwintig eeuwen geschiedschrijving van West-Europa* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 1994 (2)), 355-376.

31 Bentley, *Modern Historiography*, 81-92; De Schryver, *Historiografie*, 355-362.

32 Bentley, *Modern Historiography*, 84, 85.

33 Bentley, *Modern Historiography*, 103-115, De Schryver, *Historiografie*, 370-376.

a particular point of view, in contrast to the traditional paradigm that history is objective.

These characteristics are strikingly similar to Yoder's evangelical revisionism and his criticism of 'the standard account'. Yoder's conviction that historiography does not need a different method from ethical reasoning in this time and age, also corresponds with the *Annales'* conviction that historical and sociological methods should not be contrasted but combined in historiographical work.

The new historical approach also showed that historiography is a constant process of revisionism.³⁴ Hughes-Warrington notices that revisionism in history making is an ethical activity.³⁵ Revisionisms raise questions about the 'meta-ethics of history: the ways in which historians and historiographers make conclusions about what constitutes a justified, necessary or "good" revision in history, and, moreover, what ought to constitute a history.'³⁶ According to Hughes-Warrington, these conclusions are largely shaped by the assumptions of a particular community/ people/ country, from which perspective the historian is writing.³⁷ This 'historical revision as ethics'³⁸ is likewise very similar to that which Yoder developed in his evangelical revisionist approach.³⁹

There is however one article in which Yoder (albeit in a footnote) parallels his historiographical method to the work of others, and there he references the work of Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin. He notes:

Reading history "against the grain" is at home in (a) a minority denomination, illuminated by (b) a moral commitment to nonviolence, and (c) a Christian theological identity, it should be noted

³⁴ Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *Revisionist Histories* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1-7.

³⁵ Hughes-Warrington, *Revisionist Histories*, 2-5. 'Historiography may date (...) but it may also place. That 'placing' evidently reflects particular ethical decisions.' (3).

³⁶ Hughes-Warrington, *Revisionist Histories*, 2.

³⁷ Hughes-Warrington, *Revisionist Histories*, 4.

³⁸ Hughes-Warrington, *Revisionist Histories*, 15-17.

³⁹ Yoder is however expanding this ethical reasoning even further. Not only is the work of the historian subject to ethical reasoning, it is also the object of the researcher: how are the decisions made *back then* to be valued?

that none of those *particular* markers is indispensable. Probably the most powerful voices (per capita) for historical revision before and just after World War II were those of Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin, whose minority sociology was Jewry and whose sense-making framework was materialism. ... The analogies to our project would be illuminating.⁴⁰

Following the development of Yoder's evangelical revisionism, it is surprising that Yoder as part of a bigger historiographical movement, does not relate to historians or historical method on a more structural level in his articles and footnotes. It seems as if Yoder is developing an initial intuition ('historical revision as ethics'), finding allies ('the analogies to our project would be illuminating') or opponents, but not fully engaging either of them.

To conclude, Yoder finds a way of reading history from a different, contingent, point of view. According to Yoder, a revisionist reading of history needs the context of a minority sociology, certain distinctive practices and a sense-making framework (theological or ideological).⁴¹ Evangelical revisionism is the task of an historian, from the context of nonviolent minority churches, to revise historiography in a nonviolent way, to question the standard account (things *had* to go the way they did) and value the importance of the specific decisions people made in history. These decisions can be welcomed as progress or need to be disavowed as apostasy. In doing this, evangelical revisionism serves the church. According to Yoder, for the faithful church evangelical revisionism is a way to see and celebrate history 'doxologically', because it describes the practices of a community that bring glory to God.⁴²

40 Yoder, 'Burden,' 22. Yoder refers to Walter Benjamin's article 'Theses on Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969) 256: 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. The historical materialist therefore... regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.' Is this the origin of Yoder's frequent use of the phrase 'against the grain of the cosmos/ universe'?

41 Yoder, 'Burden,' 22.

42 RP, 128-140.

3.2.1.5 Historical and theological questioning of the evangelical revisionist approach

Yoder's perspective on historiography raised a lot of questions. Some of these questions he addressed in his publications himself. In his early work (1971) Yoder asked if a revisionist historiography would not be biased by definition. According to Yoder there was a time when 'objectivity' was the only professional attitude a historian needed. But these times have gone.

There is no historiography without a viewpoint; the most honest historiography is not that which claims to be value free but rather that which is open about its prejudices and includes in its methodology a check against their leading to distort the record.⁴³

Applying moral criteria to value decisions that were made in the past by individuals or communities, suggests that it is possible to make the right decisions in a particular time and place. In 'The Forms of a Possible Obedience' (1970) Yoder reacts to the theological question of whether actual communal obedience to the words of Jesus is possible at all or if he is advocating for an a-historical perfectionism.⁴⁴ The question was raised at a lecture due to Yoder's placement of 'the fall of the church' further back from the decadence of the mediaeval Catholic Church, to the creeds, to Constantine, to the loss of Jewishness. If that is the case, it was asked, does 'history' not equal 'fall'?⁴⁵ In his answer Yoder makes a distinction between 'Constantinian' historiography, which he calls 'Augustinian,' and evangelical revisionist historiography, which he calls 'possibilitist'. In the Augustinian framework the world or the historical reality participates by definition in the fallen state of all creation. Full obedience is therefore not possible, not because of the human tendency to make wrong decisions, but on a deeper ontological level.⁴⁶ Yoder holds the opposite position, that of the possibility of obedience within history. He finds confirmation with Jews,

⁴³ OR, 161.

⁴⁴ JCSR, 121-131.

⁴⁵ JCSR, 121.

⁴⁶ JCSR, 122.

Anabaptists and Wesleyans, whom he calls 'possibilitists'. A possibility in the sense that they affirm 'a possibility in principle – not an achievement in fact – of human behaviour that pleases God.'⁴⁷ The 'Augustinians' and 'possibilitists' also differ in their attitude towards faith communities or more specifically, about the church. According to Yoder, the true Church is for Augustine and his followers infallible.

Despite all he said about sinfulness there is also something about the empirical Church that can never go wrong. That is described by means of the *notae ecclesiae*, the traits of what can never be lost.⁴⁸

For evangelical revisionist historians, on the other hand, the church, any church, is radically fallible. The obverse of possible obedience is possible apostasy.⁴⁹ This perspective of placing the church *within the course of history* is for Yoder important, because querying that things had to go as they did *way back then*, creates space for doubting the rightness of how they continued to go later.⁵⁰

Even more fundamental to this discussion is the question: how does God act in history? In 'The meaning of the Constantinian Shift' (1983) Yoder argues that according to the witness of the New Testament, God works in history on two distinguishable levels.⁵¹ These levels are the church and the world. Through 'the church as a visible, confessing community' God acts in history. Jesus Christ is Lord over both church and world, but the church already lives according to this fact. In a little while so too will the world, and that is why Yoder made his famous statement: 'The people of God is called to be today what the world is called to be ultimately.'⁵² God, on the other level, also works invisibly to govern the world, the powers that be, 'through the fact that the risen Christ is at the right hand of the Father.'⁵³ This perspective of God's work in history on two levels, or

47 JCSR, 122.

48 JCSR, 123.

49 JCSR, 122-123, see also PK, 'Anabaptism and History', 128.

50 JCSR, 45, 'The Search for a Nonresistant Historiography', 2.

51 CA (2), 61.

52 BP, ix.

53 CA (2), 61.

‘the fact that biblically the meaning of history is carried first of all, and on behalf of all others, by the believing community,⁵⁴ shows for Yoder the urgency of a careful – evangelical revisionist – historiography.⁵⁵

Another question concerns whether Yoder himself is applying the nonviolent aspect of evangelical revisionism in his historiography. Yoder received many comments about the way in which he describes and dismisses Constantinianism, the protestant church, or whatever theological opponents there may be. Is he careful enough, is he ‘nonviolent’ in the sense that he wants to hear his opponents’ arguments? We will return to this question in the next chapter.⁵⁶

Does it really matter that ‘it did not have to be?’ According to Yoder it does. But the events of history are not just the events, but also identity-shaping moments in the way they are captured in the narratives of peoples and faith communities. Is it possible to change formative narratives through a different interpretation and a moral evaluation of the events that have shaped the identity of a community? Does it make sense for a historian to claim in retrospect that things did not have to go as they did? We will also return to this question in the next chapter.

3.2.2 An alternative paradigm: ‘the parting of the ways’ revisited

This section describes how Yoder uses his evangelical revisionist approach to look afresh at ‘the parting of the ways’. To investigate the specifics of Yoder’s approach, I will place his perspective within the greater field of New Testament studies of the twentieth century, especially that of ‘the New Perspective on Paul’.⁵⁷

54 RP, 118.

55 Yoder works with the classic anabaptist description of the government used by God, but outside ‘the perfection of Christ,’ which is the church. As for example formulated in the *Schleitheim Articles*, 1524. See SC.

56 See also J. Alexander Sider, *To See History Doxologically. History and Holiness in John Howard Yoder’s Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 97-132.

57 See 3.2.2.2 for the New Perspective on Paul.

3.2.2.1 *Evangelical revisionism and questioning 'the standard account'*

Yoder uses his evangelical revisionist approach to question the inevitability of the Jewish-Christian Schism and to take the considerations and decisions of the people that lived *back then* seriously. The questions he wants to answer in a different way are: was the schism inevitable? (the contingent question) and was it God's will? (the critical evaluation):

If God's purpose might have been to offer a different future from the one which actually came to be, then we do not do total justice to God's intent in the story by reading it as if the outcome he did not want, but which did happen, had to happen.⁵⁸

Reflecting on the amount of work that was published on the parting of the ways in the 1960's and '70's Yoder notes that most of that research 'is engaged in making adjustments within the framework of the received schema.'⁵⁹ In other words, the research is weakening the schema without replacing it. Yoder calls this received schema 'the standard account' and finds it problematic for various reasons. He describes this standard account shortly as:

The historical development of the first three centuries of our era ended with the presence, in many of the same places, of two separate, mutually exclusive systems (intellectual, cultural, social) called 'Jews' and 'Christians'. According to this account 'Christianity' broke away from 'Judaism' (intellectual, cultural, social). Christians interpret this as supersession, Jews interpret that same separation as apostasy. Yet both parties agree on what happened and why.⁶⁰

According to Yoder the basic theses of this account are⁶¹ that there was first of all a base line of 'normative Judaism' and second, that Jesus rejected normative Judaism and was rejected by it. That reciprocal rejection is not

58 JCSR, 47.

59 JCSR, 30,31.

60 JCSR, 31.

61 JCSR, 47.

a misunderstanding or a tragic fluke, but a proper and necessary response, befitting the real positions of both 'sides'. Third, the apostle Paul rejected Judaism and was rejected by it. Fourth, Christianity as such is defined by these two successive rejections, not by its commonalities with Judaism.

Yoder starts his evangelical revisionism by describing a 'more adequate alternative picture'⁶² and provides a different schema, correcting the four basic theses. The first corrective Yoder proposes is that there was no such thing as normative Judaism in the first century of our era.⁶³ Yoder argues there was a great variety of Jewish groups and there was no normative institute to impose a certain kind of Judaism, not even the Temple (although all groups somehow related to the Temple). After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE everything changed. Some groups perished because they were connected with the Temple or destroyed by the Roman Army. Those who were left had to find a way of being a believing community without the Temple or other forms of Jewish governments. Both the messianists (later called Christians) and Pharisees (later called rabbinic Judaism) found a way.⁶⁴ Both of these movements were Jewish:

They had almost the same moral traditions, almost the same social structures. They differed from one another only about one very Jewish but also very theological question, namely on whether the presence of the Messianic Age should be conceived of as future or also already as present. The Jews who affirmed the messianic quality of their age (something only Jews could do), by confessing Jesus as risen, were no less Jewish than those who rejected that confession.⁶⁵

If there was no such thing as a 'normative Judaism' at least until the end of the second century, Yoder argues, the whole picture must be redrawn.⁶⁶

⁶² JCSR, 31.

⁶³ JCSR, 47-49, 32.

⁶⁴ Yoder refers to Jacob Neusner's work to make his point, JCSR, 48, probably from *Method and Meaning in Ancient Judaism* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), JCSR, 64.

⁶⁵ JCSR, 48-49.

⁶⁶ JCSR, 32 'Not until the end of the second century of our era can the historian say that there existed a single definition of Jewishness claiming normativity. It acquired an

The second corrective Yoder puts forward is that neither Jesus, nor Paul, nor the apostolic communities rejected normative Judaism.⁶⁷ If there is no 'normative Judaism' it is hard to reject it, but there is more to it than this. Jesus, Paul and the apostolic communities did not reject 'Judaism' because they were themselves fully Jewish and so was their proclamation of a new age that had begun.⁶⁸ In his argument Yoder rejects the supposed dichotomy between 'Judaism' and 'Jesus' new teaching'. This dichotomy teaches that where Judaism represented earthly kingdoms, Old Testament wars and 'external' and 'communal' thinking, Jesus' new teaching was spiritual, and his pacifism is thought to be the product of 'individualization' and 'interiorization'. Yoder rejects this line of thinking and shows instead how particularly Jewish Jesus' teaching is, for example in his teaching on nonviolence.⁶⁹ He concludes

Jesus did not reject anything Jewish in calling for love of the enemy, and those who reject what he said on that topic do not reject it because they are Jewish.⁷⁰

Paul did not leave or reject Judaism either. According to Yoder, the ministry of Paul is one of the other major subjects in the ongoing debate about the parting of the ways in which 'Judaism' and 'Christianity' are defined over against each other. Since Martin Luther there has been the tendency to read the first as 'Law' and the latter as 'Grace'.⁷¹ Yoder rejects this perspective. For his argument on Paul he uses the work of Hans-Joachim Schoeps, and his 1959 study *Paul: the Theology of the Apostle in the Light*

institutional definition in the networking of the rabbinate, and an intellectual vision in the codification of the *Mishna*.' 'Yet those beginnings, whenever we say they began, were smaller in constituency and weaker in terms of inner coherence than were the 'Christians' at that time. Even once codified, the *Mishna* was not immediately 'received' (in the strong technical sense) from Babylon to Barcelona. It needed to be propagated and to make its way in the synagogues, just as the Christian gospel before it had to do.'

⁶⁷ JCSR, 49-51, 32-35.

⁶⁸ JCSR, 49, 151.

⁶⁹ JCSR, 69-89.

⁷⁰ JCSR, 70.

⁷¹ JCSR, 93.

of Jewish Religious History.⁷² Yoder draws a picture of Paul not as the Hellenistic thinker who opposed 'Judaism' in his ministry and letters,⁷³ but of Paul as 'the great Judaizer':

Far from being the great Hellenizer of an original Jewish message, Paul is rather the great Judaizer of Hellenistic culture. He comes with his monotheism into a polytheistic world, with his ethical rigour into a hedonistic world. He teaches Aramaic prayers to Gentile believers and expands the Pharisaic *chabourah* or love feast into a celebration of inter-ethnic unity. Paul is thus not the pioneer of mission to the Gentiles. Mission to the Gentiles had been going on for generations.⁷⁴

What is original about Paul's mission is, according to Yoder, its place in salvation history. So Paul did not start something non-Jewish. What had changed is that a new age had begun. It had begun with the Resurrection, which only a Pharisee could believe in.⁷⁵

And finally, apostolic communities did not reject Judaism either. After looking at the various reasons that are given to explain the beginning of the schism between messianic and rabbinic Jews, Yoder concludes:

Whenever the initiative was taken to make the breach irrevocable and by whomever, the fact stands that the non-schismatic stance and the non-split sociology, the stance of Paul and the New Testament and of the Jewish society which tolerated the overlap, had stood for at least a full century.⁷⁶

⁷² Yoder chooses the work of Hans-Joachim Schoeps to 'Rather than surveying that complexity down the years as a full account would need to, let me leap over it to the beginnings of the modern debate.' JCSR, 94.

⁷³ Yoder refers for example to the work of Adolf von Harnack, JCSR, 93.

⁷⁴ JCSR, 95, 151 'How Paul led, including his solutions to the detailed problems of building communities in Corinth facing dietary and calendar conflicts, was very similar to the solutions which had been found under the leadership of rabbis like the great Hillel.'

⁷⁵ JCSR, 34.

⁷⁶ JCSR, 57.

These two revisions demand a third; the Jews did not reject Christianity.⁷⁷

Yoder summarizes thus:

Again this thesis is true far more deeply than in the superficial sense that it is the sum total of the other two. Jewishness or Judaism as a system of beliefs and practices did not reject Christianity as a belief system. Nor did Jewry as a body of people, or most of their institutions, reject believers in Jesus as a people.⁷⁸

Reflecting on the history of the first generations of Jewish Christians Yoder develops this perspective: the Temple of Jerusalem was open to believers in Jesus until its destruction. There were reports of conflicts, but that did not prevent believers in Jesus from participating in the life of the Temple, attending the synagogues, keeping the Jewish calendar and being observant of the Jewish lifestyle. Outside of Jerusalem (the diaspora) the social context of the believing community was the synagogue. There were reports of debates and arguments, even of synagogues who were divided. But both parties in such a split called themselves synagogues and considered themselves Jewish.⁷⁹ Yoder concludes: ‘To be a Jew and to be a follower of Jesus were not alternatives.’⁸⁰

3.2.2.2 *Yoder’s contingent perspective in light of New Testament studies*

Yoder’s perspective on the first centuries and the Jewish-Christian schism, as described in this section, has become more common in New Testament studies. Yoder, however, developed his perspective in the 1970s, even before E.P. Sanders published his *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977)⁸¹ which led to a lot of publications on the subject and the so-called ‘New Perspective on Paul.’⁸² As was also noted regarding his *magnum opus* *The*

77 JCSR, 51.

78 JCSR, 51.

79 JCSR, 51.

80 JCSR, 51.

81 E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977).

82 This term was first used by James Dunn in his now famous 1982 lecture ‘The New Perspective on Paul’. James D.G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul* (rev ed), (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 99-120.

Politics of Jesus (1972), Yoder had a good intuition for what was going on in the field of New Testament studies, and participated in that in his publications.⁸³ At the same time Yoder's approach differs from that which is common in New Testament studies, and that difference is the specific approach of evangelical revisionism.⁸⁴

How does Yoder's approach relate to the field of Paul studies in the late twentieth century? In his work on the New Perspective on Paul, David Bolton⁸⁵ offers an overview of the different approaches in Pauline studies up until 1975. He distinguishes four 'schools', following Herman Ridderbos⁸⁶ approach:⁸⁷

- 1 The Hegelian Paul of the Tübingen School (Ferdinand Bauer)
- 2 The Kantian Paul of the Liberal School (Wilhelm Wrede, Adolf von Harnack)
- 3 The Greek mysteries/ Gnostic Paul of the History of Religions' school (Otto Pfeleiderer, Richard Ritzenstein, Wilhelm Bousset, Rudolf Bultmann)
- 4 The Jewish Paul of the Eschatological School (Albert Schweitzer)

The first three schools emphasized the Lutheran antithesis that placed Paul methodologically over against Judaism. Bolton shows how the first three schools considered Paul as a bridge builder between first-century Jewish Christianity and nineteenth-century German cultural Christianity. The universalist message of Paul (as the basis of western civilization) was placed over against the particular, provincial message of Judaism.⁸⁸ Albert Schweitzer opposed these German cultural varieties of the old Lutheran law and grace antithesis. In his work (for example *Geschichte der Paulinische*

83 JCSR, 51.

84 JCSR, 117.

85 David Bolton, *Justifying Paul Among Jews and Christians? A Critical Investigation of the New Perspective on Paul in Light of Jewish Christian Dialogue* (Leuven, 2010).

86 Herman Ridderbos, *Paulus. Ontwerp van zijn theologie* (Kampen: Kok, 1966), 5-39.

87 Bolton, *Justifying*, 2-30.

88 Bolton, *Justifying*, 2-21.

*Forschung von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart*⁸⁹ and *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*⁹⁰) he dismantled the scholarly Hellenisation of Paul as developed in the first three schools and offered an alternative picture. The entry into Paul's soteriology was Paul's eschatological focus.⁹¹ Alongside that, Paul must be seen as a diaspora Jew and he should be interpreted from a Palestinian pharisaical context. According to Schweitzer Paul never intended to start a new religion.

Nothing of the kind ever entered into his purpose. For him there was only one religion, that of Judaism.⁹²

Thus, the majority of the field of Pauline studies up until 1975 considered Paul to be the Helleniser of the gospel and initiator of the emancipation of 'Christianity' from 'Judaism'. The eschatological school of Albert Schweitzer was the only alternative in Christian scholarly circles. In Jewish scholarly circles⁹³ Hans-Joachim Schoeps came to similar conclusions as he drew a picture of Paul as a rabbinic exegete, influenced by the eschatological thought of the rabbinic schools. In light of this Paul had to be interpreted against the background of Hellenistic diaspora Judaism.⁹⁴

After the Shoah, Bolton notes, the field of New Testament studies was challenged at three levels that called for a rereading. These three questions led to the line of research we now call the New Perspective on Paul.⁹⁵

First, there was the question of the Jewishness of Paul. One of the major responders to this question was W.H. Davies with his *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*.⁹⁶ Progressing

89 Albert Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Paulinische Forschung von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1911).

90 Albert Schweitzer, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*, (Tübingen: Mohr, 1930).

91 Bolton, *Justifying* 22-30. That is reason why this Pauline 'school' is called eschatological.

92 Schweitzer as quoted in Bolton, *Justifying*, 27.

93 Bolton distinguishes between Christian and Jewish scholarly circles. For Schoeps this approach is problematic, because as a messianic Jew he was both.

94 See H.J. Schoeps, *Paul. The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), and Bolton, *Justifying* 42-48.

95 Bolton, *Justifying*, 63.

96 W.H. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (London: SPCK, 1955).

on Schweitzer's work he reads Paul as part of Palestinian Judaism.⁹⁷ Paul was a Pharisee who 'baptized' his Pharisaic concepts 'unto Christ'. Reading Paul, Davies comes to the conclusion that in Paul's perspective the new covenant did not replace the old, but was an extension of it.⁹⁸

The second question concerned Luther's reading of Paul. Bolton chooses Krister Stendahl's article 'The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West'⁹⁹ as an influential attempt to reread Paul at this point.¹⁰⁰ In this article Stendahl argued two main things: first, Paul did not wrestle with feelings of personal guilt as Augustine and Luther did, and second, Paul's doctrine of salvation was not about personal guilt and salvation but about how the Gentiles could enter the covenant with Israel's God.¹⁰¹

The third question was that of the soteriology of Late Second Temple/Early Rabbinic Judaism.¹⁰² Influenced by the work of Albert Schweitzer, G. F. Moore and W.H. Davies, E.P. Sanders challenged the mainstream understanding Christian scholars had of the soteriology of first century Judaism.¹⁰³ He did so by reading the rabbinic literature (Tannaitic literature, Dead Sea scrolls and apocrypha) and from these sources he draws a radical different picture of Judaism. Instead of the old picture of Judaism as a legalist system he describes late Temple Judaism as *covenantal nomism*. Sanders writes:

The all-pervasive view can be summarized in the phrase "covenantal nomism". Briefly put, covenantal nomism is the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedi-

97 Bolton, *Justifying*, 63-71.

98 Bolton, *Justifying*, 67-70.

99 Krister Stendahl, 'The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West' in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, Krister Stendahl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 78-96. The paper was delivered in 1961.

100 Bolton, *Justifying*, 71-74.

101 Bolton, *Justifying*, 71-74; Stendahl, *Paul*, 78-96.

102 Bolton, *Justifying*, 74.

103 Bolton, 74-89; see Sanders, *Paul*.

ence to the commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression.¹⁰⁴

In other words, obedience to the law was never thought of as a way of entering the covenant, but as a way of maintaining the covenant relationship with God.¹⁰⁵

In his now famous lecture *The New Perspective on Paul*,¹⁰⁶ Dunn notices that while Stendahl cracked the mould of twentieth-century reconstructions of Paul's theological context, Sanders broke it altogether, by showing how different Christian readings of Paul's context compared to reconstructions from other sources.¹⁰⁷ Dunn is, however, not satisfied by the way in which Sanders shows how 'Paul dealt with that 'covenantal nomism' and what he meant by 'works of the law.'¹⁰⁸ Dunn praises Sanders for the new framework he offers, but is disappointed with the way Sanders fails to use this for his reading of Paul. Dunn offers in his lecture a proposal and a theological agenda for the research of Paul from this new perspective. From that moment on this agenda is referred to as The New Perspective on Paul.

Yoder's reading of Paul and the parting of the ways, though dating from the 1960s/early 1970s, is comparable to the New Perspective on Paul's agenda: Paul should be read and interpreted within the context of first-century Palestinian Judaism. Yoder had access to the works of both Davies and Stendahl and used the material in his work on the Jewish-Christian schism,¹⁰⁹ but just like Dunn he felt that their approach-

104 Sanders, *Paul*, 75. See also Dunn, *New Perspective*, 102,103.

105 See also Dunn, *New Perspective* 102.

106 Dunn, *New Perspective*, 99-120.

107 Dunn, *New Perspective*, 103.

108 James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), xv; Dunn, *New Perspective*, 103-105, 118-120.

109 See for example for Yoder's reference to the work of Stendahl, JCSR, 34,37n, 64n, 94, 98n, 101, 158n; OR, 178; PJ, 50, 182, 191, 219, 173-174, 214-217, 221-224; PT, 401-403; THW, 6, 130, 152, 189. For references to the work of W.H. Davies see for example PJ, 170 and THW, 160.

es only cracked the mould, where Yoder would like the entire mould replaced.¹¹⁰

Reflecting on Dunn's work, Yoder is very appreciative, noting however two points. First of all, he finds the metaphor of two ways which part at a certain point too simplistic, because 'the real cultural reality must have been much more like the branches of the Nile in its delta.'¹¹¹ Second, he observes:

The other point at which Dunn's revision could have been extended is that he takes no account of the component of apostasy within later Christianity, i.e. he does not weave into his rereading of the first centuries a critical perspective on where anti-Jewish Christianity went later, and how the errors of later Christianity (when measured by the New Testament) were at the same time moves away from the Jewish heritage.¹¹²

This critical reading on the level of ethics and theology of history is specific to Yoder's evangelical revisionism.

3.2.2.3 *The specifics of Yoder's approach*

Reading Yoder's work against the major movements within New Testament Studies in the twentieth century, we discover the specifics of Yoder's line of thinking. First of all, his main focus is ecclesiological, instead of purely historical. His historical and exegetical work is always connected to the question of what does this mean for the faith communities we are called to be today. Second, Yoder uses the space his contingent approach offers to firmly state: it did not have to be. There were no historical or theological reasons why the ways should have parted, back then. Third, Yoder develops a theological meaning of history, summarized in the following:

110 JCSR, 30-35.

111 A point which was also noted by Dunn, see for example the preface to the Second Edition of *The Partings of the Ways*, xxiii-xxiv.

112 JCSR, 117.

What happened historically cannot be excluded theologically. If it cannot on historical grounds be excluded for then, it cannot be on theological grounds be forbidden for tomorrow.¹¹³

Fourth, Yoder's evangelical revisionism gives tools to critically read the decisions and developments people faced, back then. Although in his theoretical discourse Yoder finds the criteria in the incarnation, in the specific situation of the schism and Jewish-Christian relations, Yoder finds the criteria in a shared calling, derived from his reading of Jeremiah 29 (a calling that was confirmed in Jesus' teaching and ministry).¹¹⁴ According to Yoder this is a calling to diaspora as mission, and in his reading of the developments that lead to the partings of the ways, Yoder uses this specific calling as the criterion: were these groups faithful to this calling? And fifth, Yoder hopes to create space for dialogue between Jews and Christians from a different perspective.

This interaction of historical and theological perspectives is vulnerable and needs to be done carefully: the temptation to read history as you theologically would like it to be, is always there. This is also the main point of Judith Lieu's article 'The Parting of the Ways': Theological Construct or Historical Reality?' in which she aims this question at James Dunn's work.¹¹⁵ The same question could however be applied to Yoder's approach. We return to that question in Chapter 4.

3.2.2.4 *The parting of the ways: it did not have to be?*

Yoder acknowledges that it is part of an ongoing debate which steps were taken by which party in the development of the so called 'Jewish-Christian Schism', but he also notices that for his argument this does not matter so much. Yoder emphasizes that Jews, messianic and non-messianic, together with messianically missionized Gentiles, could read the Tenach together,

113 JCSR, 53.

114 See section 3.3.1.

115 Judith Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity*, 2d. Ed. (Bloomsbury: T&T Clark, 2016), 31-49.

pray together, share their meals and consider themselves as part of one people of God *for at least a few generations*. In other words, ‘the non-schismatic stance and the non-split sociology had stood for at least a full century,’¹¹⁶ lived out by communities all over the Roman empire.¹¹⁷ Yoder stresses the commonalities between the various communities.

They (Jews, messianic and non-messianic, together with messianically missionized Gentiles) shared community life for a few generations.

They shared a vision: mission (a vision which rabbinic Judaism abandoned). Yoder describes how the Judaism of Jeremiah, of Hillel, of Jesus and of Jochanan ben Zakkai was a missionary faith. In reaction to the missionary zeal of the church, the rabbis by the time of the Mishna abandoned their missionary openness, leaving their mission to tell the Gentiles about the God of Abraham to the church. Non-missionary Judaism as such is a product of Christian history (see section 3.3).

They shared an organizational structure: diaspora (a structure which Christianity abandoned in Constantinianism). Since the letter of Jeremiah to the captives in Babylon – according to Yoder’s reading – the people of God are called to a diaspora-shaped community life. This was also the case with the first generations of messianic communities. As the church gained power it lost the diaspora structured community life it was called to. Yoder calls this Constantinianism and only in a Constantinian centralized church structure could a schism be forced (see section 3.4). As Yoder observes:

As long as neither polar party disposed of the power of the civil sword, as long as neither community was administered by a theologically justified centralized hierarchy, and as long as social communities were informal, there was no force in the world to make it impossible for a person, or for many persons, to be in communion at the same time with the rest of the Jews and the rest of the Chris-

116 JCSR, 57.

117 JCSR, 59.

tians, and to live in an overlap between the two populations, maintaining social relations and attending worship events with both.¹¹⁸

A schism between ‘Christians’ and ‘Jews’ developed and became manifest. Looking back, historians and theologians agree, according to Yoder, that this schism had to do with the course of history or irreconcilable practices and theological perspectives. Describing the first centuries from an evangelical revisionist point of view, which asked for an alternative paradigm, leads Yoder to the conclusion that there might have been another way. Or in Yoder’s words, ‘it did not have to be. *Tertium datur*.’¹¹⁹

3.3 The Jewish Narrative – According to Yoder

3.3.1 *The narrative: a calling to diaspora as mission*

A main part of Yoder’s ‘Jewishness of the free church vision’ is shaped by his perspective of the Jewish people’s history and religious self-understanding. In this section Yoder’s revisionist perspective and free church reading of the Jewish people is explored.

In an introduction into the matter Yoder raises the question of why we need to reflect on who or what ‘the Jews’ ‘ought’ to be. ‘Why not let the Jews be themselves?’¹²⁰ Yoder is convinced that as Christians we are obliged to have a theology of Judaism, and if that is the case, we better do it carefully: ‘we must own and struggle with the problem.’¹²¹

In *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003) Yoder describes how the Jewish people through the centuries survived as a minority in a pagan (and later Christian) world. Although in a diaspora situation, they did not only survive but they did well. Yoder calls this ‘the blessing of diaspora.’¹²² This accommodation to the new situation was possible because

118 JCSR, 61.

119 JCSR, 63. Yoder is playing with the expression *non tertium datur* ‘no third way is given’ by stating there is a third way: *tertium datur*.

120 JCSR, 113.

121 JCSR, 112-113.

122 JCSR, 183-190.

of the narrative that shaped the lives of the Jewish communities in the diaspora. What does the Jewish narrative look like according to Yoder and how did this narrative inspire ‘one of the most innovative developments in the history of religion?’¹²³

3.3.1.1 *The Jeremiatic turn: from exile to diaspora*

Yoder reads Jeremiah 29 as a turning point in the biblical narrative. Jeremiah 29 contains a letter the prophet Jeremiah sent to the captives in Babylon, telling them to settle, build houses, marry, and ‘seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace’ (Jeremiah 27:9). From that moment on the Jewish people were called, and according to Yoder embraced that calling,¹²⁴ to live in dispersion and in that dispersion be a blessing to the nations. Yoder calls this ‘diaspora as mission.’¹²⁵ This is a major turn from landedness to dispersion, from temple to synagogue, from centrality to diaspora, from the curse of exile to the calling and blessing of *galuth*.¹²⁶

Although it was a major turn, according to Yoder the concept was not new to Israel’s narrative, and he gives numerous examples of how the Jewish scriptures are read from this diaspora perspective. Two notions are distinctive in these stories: the notion of God scattering the human race, and the notion of the kingship of God.

3.3.1.2 *The notion of God scattering mankind*

Yoder shows how the narrative of the Jewish people helped them to interpret the new situation as part of God’s calling for his people. Yoder mentions how, for example, the story of Babel (in which God is scatter-

123 JCSR, 78.

124 JCSR, 171, ‘the Jewish settlers in Babylon (and in all other cities to which they were scattered of which we know less) did not accept “not being in charge” as a lesser-evil strategy of mere survival, nor as a mere tactic, but as their mission.’

125 JCSR, 22,33,171,183,190,197n9.

126 JCSR, 183-196. *Galuth* is the Hebrew word for diaspora.

ing mankind for their own good) is told by the generations of Jews living around Babylon as the immediate background to the call to Abraham' (in which God's plan for the Gentiles is already mentioned).¹²⁷ In this context Jeremiah interprets the exilic event in light of God's greater story with the people of Israel and the nations. The real mission of the scattered Jews, according to Jeremiah's message, is to settle into Babylon, to make themselves at home, and to embrace this calling to diaspora as mission.

3.3.1.3 The notion of the kingship of God

Another major notion in the narrative of the Jewish people is, according to Yoder, the notion of the kingship of God. The scriptures of Israel tell about the disappointment not only of Samuel, but of God himself, in the rise of the Davidic dynasty and Israel's longing 'to be like the other nations'. In asking for a king they rejected God as their king and accepted the oppressive nature of kingship, as for example described in Jotham's fable and warnings from Samuel and other prophets.¹²⁸ Yoder calls this 'the ambivalence of the Davidic project.'¹²⁹

In the notion of God's kingship of all the world lies a restraint in seeing 'kingship' or 'statehood' as desirable for the honor of God or the dignity of the people.¹³⁰ It was the false prophets who proclaimed victory in the rise of the great empires around Judah and Israel. God's prophets called for faith in the God of all the earth, faith in terms of trusting God alone for their survival.¹³¹ Yoder notes, 'With Jeremiah God abandoned kingship as a vehicle of his people's identity.'¹³² And this was not only the case in the diaspora, but also from that moment on, in Judea as well. When Ezra and Nehemiah returned to Judea they established a kind of society

127 JCSR, 190.

128 Judges 9; I Samuel 8. See also PT, 241-245.

129 JCSR, 187.

130 NBH, 80; PWK, 71-72.

131 PJ, 79; John Howard Yoder, "'To Your Tents, O Israel': The Legacy of Israel's Experience with Holy War" in SIR 18 (1989), 350; OR, 99; WL, 67-70; CA, 325,326.

132 JCSR, 71.

and worship without political independence or a king.¹³³ The stories of Esther and Daniel show how faithful lives can be lived at the pagan courts, under a pagan king.¹³⁴ Yoder calls this ‘the Joseph paradigm’.¹³⁵ They show how faithfulness to God as Lord of all regularly convinces pagan kings to acknowledge the God of Israel as the true God.¹³⁶ Yoder argues that these stories are, however, not ‘merely demonstrative of individual virtue. They define a distinctive understanding of the nature of God.’¹³⁷ In Yoder’s perspective the kingship of God is an essential notion in the narrative of Israel, because it shows how God can use these small, faithful communities to bless the nations.¹³⁸ From Jeremiah on God calls his people for this reason to a diaspora-shaped lifestyle.¹³⁹

3.3.1.4 Prefiguring the early Christian attitude to the Gentile world

This ‘Jewish quietism since Jeremiah’¹⁴⁰ is socially expressed in the synagogue, the Torah and the rabbinate. The reasons for this lifestyle were, however, very theological. According to Yoder, if you were to ask Jews since Jeremiah (including the first Christians) about their attitude to pagan empires they would give at least five theological reasons for their diaspora shaped lifestyle:¹⁴¹

First, God is sovereign over history, there is no need to seize political sovereignty in order for God’s will to be done. Second, establishing a righteous order is the work of the Messiah. Third, the efforts of the Maccabees, the Zealots and Bar Kochba were not blessed by God (so God does

133 JCSR, 71.

134 JCSR, 71, 78 ‘These Israelites in pagan courts had all stood up victoriously for the one true God, disobeying non-violently, amidst a hostile pagan culture.’

135 JCSR, 186. ‘What we might call ‘the Joseph paradigm’ became a standard type. In three different ages and places, the same experiences recur in the Hebrew story.’

136 JCSR, 78.

137 JCSR, 244 from the sermon ‘Salvation is from the Jews’.

138 JCSR, 172.

139 RP, 133; DPR, 29; CA, 138, 391.

140 Yoder regularly interprets Judaism using Anabaptist terminology, this is part of his approach of reading Judaism as a free church. The use of the term quietism – typically associated with Mennonites – is an example of this. JCSR, 199n36.

141 JCSR, 170-171, 190-191. See also RP 133-134; NBH, 137-138; PWK, 111.

not want us to revolt, to build or restore a kingdom). Fourth, if a righteous God wants to punish us for our sins, our self-defense would interfere with that purpose. Fifth, the death of the righteous sanctifies the Name and makes a doxological contribution to history.¹⁴²

This was the social and theological grounding of the nonviolent ethics of Jesus and the first Christians. Jesus called his disciples to (a life of) crucifixion and diaspora,¹⁴³ and this was not something entirely new, but 'the ethos of the early Christians was a direct prolongation and fulfillment of the ethos of Jewry.'¹⁴⁴

3.3.1.5 Questions on 'diaspora as mission'

This perspective on diaspora as mission raises many questions. For example, on an exegetical level does Yoder put too much weight on Jeremiah 29? Does this letter to the exiles justify this emphasis, considering the wider context of Jeremiah and the rest of the story as told in the prophetic books such as Ezra and Nehemiah?

It also raises questions on the level of Judaism's self-understanding as a people. Of course, 'Judaism' is very broad, with different streams in different times, but is there record of any group who really embraced diaspora as a blessing or calling? Or is the main attitude, while making the best of diaspora, the hope for return ('next year in Jerusalem')?¹⁴⁵

Yoder emphasizes that since Jeremiah, to be Jewish included some element of freedom. A choice against assimilation in order to be an alternative minority was a voluntary decision. Whereas, since the time of Constantine, being a part of Christianity largely ceased being voluntary.¹⁴⁶ Yoder thus sets out a view on the formation of Jewish peoplehood as arising from a voluntary embrace of a diaspora-shaped lifestyle and of the very narrative that forms and inspires this way of living. In Yoder's perspective

142 See also THW, 32,33.

143 WL, 172.

144 JCSR, 191; RP 133-134; NTL, 122-125; WL, 46-49.

145 'Next year in Jerusalem' are the last words of the Passover Seder.

146 JCSR, 155.

this is faithful Judaism. This is indeed a free church reading of the Jewish people, as Daniel Boyarin has interpreted it.¹⁴⁷ In doing so, Yoder moves to a conditional approach towards Jewish peoplehood, and it is questionable whether that approach is compatible with the mainstream Jewish perspective where Jewish peoplehood is formed first and foremost by God's election of the people.¹⁴⁸ For any Christian theologian since the Shoah it is problematic to make a distinction between faithful and apostate Judaism, whether the criterion is the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah or the acceptance of a peace church ethic. These questions are engaged in Chapter 4.

3.3.2 Synagogues: the social expression of diaspora life

According to Yoder, the calling to diaspora led to the development of a new form of worship.¹⁴⁹ The Jewish people in the exile lived with the absence of the Temple and had to find a way of being faith communities without it. Yoder reads the promises of return as eschatological promises to be fulfilled in the messianic age.¹⁵⁰ This is also how he reads the memory of the Temple and how it influenced the development of synagogal worship: the memory of the Temple was kept alive in the hope of return in the messianic age.¹⁵¹ Because of the centrality of the Temple, the Jewish people would not set up another place of priestly, sacrificial worship in the exiled communities. The Temple was not replaced by another Temple, but by a house of prayer, a synagogue, a gathering of believers around the Scriptures.¹⁵² In the synagogue a lay, book-centered, locally managed community was created,¹⁵³ which, according to Yoder, was 'sociologically speaking perhaps the most fundamental innovation in the history of religion.'¹⁵⁴

147 Daniel Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church.'

148 See also the main argument of Tommy Givens, *We the People. Israel and the Catholicity of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).

149 THW, 46.

150 JCSR, 190.

151 JCSR, 186.

152 JCSR, 192-193.

153 JCSR, 201n48.

154 JCSR, 78.

According to Yoder, these faith communities were marked by the following characteristics.¹⁵⁵ First, that of Torah: the primary vehicle of identity definition is a text which can be copied, and can be read anywhere. Second, the ground floor of 'worship' is reading and singing the texts. Third, a Jewish faith community can exist wherever there are ten households (a minyan). No priesthood, no hierarchy is needed. The role of the rabbi is that of a scribe, rather than that of a prophet, priest or prince. Fourth, the international unity of the people does not depend on a High Priest or Pope or King, but sustained by practices such as inter-visitation, intermarriage, commerce and rabbinic consultation. Fifth, Jewish identity is grounded in the common life itself, *halakhah*, and the shared remembering of the story behind it.

According to Yoder, these communities could exist, even flourish, as minority communities in a dominant surrounding pagan culture, as long as they were tolerated.¹⁵⁶ There was no need or drive toward cultural homogeneity, political control or autarchy. Each of these characteristics, Yoder maintained, was

sociologically innovative. Each was indispensable to define Jewish identity outside of Palestine to make it viable. Each had its Palestinian counterparts, but the home of each was in the Diaspora. Each of them guaranteed that while 'quietist' and 'pacifist'..., this community would be neither silent nor powerless. Cumulatively they made of Jewry an effective missionary people all across the Middle East.¹⁵⁷

In this description Yoder summarizes characteristics of the synagogue that echo the free church vision, or in other words Anabaptist or Mennonite communities. Yoder reads the synagogues as a congregational system. It is fascinating that he says that no prince was needed. He must have been aware that one of the successors of Jochanan ben Zakki was called Yehu-

155 JCSR, 187. See also PWK, 111; BP, 56.

156 JCSR, 172.

157 JCSR, 171.

da haNasi, which means Judah the Prince. Yehuda haNasi was famous for compiling the Mishnah and putting the oral tradition on paper. Of course, ‘nasi’ was the word used for the president of the Sanhedrin, but in Yehuda’s case this title also had to do with his royal household and his religious and moral impact on the widespread Jewish communities. This impact was said to be broader than the Jewish communities, and there are stories that even the Roman emperor visited his house. In other words, Yehuda haNasi was portrayed as a bishop at the height of their power.¹⁵⁸

Yoder focusses on the orthodox tradition and rabbis (*the mitnagdim*) in the same way. Within orthodox tradition there is a strong emphasis on the responsibility of every man to study and learn. The role of the rabbi is indeed that of a scribe. In Chassidic Judaism however, the role of the rabbi is more of a prophet and priest combined, a *Zaddik*, almost a mediator between God and people.¹⁵⁹

3.3.3 *Nonviolence: never have they reached for the sword*¹⁶⁰

Yoder reads Judaism as an essentially nonviolent system. In *Nevertheless* Yoder summarizes his perspective on Jewish ethical life very briefly in one sentence: ‘Since Jeremiah on a world scale and since Bar Kochba even in the former land of Israel, nonviolence is the normative Jewish moral vision.’¹⁶¹ How did Yoder develop this argument throughout his work?

According to Yoder the people of Israel since Jeremiah were called to a diaspora lifestyle. Directly connected to this diaspora lifestyle is an ethic of nonviolence which was based on the Old Testament narratives that YHWH saves his people without their need to act.¹⁶² This is the precise fo-

158 See for example Jacob Neusner (ed.), *Dictionary of Ancient Rabbis* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 269-278.

159 See for an example of an orthodox criticism of ‘Zaddikism’ Solomon Schechter, *Studies in Judaism, Essays on Persons, Concepts, and Movements of Thought in Jewish Tradition* (New York: JPS, 1958), 181-183, where he criticizes the chassidic ‘doctrine’ of the intermediary function of the Rabbi. Yoder would call this phenomenon ‘the religious specialist’, see ‘The Fullness of Christ’ in *Concern*, No. 17, 33-37; TFC, 1-8; BP, 55-58.

160 JCSR, 81.

161 NTL, 123.

162 PJ, 76.

cus from which Yoder chooses to deal with the violent holy war narratives in the Old Testament. He wants to look at these narratives in the way, he says, they are read by the Jewish people.¹⁶³ They are first read as testimonies of the community's faith¹⁶⁴ and second, the fact that they are part of the canonical collection demands that they are read directionally.¹⁶⁵

The phenomenon of holy war calls the people to an attitude of 'believe'. This faith or *emunah* does not consist of some ideas about God, or an inward attitude. To believe is to put your trust in God for survival as a people.¹⁶⁶ 'Israel's identity began with the imperative: "Stand still and behold YHWH's salvation."¹⁶⁷ That is what made Israel different from the other people. The holy wars as ad hoc charismatic events,¹⁶⁸ where God acted and his people were saved, disappeared with the rise of the Davidic dynasty. When the Israelites wanted to have a king like other kings and a standing army like other nations had, when the people did not trust in God alone to save them, but put their faith in their kings and their armies, the holy wars came to an end.¹⁶⁹ The experience with the holy wars told the people of Israel that their survival could be trusted to YHWH as their King. In situations of national crisis the prophets did not interpret these stories as 'Israel slaughtered the Amalikites *before* and therefore we should put to death all the enemies of God *right here and now*.'¹⁷⁰ They rather made the point 'YHWH has always taken care of us in the past; should

163 PJ, 76; Yoder, 'To your tents.' See also Daniël Drost, 'Is JHWH een geweldddige Strijder? Een vergelijking tussen Arie Versluis' dissertatie *Geen verbond, geen genade* en John Howard Yoders geweldloze benadering', *Wapenveld*, Jaargang 62, nr 6 (December 2012): 28-35.

164 Yoder, 'To your tents,' 355.

165 Yoder, 'To your tents,' 354.

166 Yoder, 'To your tents,' 350.

167 Yoder, 'To your tents,' 351.

168 OR, 98. Drawing heavily on the work of Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior. The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1980) Yoder describes the holy wars as *herem*, as a religious or ritual event, an ad hoc charismatic event.

169 Yoder, 'To your tents,' 347. See also WL, 69 'The call for the faithful Israelite will therefore be not to fight boldly and even less to fight brutally. It is to trust Yahweh.' Looks as if a word was missing from the quote. Check for accuracy.

170 OR, 99.

we not be able to trust His providence for the immediate future?’¹⁷¹ Yoder concludes:

Its impact in those later prophetic proclamations was to work *against* the development of a military caste, military alliances, and political designs based on the availability of military power.¹⁷²

In this description of Jewish faith in YHWH for their survival Yoder draws a straight line from the holy wars to the Jewish pacifism of Jesus and Johanan ben Zakkai.¹⁷³

Part of Yoder’s argument is his focus on a ‘directional reading’ of the canonical texts. What do these texts say about what it meant to be a people of God, *back then*, and how are these texts to be read to practice what it means to be a people of God *right now*? There is a pattern, a direction, of God’s acting with his people in history, and of how Israel interpreted, narrated and celebrated this acting.¹⁷⁴ This directional reading moves, according to Yoder, from patriarch to pharaoh, from Exodus to Sinai, from judges into kingship and back out; in short from the holy wars of Joshua to the pacifism of Jesus and Rabbinic Judaism.¹⁷⁵

Although most of Yoder’s argumentation was already present in some early works such as *The Original Revolution* (1971), he developed it further over time. He started to talk about ‘Jewish Pacifism’ as the dominant pattern in Rabbinic Jewish ethical thinking and practice. He wrote several articles with the title ‘From the wars of Joshua to Jewish Pacifism.’¹⁷⁶ He used terms like ‘the pacifism of Rabbinic monotheism,’¹⁷⁷ ‘the nonvi-

171 OR, 99.

172 OR, 99.

173 JCSR, 75, 150-152, 170; NTL, 122-125; PK, 75; CA, 139-140; NBH, 81,82.

174 As Yoder notices at the beginning of ‘To your tents,’ 347: ‘The communities appropriation of the texts as “canonical” and its selection of certain themes above others as particularly rewarding for later believers to learn from, must properly move beyond the texts’ own witness. What then was it about the war of YHWH which constituted then the meaning of “God” – of being Israel?’

175 Yoder, ‘To your tents,’ 354.

176 See for example WL, NBH.

177 NTL, 122-125.

olence of Rabbinic Judaism',¹⁷⁸ and even 'Judaism as a Peace Church.'¹⁷⁹ These articles are written in different times and for different occasions, but there is a distinct pattern to the way in which he unfolds his argument.

This pattern can be described in the following way: Yoder starts with (a) the holy war experiences (the kingship of God), (b) the call to diaspora since Jeremiah, and then moves to (c) the Rabbinic interpretation of these narratives, which is in Yoder's reading a Rabbinic explanation of why Jewish pacifism makes sense.¹⁸⁰ Yoder notices at least five explanations for Jewish pacifism.¹⁸¹

First, the sacredness of blood. Blood is life and belongs to God. Second, the Messiah has not yet come. Only the Messiah can restore a righteous order and only he could justify the shedding of blood. The time of his coming will be a time of peace, so if that is the case, his people participate in that coming by living in peace already. Third, Judaism is concerned to learn from the Zealot experiences, including the final catastrophe in 130-35 CE with Bar Kochba, the earlier catastrophe in 66-70 CE, and the still earlier Maccabean drama.¹⁸² Fourth, God has His own (hidden) way of dealing with the Gentiles. It is not a Jewish responsibility to be the instruments of God's wrath.¹⁸³ Fifth, suffering has a place in the divine economy. That the faithful must suffer is a mystery in the Jewish understanding of history. Some suffering is explained 'because of our sins'. Some suffering is beyond explanation (as with Auschwitz). In any case, some suffering at the hand of the *goyim* is to be expected and excepted as sanctifying the name of God.¹⁸⁴

178 CA, 137-143.

179 JCSR, 75-87.

180 JCSR, 82-87.

181 CA, 141-142; WL, 74-75; NBH, 82-84; JCSR, 82-84. The most detailed version including references to Rabbinic literature is 'The Nonviolence of Judaism from Jeremiah to Hertzl', Chapter 3 in RRN (1994).

182 Yoder notices at several occasions that it was rabbi Steven Schwarzschild who pointed him to the fact that I and II Maccabees are part of the Christian canon, not of the Jewish. See for example JCSR, 200n40.

183 CA, 141.

184 CA, 142.

In *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003) Yoder gives two more explanations, the first of which is the general interpretive pattern called *tzerupah* (refinement). The rabbis 'consistently' interpreted the violence out of the stories and the commandments.¹⁸⁵ And the second is that the survival of Israel is promised by God. Drawing on Steven Schwarzschild's distinction, Yoder notices that there are two ways to take that promise, two conceptions of covenant: an ethical view and a metaphysical view. Despite their differences, there is also a great commonality: 'the one thing that Israel is not to do under *either* hypothesis is to take survival into its own hands.'¹⁸⁶

In 'The Nonviolence of Judaism from Jeremiah to Hertzl' (1994), one of his latest and most extended versions of a chapter on the subject, Yoder follows the same pattern, but adds a few examples of *tzerupah*. He quotes from a variety of Rabbinic texts, both halakhic and exegetic.¹⁸⁷ For example: Mercy, not rejoicing in the suffering of the guilty, is a divine quality which humans should imitate;¹⁸⁸ "Mosaic" provisions for Israelite

185 JCSR, 83 'The rabbis consistently downplay the wars of the age of Moses, Joshua and the Judges. They interpreted the violence out of the stories of Deborah or even Psalm 37. They do not consider Moses to have been justified for killing the Egyptian. They dismantle and transform the Mosaic legislation, which provides for capital punishment, by tightening radically the rules of evidence and by substituting other forms of retribution. This is part of the theme of the general interpretative pattern called 'refinement', *tzerupah*.'

In 'The Nonviolence of Judaism from Jeremiah to Hertzl' Yoder gives examples of this kind of reasoning from rabbinic literature, for example Mishna Makot 1,10:

'A Sanhedrin that executes once in seven years is branded a "destructive tribunal." R. Eliezer b. Azariah says: "once in seventy years." R. Tarvon and R. Akiba say: "Were we members of a Sanhedrin no person would ever be put to death."

and Torah Temimah on Deut. 21:8:

"Be merciful, O God, unto your people Israel whom you have released." For that is the reason that the Holy One, Blessed be He, has redeemed them from Egypt, so that among them and their descendants there should be no shedders of blood.'

186 JCSR, 84. Yoder works with Steven Schwarzschild's article 'The Theology of Jewish Survival', CCARJ Vol. 15, No. 4 (Oct. 1968), later published in Menachem Kellner (ed.) *The Pursuit of the Ideal. Jewish Writings of Steven Schwarzschild* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 83-98.

187 The collection of quotations from rabbinic sources was brought together by Yizhar Tal and Daniel Smith. Yoder used this collection as a handout for his lectures on the nonviolence of Rabbinic Judaism for a couple of years before he used them in his own publications.

188 Yoder refers to Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 39b, cf. Megila 10b. and Proverbs 24:17.

war provided for exemptions from the obligation to serve in war, on the basis of the moral priority of the ordinary duties of life;¹⁸⁹ to reconcile humans is to do the work of God;¹⁹⁰ separate the sinner from the sin, seek the adversary's well-being, curbing your own evil drive¹⁹¹ and, even in legitimate combat the enemy's well-being is to be respected.¹⁹²

Yoder had a theological intuition about the nonviolence of Jesus and the Jewish tradition which he explored in *The Original Revolution* (1971) and kept testing and developing it until his death in 1997. From a desire to read the practices of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists as faithful to the convictions of the early church, and the practices of the early church as faithful to the teachings of Jesus, and the teachings of Jesus as faithful to Israel's narrative, he uncovered this 'Jeremiatic Turn' as the narrative that shaped diaspora life: mission as calling and embodiment, expressed in synagogue worship, the teachings of Jesus and the moral life of rabbinic Judaism until Hertzl.

Yoder's approach, inspiring as it is, raises a lot of questions however. Yoder's reading of the rabbinic material is too selective an approach, in which he uses the rabbinic sources too much on his own conditions. Schwarzschild points this out in their correspondence, as did Jacob Neusner.¹⁹³ Following on from this: is it possible to talk about a normative Jewish moral vision? Is this not too much of an essentialist approach? Does

189 Yoder refers to Deuteronomy 24:5 and Mishna Sotah 8,4, Maimonides Mishne Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars VII, 9-10 and Tosefta to Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 44a, VII 14.

190 Yoder refers to a quote from Rabbi Meir, which he read in *A Rabbinic Anthology* by Montefiore and Howe, without specifying the source in Talmud (Gittin 52b).

191 Yoder refers to Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 10a and exegetical remarks on Exodus 23:5 and Deuteronomy 22:4. Namely, Nahmanides on Deuteronomy 22, Torah Temima on Exodus 23, Babylonian Talmud Baba Mezia 32b, Mechilta de Rashbi 23,4 and Midrash Genesis Rabbah 38:3. He also refers to Proverbs 25:21 and midrashim: Midrash Proverbs 25, Midrash Aggadah Exodus 23:5.

192 Yoder refers to Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 74a and to various exegetical works: Midrash Genesis Rabbah 76,2, Torah Shlema on Genesis 32:7 citing an early edition of Midrash Tanhuma found in the Schechter Genizah, Sifte Hachanim on Gen. 32:7, Midrash Tanhuma, Lech Lecha, 19, Midrash Genesis Rabbah 44,8.

193 See for example the letter from Jacob Neusner to Yoder, February 9, 1982 (Box 133).

not the dialogical style of the rabbinic literature make it impossible to talk about one normative vision? Does Yoder's agenda (to read nonviolence in the rabbinic literature and Jewish diaspora practice) not make him too selective in his reading of rabbinic and historical data, and everyday Jewish religious life in the diaspora? Is he in danger of picking a minor stream within Judaism and embracing this as normative, in the same way that he does with Anabaptists within the wider church? We engage these questions further in Chapter 4.

3.3.4 Judaism as a non-non-Christian religion

In Yoder's perspective, rabbinic Judaism as we know it is developed in interaction with an also developing and expanding Christianity. Rabbinic Judaism claims, just as Christianity does, to be the faithful heir of Old Testament Judaism. In the process of 'the parting of the ways,' according to Yoder, both communities lost part of the original vision and narrative. In the fourth century Christianity lost its diaspora-shaped living. For 'rabbinic Judaism' this interaction with 'Christianity' led, according to Yoder's argument, to an abandonment of the missionary vision that was an essential part of Jewish narrative since the calling of Abraham. A culmination of this interaction is the development of Zionism.

3.3.4.1 Loss of missionary vision

From Yoder's point of view the Judaism of Jeremiah, of Hillel, of Jesus and of Jochanan ben Zakkai was a missionary faith.¹⁹⁴ Somehow the rabbis in the time of the Mishna (around 200 CE) abandoned their missionary openness, 'leaving that function to the messianic Jews (i.e. the Christians).'¹⁹⁵ Yoder does not give explanation, but he suggests that because of the strong missionary drive of Christianity, including an open attitude to the Gentiles, rabbinic Judaism slowly backed away from their missionary

194 JCSR, 105.

195 JCSR, 106.

calling. Yoder talks about 'the time of the Mishna' as the time that this schism started to have an effect on the concrete communities and on the theological reflection upon it. He notes a few moves within the Judaism of the Mishnah that only make sense after 'the schism'.

First, he observes the separation of communities: inter-visitation between messianic and non-messianic Jews is definitely discouraged.¹⁹⁶ Second, he sees Christology as an obstacle: only after the schism does it make sense for Jews to say that the reason they reject Jesus is because 'the Christians' affirmed that 'Jesus is God' and that 'the Jews' could not accept this denial of monotheism. Yoder calls this 'a reconstruction after the fact' because it does not deal with the statements about Jesus in the New Testament writings, which were made by radically monotheistic Jews and express an undeniable 'high Christology'. They were not seen nor rejected as polytheistic or idolatrous in any sense. There is no record from the first century of a rejection of such statements by messianic Jews nor anybody else.¹⁹⁷ Third, Yoder highlights the laws of Noah: only after the schism¹⁹⁸ does it make sense to formulate a perspective that abandoned the messianic hope of the ingathering of the Gentiles,¹⁹⁹ and argued that Gentiles do not need the Torah because they can keep the laws of Noah to enter into the world to come.²⁰⁰ This perspective could develop only after a declining openness to the Gentiles, which in turn only made sense when Christians identified too closely with the Gentiles.²⁰¹ Thus, whereas from the rabbinic perspective the Noachic commandments are seen as positive markers, Yoder considers them a barrier, a way to draw the lines again between Jews and Gentiles, and a sign of the abandonment of the missionary vision.

196 JCSR, 106. Yoder notes: 'although in the total bulk of that literature it is not an important topic', see also JCSR, 153.

197 JCSR, 153.

198 Yoder dates this 'doctrine' of the Noachic laws as late, in the time of the Mishnah and does not see an earlier practice. JCSR, 60, 96-97, 106, 155.

199 JCSR, 60.

200 JCSR, 60, 97, 105, 155.

201 JCSR, 155.

Yoder concludes:

In any case, Judaism after the schism turns out to be an ethnic enclave, less missionary than before, if not actually committed to near rejection of the accession of Gentiles to membership in their community. Thus the abandonment of the missionary vision and action is kind of backhanded adjustment, not to the Gentile world in general, but to Christianity. *Non-missionary Judaism is a product of Christian history.* For Jews to be non-missionary means that they have been “Christianized”: they have accepted a slot within a context where telling the Gentiles about the God of Abraham is a function that can be left to the “Christians”.²⁰²

In short, Yoder stresses that Rabbinic Judaism after the schism is shaped in reaction to and in interaction with Christianity, and in that process lost her missionary vision for the nations. That is why Yoder talks about ‘Judaism as a Non-non-Christian Religion’²⁰³ or ‘Judaism as a Post-Christian Phenomenon.’²⁰⁴

From the concept of ‘diaspora as mission’ one might wonder how communities can lose their missionary witness while living in diaspora. Yoder however gives different examples throughout his work as to how it might function like this. It circles around the word ‘enclave’, which in Yoder’s terminology has to do with a differentness that is closed to or even suspicious of others. In a reflection on the temptations within an Anabaptist approach to mission, Yoder for example notes that

the second temptation is to accept the status of an enclave, to find a niche in society to be different, but not to be missionary about it.²⁰⁵

This is how Yoder reads diaspora Judaism: in giving up their missionary calling they accepted the status of an enclave.

202 JCSR, 106. Italics by JHY.

203 The title of Chapter 7 in JCSR, 147-158.

204 JCSR, 152.

205 TM, 180.

If the first stage of the Christianization of Judaism was the abandonment of the Jewish missionary vision, one of the latest stages is, according to Yoder and in the American context, the acceptance of Judaism into western pluralism. Protestants, Catholics and Jews are seen as ‘the three equally legitimate forms of moral theism called “the Judaeo-Christian heritage”’.²⁰⁶ The same could be said on the level of intellectual history, where Jewish culture and philosophy not only critically interacted with Christian and post-Christian models in the last centuries, but also worked within the offered (Christian) framework.²⁰⁷

3.3.4.2 *Zionism*

In Yoder’s perspective the development of Zionism is the culmination of the ‘Christianization’ of Judaism. Zionism developed itself in the direction of a nineteenth-century Western European perspective on nation statehood. In biblical language: Zionism tried to shape Israel to be ‘a nation like the other nations’.²⁰⁸ As the state of Israel models itself on Western national thinking,²⁰⁹ so will this lead to the same problems Christianity has faced since ‘Christendom’:

First, Judaism is no longer defined as a believing community but as a nation state.²¹⁰ For the state it does not matter if most Jews are unbelieving or unobservant, since it does not define Jews in religious terms.

Second, committed Judaism, in Yoder’s words ‘a discernible people ready thoroughly and sacrificially to order their lives around their convic-

²⁰⁶ JCSR, 154.

²⁰⁷ ‘The most adequate continuing advocacy of the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant may be very well that of the Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen. That involved no sense of betrayal or acculturation. It was like Philo or Maimonides believing that everything true that the classical Greek thinkers taught they had received from Moses. Similarly, the best interpreter of the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr in mid-century America was Will Herberg.’ (JCSR, 154). Yoder does not unfold or back up this argument, because of lack of ‘time and expertise,’ JCSR, 154.

²⁰⁸ JCSR, 85.

²⁰⁹ JCSR, 107, 154.

²¹⁰ JCSR, 107.

tions as to the substance of the 'Torah,' is a minority sect in Israel, just as free churches are in (post) Christendom Western Europe.²¹¹

Third, Judaism abandons its calling to a diaspora-shaped lifestyle, just as Christianity did in the fourth century. Israel becomes a state like other states. One of the expressions of this tendency is the reproach of 'double standards'. The state of Israel denounces friendly criticisms that as a state they are called to a higher ethical standard. Yoder states firmly: 'the refusal to admit a call to be different is a denial of the Jewish vision on religious and moral grounds.'²¹² It shows in other words that Judaism is defined in terms of nation state, and reacts likewise.

Fourth, in its abandonment of her diaspora-shaped lifestyle, Zionist Judaism also abandons her nonviolence as the normative Jewish moral vision.²¹³ From Yoder's perspective this is a major turn in Jewish ethical reasoning.²¹⁴ He emphasizes this in his choice of titles for his articles and chapters about Jewish nonviolence, for example 'The Nonviolence of Judaism from Jeremiah to Hertzl'.²¹⁵

Yoder recognizes that he speaks as an outsider, as a *goy*, and writes 'It is too easy for me to make these critical though pro-Jewish observations from the safety of distance.'²¹⁶ He mentions therefore that these observations are made in 'a costly and therefore in far more credible ways' by a wide range of Jewish thinkers from Stefan Zweig, Martin Buber, André Neher to Steven Schwarzschild.²¹⁷

Yoder reads Judaism as a non-non-Christian religion because it developed itself in interaction with Christianity, and in that interaction

211 JCSR, 107.

212 JCSR, 85.

213 NTL, 123 'Since Jeremiah on a world scale and since Bar Kochba even in the former land of Israel, nonviolence is the normative Jewish moral vision. We have been misled by Christian anti-Semitism (and recently by Zionism) into missing that fact.'

214 In his correspondence with Schwarzschild Yoder asks for critical reflection on his developing perspective of Zionism as a turning point in Jewish ethical reasoning. See Schwarzschild's response from May 3, 1968 (Box 110).

215 See for example RRN.

216 JCSR, 85.

217 JCSR, 85.

abandoned, just as Christendom did, parts of her calling to a missionary embodiment of a nonviolent, diaspora-shaped lifestyle.²¹⁸ The community that later developed into ‘Christianity’ and ‘rabbinic Judaism’ had shared, according to Yoder, a common narrative and vision since Jeremiah. Christianity did not start with Jesus, just as rabbinic Judaism did not start with Jochan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Akiva. In Yoder’s reading, both go back to the vision of Jeremiah and the synagogue-based faith communities in the diaspora.²¹⁹

3.3.5 Diaspora as blessing

According to Yoder, the history of Judaism shows that diaspora indeed was a blessing to the Jewish people on various levels. The first is that Judaism as we know it was shaped and could only be shaped in the Diaspora.²²⁰ Since the Jeremiad Turn the center of Judaism was in Babylon and not in the land Israel.²²¹ The canon as we know it was created in Babylon. The story of creation, Babel, the calling of Abraham and the story of Israel were told against the background of the Jeremiad calling to a diaspora-shaped lifestyle.²²² The ‘Joseph paradigm’ became a standard type:

In three different ages and places the same experiences recur in the Hebrew story. Joseph, Daniel and his friends, and Esther, all found themselves involuntary at the heart of the idolatrous empire. Each ran the risk of faithfulness to their people and to the revealed will of the one true God, when their civil disobedience could have cost them their lives. Each was saved by divine intervention, with the result that the pagan tyrant was converted to the recognition of the one true God, vindicating themselves against their enemies, and giving Jews a role in running the empire.²²³

218 JCSR, 129.

219 JCSR, 32.

220 NBH, 138, 139. See also FN, 1-3.

221 JCSR, 80.

222 JCSR, 186-189.

223 JCSR, 186.

The same is the case with the psalms: pilgrimages were part of diaspora life and some pilgrim psalms show they originated in Babel (among those who hate peace, Ps 120:5).²²⁴ Babylon became the cultural and religious centre of Judaism, from the time of Jeremiah to the Middle Ages. The Babylonian concept of synagogues was introduced even into the land of Israel, Babylonian rabbis were consulted all over the diaspora, the authoritative Talmud was from Babylon and not from Palestine.²²⁵ Yoder concludes that ‘our palestinocentric reading of the story is a mistake.’²²⁶ From Jeremiah to the Middle Ages the identity of Jewry was more shaped by diaspora than by the land of Israel.²²⁷ Yoder calls this the blessing of diaspora: Judaism as we know it is shaped in and because of living in dispersion all over the world.

A second level of blessing to the Jewish people is that the diaspora helped Jews to be observant and faithful. Yoder draws an inspiring picture of how Jews never reached for the sword and he notices that Judaism was present within Christendom since the time of Constantine in the shape of a ‘peace church.’ This peace church perspective is how he reads the Jewish presence in diaspora: the dispersion and the narrative this was explained in, created for Jews a permanent awareness of not needing to assimilate,²²⁸ as they expected to be a faithful minority in a dominant pagan or Christian society. The Joseph Paradigm preserved them from thinking that Caesar ruled the world. They deny ultimate loyalty to any local nation or regime, while they provisionally accept its administration. Their literature never justified violence, and the Maccabees were their ‘Münster’,²²⁹ so to

224 JCSR, 186 Yoder notices that the mentioned places Meshach and Kedar were neither in Mesopotamia nor in Palestine.

225 JCSR, 80.

226 JCSR, 186. See also 33 for the theological debate.

227 NBH, 138 ‘What it means to be an Israelite or an Israeli may be spoken of as defined by the experience of kingship in Judea and Ephraim, but what it means to be Jewish was defined in the experience of diaspora since Jeremiah.’

228 JCSR, 79.

229 Münster became a symbol for the violent roots of Anabaptism. In 1533 Jan Matthijsz and Jan Beukels (Jan van Leiden) invaded the city of Münster to proclaim the Kingdom of God. This turned into a sectarian display of power and sexual misconduct until the city was surrounded and taken back by the bishops two years later. Anabaptist preachers and theologians condemned this violent beginning and taught a nonviolent lifestyle, following the sermon on the mount. A famous example of such teachings are those of Menno

speak.²³⁰ Although they were oppressed, cast away or martyred from time to time, they were able to maintain their identity without sovereignty or the sword.

In sum: for over a millennium the Jews of the Diaspora were the closest thing to the ethic of Jesus existing on any significant scale anywhere in Christendom.²³¹

The third level of blessing is what Jews brought to Europe. As the minority they were, they embodied contrasting eschatological communities, living by different convictions and eschatological hope ('next year in Jerusalem'). They were annoying to many rulers and people in West Europe, but they were also a living sign.²³²

Yoder wants to show in his grand narrative that the Jews found shalom when they were looking for the shalom of the cities they were brought to (Jeremiah 29). This is what Yoder calls the blessing of diaspora. However, this leads to a lot of questions. For example, regarding Yoder's criticism of 'a palistinocentric reading' of the Jewish narrative, with which Rabbinic Judaism (originating in Javne with Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai en Jehuda haNasi) obviously dares to differ. Is Yoder's free church reading of the Jewish story not too much of a self-fulfilling prophecy which forces it into an Anabaptist template? And is the 'Joseph Paradigm' or the connection and cooperation with governments in Western Europe, who oppressed the working class, not a way of being responsible and being in charge? Hannah Arendt raises this question in her work on antisemitism.²³³ Is this cooperation, in Yoder's way of reasoning, not a way to abandon the calling to diaspora and nonviolent 'quietism' and, in fact, of taking responsibility

Simons. See for example G.H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3d. ed. (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992), 553-595.

²³⁰ JCSR, 170,171.

²³¹ JCSR, 81,82. See also NBH, 79.

²³² FN, 42. Only a believing community with a "thick" particular identity has something to say to whatever "public" is "out there" to address.

²³³ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism, Part 1, Antisemitism* (New York: Harvest Book, 1951), see also 'Antisemitism', in *The Jewish Writings*, Hannah Arendt, Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (ed.), (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 46-121.

to make history come out right? We engage with these questions further in Chapter 4.

3.4 The Jewishness of the Free Church Vision

3.4.1 *The free church vision versus Constantinianism*

As Yoder sets out his argument, he uses the word ‘free church’ to describe his ecclesiological position. In his writings he employs various terms to describe this position, such as ‘believers church’, ‘free church’ or ‘radical reformation’.²³⁴ He chooses a particular term to emphasize the point he wants to make. So in ‘The Believers Church and the Arms Race’ he emphasizes an attitude of faith and what it means to be a believing community.²³⁵ In ‘Radical Reformation Ethics in Ecumenical Perspective’²³⁶ Yoder uses the label ‘radical reformation’ as ‘representative of a genuinely distinctive vision of what the church is about in the world.’²³⁷ Every term is reactionary in a certain way as it opposes another term. ‘Believers church’ opposes *Volkskirche*, ‘radical reformation’ opposes ‘magisterial reformation’ or ‘Rome,’ and ‘free church’ opposes ‘Christendom’ or ‘Constantinianism.’ Thus, when Yoder uses the label ‘free church’ in this argument (the Jewishness of the *free church vision*), he shows how he wants to emphasize the opposition to magisterial churches, to Christendom (*Christianity* as a cultural political establishment),²³⁸ or in other words to Constantinianism.²³⁹ He is clear about that in the introduction of *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003):

234 See for example RP, 279. The orientation represented in this article has been variously denominated as “believer’s church” by Max Weber, as “free church” by Franklin H. Little, and as “radical reformation” by George H. Williams. James Wm. McClendon Jr. proposes calling them all “baptist.”

235 FN, 148-161.

236 PK, 105-122.

237 PK, 106.

238 JCSR, 34.

239 For Yoder Christendom equals Constantinianism. When you look at the Subject Index of JCSR for the word Christendom, it says ‘see Constantinianism’, JCSR, 283.

I am responsible for interpreting and applying a different vision, namely a criticism of past 'Christendom' practices, from the centre of Christian identity rather than from its liberal margin. Christianity as ... 'Christendom', which was its primary image from the fourth century to the twentieth, under which Jews suffered, should be challenged for its own sake. It should not be found wanting only from the perspective of the Jews whom it mistreated, but also for the sake of Jesus whom it claimed to serve and thereby defamed.²⁴⁰

There has been a lot of criticism about the blunt way Yoder uses the term Constantinianism and how he frames Constantine and the fourth century. We turn to that criticism in Chapter 4. This section will start with a description of Yoder's use of Constantinianism. In earlier sections we discussed Yoder's historical method and his free church version of Judaism. He needed to establish all of this in order to enter the core of his argument: his perspective on the Jewishness of the free church vision, which will be the subject of this section.

From his earliest work onward, Yoder describes Constantinianism as a problem of eschatology. In *Täuferium und Reformation im Gespräch* (1968) Yoder reads the reformation as a move away from Constantinianism. He criticizes Zwingli from an Anabaptist point of view that he did not have the faith to go all the way in his reformation but made a move towards the government, the city council in Zürich. This led to religious intolerance,²⁴¹ government influence in church matters,²⁴² a secularization of the Corpus Christianum²⁴³ and natural theology as a source for ethics.²⁴⁴

240 JCSR, 34.

241 'Intoleranz als Glaubenssache,' TRG, 140-143.

242 TRG, 145: 'Wir sahen bei den Täufnern, dass die "Regel Christi" die Parallele zum Staat war; wie die Schwertgewalt im Staat, so dient die Banngewalt in der Gemeinde zur Aufrechterhaltung der Gemeinschaftsordnung. Die Reformatoren gaben diesem Satz insofern recht, als sie nach dem verschmelzen von Staat und Kirche die Schwertgewalt als Banngewalt betrachteten.'

243 'Die Säkularisierung des Corpus Christianum,' TRG, 147-149.

244 'Das Naturrecht,' TRG, 151-153.

All of these are consequences of a ‘realized eschatology’²⁴⁵ where ‘Christian government’ is seen as the Lordship of Christ: ‘Das Corpus Christianum ist das Regnum Christi.’²⁴⁶ So in Yoder’s reading Zwingli wholeheartedly embraces Constantinianism. His critique of Zwingli (which is in fact a critique of Constantinianism) is consistently recognizable in Yoder’s writings on Constantinianism through the years. In *The Original Revolution* (1971) Yoder gives a definition of Constantinianism:

The term refers to the conception of Christianity which took shape in the century between the Edict of Milan and the *City of God*. The central nature of this change, which Constantine himself did not invent nor force upon the church, is not a matter of doctrine nor of polity; it is the identification of church and world in the mutual approval and support exchanged by Constantine and the bishops.²⁴⁷

From *Täuferium und Reformation im Gespräch* (1968) on, Yoder continues to locate the core problem of ‘the Constantinian heresy’²⁴⁸ in eschatology. He calls this Constantinian perspective ‘realized eschatology’,²⁴⁹ ‘peace without eschatology’,²⁵⁰ ‘the new eschatology’²⁵¹ or ‘the reversal of eschatology.’²⁵² This perspective where Christian government is seen as the realization of the Lordship of Christ has major consequences for the perspective on the state. Inspired by Berkhof, Yoder argues that the apostolic church confessed the Lordship of Christ, even over the fallen principalities and powers, and that Christ is using them within his purpose. Likewise, the government was seen – as part of the principalities and powers – as fall-

245 TRG, 153-154: ‘Zwinglis letzte Voraussetzung ist demnach die einer vollendeten Eschatologie. Mit der Christlichkeit der Obrigkeiten seit Konstantin ist der Kampf zwischen Welt und Kirche gewonnen. Die Reiche dieser Welt sind das Reich Christi geworden.’

246 TRG, 154.

247 OR, 65.

248 OR, 64.

249 TRG, 153-154.

250 OR, 64-70.

251 PK, p136-138.

252 PK, 137.

en, but somehow being used by Christ within his purpose.²⁵³ After Constantine the reign of (Christian) government was identified with Christ's reign. That is a major shift in the theology of the state, a development from a perspective of the state as part of the fallen powers that be, to the (Christian) state as God's way of governing the world. Yoder is very critical about this development and in his perspective 'the messianity of Jesus was replaced by that of Constantine.'²⁵⁴ Yoder describes how for Augustine, decades later, the Roman church was identified with the millennium. God's goal, the conquest of the world by the church, had been reached.²⁵⁵

Yoder sketches how this perspective of 'new eschatology' has major consequences for church and theology.²⁵⁶ It leads to a new ecclesiology. Before Constantine the church was a minority group, after Constantine society was Christianized, so in a certain way, the church had become 'anybody.' This raised of course questions about the visibility of the church.

Before Constantine one knew as a fact of everyday experience that there was a believing Christian community but one had to "take it on faith" that God was governing history. After Constantine one had to believe without seeing that there was a community of believers, but one knew for a fact that God was in control of history.²⁵⁷

In 'The Forms of a Possible Obedience'²⁵⁸ Yoder describes the development of an Augustinian perspective on the church, which contains on the one hand a skepticism towards the possibility of obedience, because everything

253 For his theology on the powers, Yoder is influenced by Hendrik Berkhof's work *Christus en de machten*, translated by himself into English (*Christ and the Powers*, Herald Press, 1962). See also OR, 140-176; PK, 136; most detailed in PJ, 134-161; RP, 128-140; FN, 87, 151, etc.

254 JCSR, 171. Yoder describes how Constantine was seen and described in messianic terms, for example by Eusebius. Although Eusebius never uses the word *ho Christos* to describe Constantine, 'yet functionally "messianity" describes Eusebius' view of Constantine's place in salvation history. The *meschiach*, the "Anointed", is the man who by special divine intervention ('unction') has been empowered to inaugurate the next phase of God's saving history. This is what Eusebius said about Constantine and his age.' JCSR, 177n23.

255 OR, 66.

256 PK, 135-147; JCSR, 88n12.

257 PK, 136-137.

258 JCSR, 121-132.

participates in the fallen state of all creation.²⁵⁹ On the other hand, for Augustine the true church is indefectible, which is expressed in the *notae ecclesiae*, ‘the traits of which can never be lost.’²⁶⁰ Yoder sketches this perspective as an highly idealistic ecclesiology on the level of ideas, but a highly skeptical ecclesiology on the level of practical obedience. He calls this perspective ‘Augustinian’ or ‘Constantinian,’ whereas he names the ‘possibilitist’ approach as ‘Jewish,’ ‘Anabaptist’ or ‘Wesleyan.’ Yoder considers the possibilitist option as the pre-Constantinian stance, faithful to early church life and theology.²⁶¹ So after Constantine, the church expects less and less of her members (which is everybody in the *Corpus Christianum*) regarding *Nachfolge* (the imitation of Christ).

This leads to the development of ‘the religious specialist,’ or clergy. The religious specialist performs symbolically the practices of the church, representing in those very acts the church itself.²⁶² ‘It is, in fact, his presence which is the presence of the church; he is the definition (sociologically) of the church.’²⁶³ In the Roman Catholic church the religious specialist is needed to perform the liturgy,²⁶⁴ in Protestant Tradition to preach the Word ‘properly’.²⁶⁵ These practices of the religious specialist define the church as such. Yoder views this as a major setback, from ‘a people of

259 JCSR, 122.

260 JCSR, 122-123. The *notae ecclesiae*, the four marks of the church, are One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. Since the First Council of Constantinople in 381 C.E. they are officially part of the doctrine of the church, as an antidote to all kind of heresies, although the idea can be found earlier.

261 ‘Over against this tradition I need to situate a position which affirms the possibility of obedience within history. I classify Jews, Anabaptists, and Wesleyans as “possibilitist” in this sense: they affirm a possibility in principle – not an achievement in fact – of human behavior that pleases God.’ (JCSR, 122).

262 Yoder writes about this in ‘The Fullness of Christ’. He published three versions of this article/ chapter. In 1969 as an article in *Concern* (A pamphlet series for Questions of Christian Renewal, No 17): 33-93. After that he published TFC in 1987, an extended version of the earlier published article. In 1992 ‘The Fullness of Christ’ appeared as a chapter of BP, 47-60. See also Daniël Drost, ‘De volheid van Christus: John Howard Yoders spreken over ambt in de *free church tradition*’ in *Van onderen. Op zoek naar een priesterschap van gelovigen*, Jan-Martijn Abrahamse and Wout Huizing (ed.), Baptistica Reeks (Amsterdam: Baptisten Seminarium, 2014), 115-128.

263 *Concern*, No 17, 34.

264 *Concern*, No 17, 34.

265 *Concern*, No 17, 34, 67-69.

priests' to 'a people with a priest', from minority communities that live the practices Jesus calls them to, to a majority church which creates religious specialists to perform the practices symbolically for them.²⁶⁶

According to Yoder, ethics had to be redefined as well. Because everybody was Christian, ethical questioning changed. Ethical discourse had to meet two more tests: first, can you ask such behavior of everyone?, and second, what would happen if everyone did it?²⁶⁷ Since Jesus' teaching is too radical and not usable to rule a state, in other words not realistic, the church has to turn to natural theology as a source for realistic ethics.²⁶⁸ So the source of ethical reasoning changed from the particularity of the guidance of Jesus and the apostles to reason and 'the order of creation.'²⁶⁹ 'Responsibility' becomes an important word and shows the urgency to make history come out right.²⁷⁰ Yoder calls this 'a new value for effectiveness': right action is what works; what does not promise results can hardly be right.²⁷¹ This inevitably leads to the use of violence and the suppression of minority groups to protect and restore order in society.²⁷²

Another development Yoder describes is the interiorization and individualization of the gospel and Lordship of Jesus Christ. Because after Constantine the outside order was Christianized and the church no longer

266 BP, 55-60. Yoder is very critical on the phenomenon of the religious specialist: 'The special role of the professional religionist is part of the fallen nature of things' (BP, 55). Yoder describes how in the story of Israel the role of the religious specialist was consequently downplayed, see *Concern*, No 17, 36-37; TFC, 6-8; BP, 55-57. According to Yoder, Paul's starting point is the fullness of Christ, which leaves no place for the religious specialist whatsoever, because the practices of the church are performed by the community itself (*Concern*, No 17, 33-93; TFC; BP, 47-60).

267 PK, 139.

268 Yoder wrote extensively about this, for example in PJ, 1-20.

269 PK, 141.

270 OR, 76-84.

271 PK, 140.

272 OR, 65,66: 'The church is no longer the obedient suffering line of the true prophets; she has a vested interest in the present order of things and uses the cultic means at her disposal to legitimize that order. She does not preach ethics, judgment, repentance, separation from the world; she dispenses sacraments and holds society together. Christian ethics no longer means the study of what God wants of man, since all of society is Christian (by definition, i.e., by baptism), Christian ethics must be workable for all of society. Instead of seeking sanctification, ethics becomes concerned with the persistent power of sin and the calculation of the lesser evil; at the best it produces Puritanism, and at the worst simple opportunism.'

the visible community of believers, a visible/ invisible dualism was developed regarding the church. Since the dominant ethic was different from the New Testament in content and source there was one functional approach: a turn to the ethics of love and the personal. The ethics of power and outward structures was covered by the Christian government. According to Yoder the source of this dualism is Neo-Platonism. The structures of Constantinianism caused it to flourish.²⁷³

Mission also had to be redefined. Mission used to be the witness of faithful communities to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, calling people to faith and challenging the principalities and powers (Rome). Within a Christian society the outward allegiance to Christ was obvious, so mission turned to inward renewal, 'with adding inner authenticity to an outward profession which is already there.'²⁷⁴ Outside the borders of the empire mission was strongly connected with Rome's expansion, as in later centuries with the colonization of the East and the West.²⁷⁵ Because you could not ask for the same level of missionary commitment from every church member, mission was outsourced to missionary agencies. In that way mission was disconnected from the shape and practice of the church and performed by religious specialists.²⁷⁶

Thus for Yoder, the main result of Constantinianism is the ongoing connection of the church with the powers that be: the state. Under the provocative title 'The ever new shape of establishment'²⁷⁷ or the slightly ironic title 'Constantinianism old and new'²⁷⁸ he describes various shapes of Constantinianism through the centuries. After the religious wars of the seventeenth century the whole church was not connected anymore with the whole empire, but there was a unity of particular national churches

273 PK, 140,141.

274 PK, 137.

275 PK, 137.

276 TM, 36-38, 182-192. See also RP, 'A people in the world', 65-101, where Yoder talks about the *Notae Missionis*, and 53-65, 221-230.

277 PK, 141-144.

278 OR, 141-145.

with local governments. Yoder calls this ‘neo-Constantinianism’.²⁷⁹ After the political revolutions of 1776 to 1848 society draws a clear distinction between government and church. The church however continues to sanctify state and society. Yoder gives the example of the United States which consider themselves to be a Christian nation, and ‘the army, congress, schools, and even football games have chaplaincy services.’²⁸⁰ Yoder calls this ‘neo-neo-Constantinianism’.²⁸¹ Even in explicitly secular societies the church keeps looking for connection with the government. Yoder gives the example of some countries in eastern Europe during communist times.²⁸² Yoder calls this ‘neo-neo-neo-Constantinianism’.²⁸³ Identifying God’s cause and Christian loyalty with a future regime is the final step: “What God is doing in the world,” or “hope,” or “salvation” is spelled out as a better power system yet to come, with which Christians proleptically should identify.²⁸⁴ Yoder calls this ‘neo-neo-neo-Constantinianism’²⁸⁵

Although Yoder started writing about Constantinianism from his earliest publications onward, his focus on Jewish-Christian relations lead to new insights in the matter. In the articles published in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003) Yoder starts to equate Constantinianism with the church’s loss of Jewishness.²⁸⁶ Yoder describes the consequences of this loss as devastating for the church. It is worth quoting Yoder at length:

Thereby the faith became an ahistorical moral monotheism, with no particular peoplehood and no defense against acculturation, no ability to discern the line between mission and syncretism.

With its Jewish roots dominant Christianity lost its vision of the whole globe as under God, with all nations (i.e. even beyond the

279 OR, 142, PK, 141-142.

280 OR, 143.

281 OR, 142-144; PK, 142.

282 PK, 142.

283 OR, 144,145; PK, 142.

284 PK, 143.

285 OR, 145; PK, 143.

286 JCSR, 72-75, 121, 150-152. Yoder reflects on his development of the subject in JCSR, 37: ‘Since I was first led to the theme, once in 1971 and again in 1977 at the University of Notre Dame, it has been clear to me that there is important unfinished intellectual

Roman Empire, even including its enemies) seen as having their place and needing to hear their message. With its Jewishness Christians lost their understanding of Torah as grace and as privilege, replacing it with morality as requirements for salvation.

With its Jewishness Christianity lost its capacity for decentralized congregationalism and was ready to function as the ceremonial ratification of the Byzantine court.²⁸⁷

In other words, in its loss of Jewishness the church lost its free church characteristics. For Yoder 'Jewishness' and 'free church vision' are both to be read as 'Jeremian': grounded in the calling to diaspora as mission.²⁸⁸ In this reading Yoder finds words to criticize Christendom (in the end it has to do with its loss of Jewishness) and finds a way to more deeply root his free church vision, tracing it back from the sixteenth-century radical reformers, to the practice of the early church, to the ministry of Jesus, to the calling to diaspora since Jeremiah.

3.4.2 The Jewishness of the free church vision: a diaspora ecclesiology

From his perspective on 'Judaism as a free church' Yoder moves to 'the Jewishness of the free church vision'. He recognizes a shared calling between free churches and diaspora Judaism, which he sees expressed in social analogies.

3.4.2.1 A shared calling: diaspora as mission

The Jewishness of the free church vision as Yoder describes it, has first of all to do with a shared calling to diaspora as mission. This is the main per-

business to be worked on at the intersection of two themes: 1. The "believers' church" critique of how the meaning of Christian discipleship has been denatured by the historically dominant deformations variously designated as "establishment", "Constantinianism", or "patriarchalism". 2. The critical revision of Jewish-Christian relationships, especially since "the holocaust".

²⁸⁷ JCSR, 107.

²⁸⁸ Yoder even comments (albeit in a footnote) that when the synagogue polity came later to be overshadowed among Christians by sacerdotalism and episcopacy, that represented a fall back into the pre-Jeremian patterns of Hellenistic paganism (JCSR, 201).

spective. This calling is instigated in the letter of Jeremiah to the people of Israel in Babylon (Jeremiah 29). According to Yoder's reading of Judaism, this calling was embraced and found expression in the synagogues and everyday life of the Jewish people both in the diaspora and in the land of Israel. This was continued in the teaching of Jesus and the practice of the early church. It was everyday practice in the Jewish diaspora communities all over the world. Yoder uses the semantics of calling to draw attention to an aspect of voluntary participation in God's overall purpose, and to move away from aspects of exile, punishment or fate.

3.4.2.2 The shape of the community: social analogies

This calling is expressed in social structures or practices. To describe the commonalities in Jewish and free church practices Yoder uses the phrase 'social analogies'. For Yoder practices of communities, which are visibly social and political, are a direct expression of their calling and in that sense very theological. Therefore these social analogies are not coincidental or lacking theological significance. On the contrary, the fact that these practices are analogous reveal the very theological roots these communities share.²⁸⁹ Such social analogies between free churches and Jewish faith communities do reflect the calling to diaspora, but leave the mission aspect out, because, according to Yoder, this is no longer part of Rabbinic Judaism since the time of the Mishna. In his treatment of these social embodiments of free church ecclesiology throughout the rest of his work however, these characteristics are inseparably connected with a call to mission.

289 THW, 143: 'It consists not in concepts, but in practices; yet behind the practices we can discern shared understandings.' See also BP, 75,76; RP 'Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture', 359-373; NBH, 90. One might think that these social analogies also apply to other groups such as monastic orders. Yoder would agree with this and even comments that (in the context of mission outside Christendom borders) 'The monastic order is a kind of believers church', TM, 151.

The first social analogy Yoder notes, is a shared perspective on history and the present, a theology of history.

Radical reformation and Judaism have in common that they see God as active in correlation with historical change and criticism more than with sanctifying the present.²⁹⁰

This ‘sanctifying the present’ is what Yoder throughout his work refers to as the ‘Constantinian’ sense of responsibility ‘to make history come out right’,²⁹¹ or to defend the status quo by force. The free church vision embraces a calling to diaspora in the conviction that God is in charge of history. From the minority free church perspective there is no need to Christianize society, or defend its Christian values, but only the need for the church to be church.²⁹² God is in charge of the rest, and from this perspective and attitude it can be said that ‘the meaning of history is first of all carried by the church.’²⁹³ Looking back and reading history from this perspective is what Yoder calls evangelical revisionism.

Connected with this is the second social analogy Yoder notes: both Jews and radical reformers accept a minority position as a given situation. ‘They expect to be outvoted,’ and ‘they are unembarrassed about particularity.’²⁹⁴ The semantics of diaspora and pilgrimage help to sustain the development of a communal identity that is not dependent on the opinion of the majority culture. The synagogue and the church are *particular* communities.²⁹⁵ According to Yoder, this has always been a scandal. Churches have ‘a gospel connected with a particular name and place and time, with

290 JCSR, 108.

291 RP, 95.

292 OR, 107-124.

293 RP, 151. See also THW, 109, where Yoder is reflecting on the particularity of the gospel, the church, and history: ‘The incarnation does not mean that human kind in general, or human history in general was stamped with God’s approval or transformed by God’s indwelling, but rather that a particular story, the words and work of a particular man, is the key to the very nature of God. That particularity is even more scandalous if we reckon deeply with the fact that the historicity of the incarnation committed God to the particularity of an ongoing history.’

294 JCSR, 108, 109.

295 PT, 317.

Jesus and the Jews and Jerusalem.²⁹⁶ The church has been tempted, for missionary or political reasons, to reach ‘beyond’ to a ‘common’ or ‘public’ ground, to a more general or objective message.²⁹⁷ Free churches denounced this temptation and embraced particularity. Yoder describes Paul and the early church as radically open to the Gentile world, but with a radical particular message: the Jew Jesus is the only way to know the God of Israel. Yoder calls this ‘missionary particularism.’²⁹⁸ Free churches embody this particularity, this communal identity in a minority position, as witness and mission.²⁹⁹

The third analogy Yoder notes, concerns a shared dynamic of identity. The identity of both communities is shaped – in a direct way – by a book. By reading, singing and praying these texts, they become the formative narrative of the faith community. And of specific note is the direct availability of the text to the whole of the community. There is no need for a mediator, or in Yoder’s language ‘a religious specialist.’³⁰⁰ Although Roman Catholic and Protestant churches have the book too, they have created the need for religious specialists: clergy to perform the rituals or explain the bible to lay people, or academically trained ministers to explain the word in a doctrinally sound way.³⁰¹ According to Yoder, free churches embrace ‘the fullness of Christ’ (Eph 4:11-13), a term Paul uses ‘to describe a new mode of group relationships, in which every member of a body has a distinctly identifiable, divinely validated and empowered role.’³⁰² This implies that even when there are teachers to explain the texts,³⁰³ everybody in the community has the possibility and responsibility to relate to the texts,

296 RP, 110.

297 RP, 110; PWK, 40-57.

298 THW, 7.

299 See PK, “But we do see Jesus”: the Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth’, 46-62; RP, ‘Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics: Gospel Ethics versus the Wider Wisdom’, 102-126.

300 ‘The Fullness of Christ’ in *Concern*, No. 17, 33-37; TFC, 1-8; BP, 55-58.

301 JCSR, 108, ‘The Fullness of Christ’ in *Concern*, No. 17, 33-36; TFC, 1-3.

302 BP, 47.

303 Yoder emphasizes that the role of the rabbi is that of a reader or teacher, not that of a ‘religious specialist’, JCSR, 187.

and through that be involved in the process of communal moral reasoning. As Yoder states in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003):

The first pro-Anabaptist meetings in Zurich and St Gall in 1522-25 were in fact called “readings” (lesene). Their first leaders were called readers or teachers. In creating a new critical sub-culture around the text of their Scriptures, the Anabaptists were doing something more like the synagogue than like anything else going on in Europe at the time.³⁰⁴

In his historical work on the first Anabaptists in Switzerland, Yoder called this dynamic of reading the texts and through it discerning the mind of Christ ‘das Gespräch.’³⁰⁵ This process of reasoning shaped and kept reshaping the identity of the faith communities.³⁰⁶

The fourth analogy is that ‘the free churches were like the Jews in their seriousness about a distinctive moral commitment.’³⁰⁷ The Anabaptists embraced the commandments of Jesus as good news. In this, just like Judaism, Anabaptists thought of God’s law as grace, in contrast, Yoder argues, to the Reformation, which proclaimed ‘Christ the end of the law,’ and in doing so positioned law against grace.³⁰⁸ For Yoder this distinctive moral commitment is focused in a nonviolent ethic. Ethical commitment asks for ethical reasoning and Yoder calls this practice ‘binding and loosing’ (Matt 18:18). Historically grounded in the practices of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists, Yoder developed the perspective that the practices of the community are the gospel. In his introduction to *Body Politics* (1992), he writes:

Stated very formally, the pattern we shall discover is that the will of God for human socialness as a whole is prefigured by the shape to

304 JCSR, 109.

305 TRG, 111-116.

306 TRG, 111-116 ‘Das Gespräch als Struktur der Gemeinde’. Yoder developed this perspective ecclesialogically in ‘The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood: A Protestant Perspective’ in PK, 15-45.

307 JCSR, 109.

308 JCSR, 109, 121-129.

which the Body of Christ is called. ... The people of God is called to be today what the world is called to be ultimately.

The very presence of contrasting communities and their peaceful and reconciling practices are a witness before the watching world.

The fifth social analogy Yoder notes is the everyday practice of diaspora life. Just like the Jewish communities in the diaspora, Anabaptists were strangers in the countries in which they lived, sometimes because they had to flee from religious persecution, sometimes because they chose to move to escape military service. According to Yoder, both Jews and Anabaptists could be useful citizens everywhere they lived, but never fitted in completely, because of their alternative lifestyles.

The sixth analogy Yoder mentions is that 'Mennonites are like Jews in facing today a crisis of self-understanding, in the tension between being a community of descent and one of dissent.' According to Yoder, both communities feel the tension between being a faith community and being a people, and both communities never really solved that tension by deciding for either a purely spiritual identity or a purely ethnic one.

The Jewishness of the free church vision is its shared calling to 'diaspora as mission.' A free church ecclesiology is therefore a diaspora ecclesiology. The social analogies show how both free churches and Judaism in the diaspora find ways to shape faith communities and everyday life as minorities in a dominant culture. According to Yoder being a faithful church means being a diaspora church. What the implications of this are for being a church and a missionary people in post-Christendom Western Europe, is engaged with in Chapter 6.

Yoder's description of social analogies, which show or even 'prove' a common calling, is however questionable. Fernando Enns, for example, comments that Yoder 'did not develop it theologically, listing rather par-

allel phenomenological observations about Judaism and the free church tradition.³⁰⁹ We return to this issue in Chapter 4.

3.4.3 Evangelical revisionism, the free church vision and Jewish-Christian dialogue

It is Yoder's hope that his reading of the schism, Judaism and the church will open new perspectives in Jewish-Christian dialogue. This is the point to which the major chapter in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003) leads.³¹⁰ Reflecting on the state of dialogue, Yoder notes:

Seldom is it clear what the needed correction is, or why the adjustments that some propose (abandoning Christology? abandoning theology? abandoning God language?) would be good news.³¹¹

Yoder believes that his reading is good news for Jewish-Christian dialogue. His focus on 'the commonalities of historical context' and 'the congruences of social shape,' in other words his focus on historiography and ecclesiology instead of a more systematic theological approach, should create new room for positive dialogue.

How did this work out? During his lifetime Yoder engaged various Jewish scholars who were happy to inform him or work with him. Most prominent was Steven Schwarzschild.³¹² This engagement instigated some, albeit limited, form of Jewish-Christian dialogue, which had to do with Yoder's specific free church approach to the matter.

Posthumously we discern a similar pattern. Especially in postliberal circles, Yoder's work is received positively. Peter Ochs, a postliberal Jewish scholar, delivered a commentary at the end of every chapter of *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003), and within the ambit of Ochs' *Scriptural Reasoning* Yoder's work is discussed and related to.³¹³ Ochs also

³⁰⁹ Fernando Enns, *The Peace Church and the Ecumenical Community. Ecclesiology and the Ethics of Nonviolence* (London: Pandora Press, 2007), 143.

³¹⁰ JCSR, 105-119.

³¹¹ JCSR, 111.

³¹² See Chapter 1.2.

³¹³ For postliberal theology, Peter Ochs and Scriptural Reasoning, see 4.2.4. See for an example of engagement with Yoder's work *JSR* Vol. 13, No. 2 (November 2014): 'Nav-

engaged in Mennonite-Jewish dialogue by giving series of lectures on his reading of Yoder's work, and offering suggestions for moving beyond that.³¹⁴ So we might conclude that Yoder's work did contribute to Jewish-Christian dialogue in the academic context.

Another context in which Yoder's work is discovered and used is that of Messianic Judaism. Mark Kinzer for example, a major scholar in these circles, works extensively with Yoder's reading of the Jewish-Christian schism, 'diaspora as mission' and 'Judaism as a non-non-Christian' to describe his 'Post-missionary Messianic Judaism' ecclesiology.³¹⁵

It is therefore fair to conclude that Yoder's specific free church approach to the schism, Judaism and the church, and his choice to engage Jewish-Christian dialogue on the level of the calling of faith communities (in other words, ecclesiology) has a potential to bring a fresh and creative angle to Jewish-Christian dialogue.

3.5 Conclusion

John Howard Yoder's diaspora as mission ecclesiology is an inspiring proposal which grounds an ecclesiology for post-Christendom Western churches not just in the ecclesiology of sixteenth-century Anabaptists, or in the practices of the early church. His ecclesiology did not even start

igating John Howard Yoder's *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, which offers several articles of postliberal scholars who reflect on JCSR. This conversation continues to draw attention. See for a recent reflection Shaul Magid 'Christian Supersessionism, Zionism, and the Contemporary Scene. A Critical Reading of Peter Ochs's Reading of John Howard Yoder', *JRE*, Volume 45, Issue 1 (March 2017): 104-141.

³¹⁴ Published as Peter Ochs, *The Free Church and Israel's Covenant. The 2009 J.J. Thiessen Lectures* (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010).

³¹⁵ For Mark Kinzer's use of JCSR, see his *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism. Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 72, 166, 213, 215, 259, 307; *Israel's Messiah and the People of God. A Vision for Messianic Jewish Covenant Fidelity* ed. Jennifer M. Rosner (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2012), xxiii (reference to Ochs), 163; *Searching Her Own Mystery: Nostra Aetate, the Jewish People and the Identity of the Church* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 46. Some examples of other scholars from Messianic Jewish circles who work with Yoder's JCSR are as follows: David J. Rudolph and Joel Willitts (eds.) *Introduction to Messianic Judaism. Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013) who refer to Yoder's JCSR in their introduction, 13, and Stuart Dauermann, *Converging Destinies. Jews, Christians, and the Mission of God* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), 121, 158.

with Pentecost, or with Jesus Christ's life and teaching, but goes all the way back to Jeremiah's letter to the captives in Babylon. As twenty-first-century Christians we are, according to Yoder, called to embrace the diaspora shape of the church in this time and place, instead of mourning over the loss of power and influence. The diaspora shape of the church will 'work' as good news before the watching world.³¹⁶

Yoder's approach has, however, also been subject to severe criticism. In his evaluation of Yoder's reading of Rabbinic Judaism, Daniel Boyarin calls this approach 'Judaism as a Free Church'.³¹⁷ Although Boyarin is approving of most of Yoder's argument, with the use of this term he also points to a flaw in Yoder's method of reasoning, namely, it is reasoning in a circle. Yoder uses his ideal of the free church vision (faithful, contrasting, nonviolent communities as embodied in the early church and sixteenth century) to read these convictions into the diaspora Judaism of Jeremiah to the present. Yoder uses this 'Judaism as a Free Church' to give the free church vision a stronger ecclesiological basis in the narrative and practices of Judaism, as he reads them. This is what Yoder calls 'the Jewishness of the free church vision'. His line of thinking can be visualized in the figure below:

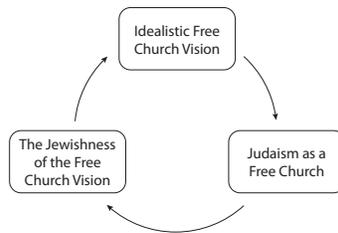


Fig. 2. Yoder's circle of reasoning

316 See for example Yoder's perspective on the witness of the church: 'In the Acts story we see rather that the church is not simply a vehicle, the events in the church's life are themselves the fact of mission' TM, 89, and TM, 124: 'The Diaspora base was in place before the gospel. In this sense the "new people" *was* the message before it became the vehicle for the message.' (italics JHY). Yoder even mentions diaspora as missionary 'method': 'But how about being in diaspora on purpose? How about being a missionary people?' (TM, 113).

317 Daniel Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church,' 1-17. Yoder also talks about 'the "free-church" dimension of Israel as a confessing community of moral identity,' for example in PK, 10.

Yoder's perspective however, mount a challenge to what had been regarded as the 'standard account' of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. To mention some examples; first, the parting of the ways between 'Jews' and 'Christians'. Problem: it was inevitable, this was the course of (church) history as God led it. Yoder's solution: finding a different way of narrating the history of the first centuries. Yoder calls this perspective 'evangelical revisionism' and this approach leads to the conclusion: it did not have to be.³¹⁸ Second, the shared history of Christendom and Judaism. Problem: the history of violence of the church towards the Jewish people. Yoder's solution: it was the church- state (Christendom or the Constantinian church) that inflicted this violence on the Jewish people. The free churches had no part in in, actually they were a persecuted minority as well.³¹⁹ Third, theology and practices of Christendom and Judaism. Problem: the irreconcilable differences between the narratives and practices of both faith communities. Yoder's solution: from the time of Jeremiah the people of God are called to a diaspora-shaped lifestyle: diaspora as mission. The Christian communities share that calling, without being supersessionist. Yoder also emphasizes that 'what happened historically cannot be excluded theologically.'³²⁰ The first generations of Christians were at the same time 'Jew' and 'Christian'. This shows that theologically speaking, the Jewish and Christian narratives and practices do not need to be irreconcilable.³²¹ Fourth, the relation between Judaism and Jesus. Problem: the Jewish people reject their own Messiah. Yoder's solution: the Jewish people as a whole never rejected Jesus. The first Christians were Jews. Further down the road in the parting of the ways, the Jesus that was offered to the Jewish people was a pagan Christ. If the Jewish people accepted this Jesus it would mean unfaithfulness to the God of Israel.³²² Additionally, in the last two thousand years there has been one people who

318 JCSR, 43-63.

319 See for example JCSR, 34.

320 JCSR, 53.

321 JCSR, 53,57.

322 JCSR, 6,51-61,76-77.

lived as a people of the Sermon on the Mount regarding nonviolence, and this is the Jewish people in the diaspora.³²³

No matter how creative and inspiring, his approach not only raised questions concerning content, but also concerning method. Should Yoder's approach be disqualified because his reasoning is circular and thus in danger of either tunnel vision or self-affirmation? Or is Yoder's approach careful, self-reflecting and theologically rewarding enough, as Daniel Boyarin argues? We turn to this question in Chapter 4.

323 JCSR, 81,82.

4

A THEORETICAL CRITIQUE OF JOHN HOWARD YODER'S DIASPORA AS MISSION

4.1 Introduction

While Chapter 3 sets out my reading of Yoder's diaspora ecclesiology on his own terms, Chapter 4 provides a theoretical critique of his work. Several Jewish and Christian scholars critically engaged with Yoder's work on 'diaspora as mission.' I will analyze their critique to sharpen the focus on the strengths and questions of Yoder's approach.

In his *Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* project Yoder covered a lot of fields in which he considered himself to be 'an amateur.' This did not stop him from reading historical, biblical and rabbinical sources in his particular way, and drawing conclusions regarding his ecclesiological discourse. What do the experts on these fields have to say about Yoder's approach and method?

This chapter discusses first of all Yoder's methodology in his use of sources: historical sources, Biblical sources, and Rabbinic sources. How is Yoder's reading challenged or affirmed by his critical readers and what are the consequence for our reading of Yoder's work? That is the subject of section 4.2. Section 4.3 is focused on Yoder's historical work and the criticism this generated, especially on the subjects of 'the parting of the ways' and his use of 'Constantinianism.' In the process of his ecclesiological work, Yoder has a lot to say about Judaism as he perceived it from Biblical and Rabbinic sources, historical research and systematic theological or ecclesiological perspectives. How was this received by Jewish and Christian scholars, and

how can we use their critique to evaluate whether Yoder's reading of Judaism was fair? We turn to this question in section 4.4. Section 4.5 focuses on the theological questions Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach raised. The work of experts in these fields is used to evaluate and, if necessary or helpful, to revise Yoder's diaspora as mission approach. The final section summarizes the critique and proposed revisions.

4.2 Methodology: Yoder's Use of Sources

Ecclesiology is a field of study that is in need of a careful reading of sources. As I mentioned before, Yoder covered a lot of fields in which he considered himself to be an amateur. This did not stop him from reading historical, biblical and rabbinical sources in his particular way, and drawing conclusions regarding his ecclesiological discourse. This particular way was praised, mostly because the experts were sympathetic to Yoder's project. But it also attracted criticism, in particular concerning Yoder's methodology. In this section we critically engage with Yoder's method of reading historical sources (4.2.1), biblical sources (4.2.2, 4.2.3) and rabbinic sources (4.2.4).

4.2.1 Yoder's reading of historical sources

In her now famous article "'The Parting of the Ways': Theological Construct of Historical Reality?"¹ Judith Lieu questions the theological agenda she sees in contemporary work on 'the parting of the ways.' Although some of the issues she discusses in this 1994 published article are carefully avoided by Yoder in his work on the schism,² her main question still

1 Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek?*, 31-49.

2 Lieu sees a couple of problems with the approach of 'the parting of the ways', for example 'it operates essentially with the abstract or universal conception of each religion, Judaism and Christianity, when what we know about is the specific and local' (Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek?*, 38). And: 'This model also works best with a theological agenda in the sense that particular theological affirmations can be taken, explored within the two systems, and traced back to earlier roots within the first-century variety: for example, the unity of God, ideas of covenant or eschatology.' (Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek?*, 38-39.)

stands: to what sense is Yoder's historical work driven and shaped by a theological agenda? And if so, in what way might this be problematic?

Another question that comes to the surface is whether Yoder himself is applying the nonviolent aspect of evangelical revisionism in his historiographical work. Yoder received much criticism for his framing and dismissal of Constantinianism, and for his attitude towards the protestant church and other theological opponents. The question is asked as to whether he is rigorous enough and 'non-violent' in his own approach, in the sense of truly hearing the arguments of his critics.

J. Alexander Sider's work is helpful in discussing this question. Sider engaged with Yoder's historical method in his PhD research *To see history doxologically* (2011).³ Sider spends one chapter addressing the question of whether Yoder does actually work according to the commitments of his formulated evangelical revisionism, especially on the subject of Constantinianism.⁴ Sider describes how Yoder approaches Constantinianism 'as a narrative trope.'⁵ Yoder does so because Constantinianism was for him not only an historical subject, but also an ecclesiological one, connected with questions on faithfulness to 'the politics of Jesus.' This made Yoder's agenda more complex and should make him more 'careful and consciously self-critical' in his research.⁶ Sider concludes however that this not the case. He points to some serious flaws in Yoder's method.

First, Yoder's sources of choice. While Yoder was very focused on how history shapes politics and theology, he himself relied heavily on older, secondary sources, 'monological and polemically invested readings of the early church.'⁷ Most of the time Yoder failed to discern the particular perspectives that lay behind the reasoning of these secondary sources.⁸

3 Sider, *History*, 97-132.

4 Sider, *History*, 99.

5 Sider, *History*, 101-122 A 'trope' is a word or expression used in a figurative sense, a figure of speech (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

6 Sider, *History*, 101.

7 Sider, *History*, 103.

8 Sider, *History*, 101-103.

Second, Sider also questions Yoder's monological⁹ framing of the first centuries, and the way Yoder's discussion of the age of Constantine is governed by 'a fall motif.'¹⁰ This leads Yoder to reason from 'a shift' instead of a process of development.¹¹ According to Sider, this manner of reasoning provokes unnecessary oppositions, for example between martyrs and apologists in the first centuries.¹² Sider concludes that Yoder's evangelical revisionism 'ought to have led him to challenge the effectiveness of these tropes in his ecclesiology,' but that he fails to do so.¹³

Furthermore, Sider discerns a more comprehensive problem: Yoder 'constantly invoked but rarely engaged deeply the history of the fourth century.'¹⁴ Yoder's historiographical work is, in other words, not doing the job.¹⁵ Does that render Yoder's historiographical work useless? Sider does not think so, he finds Yoder's approach helpful for other reasons:

Its value lies rather in the way that the answers Yoder reached open historians up to the new possibilities for envisioning how historiography can be done as Christian ministry, in that Yoder gave specifically theological merit to the process of listening to alternative voices as a way of making Christian inheritance of the past difficult.¹⁶

In other words, Yoder offers an inspiring historiographical method, but

9 Sider, *History*, 111. Sider's choice of words.

10 Sider, *History*, 113.

11 Sider, *History*, 107.

12 Sider, *History*, 111. Sider does see how Yoder can work carefully, for example in the way in which he related to the Nicene creeds. Sider is appreciative of how Yoder sees theology not merely as a collection of doctrines, but as politics, institutional arrangements and practices. But the main problem is that Yoder has the tendency to 'provoke unnecessary dilemmas,' and Yoder falls short in applying his own historiographic method. Sider mentions for example Yoder's 'inattention to the effects of roman law on Christian self-perception and theology,' 'his unnuanced account of the political implications of pro Nicene theology,' and his perspective on how discipleship changed under Constantinianism. Sider, *History*, 119-123.

13 Sider, *History*, 113.

14 Sider, *History*, 99.

15 Sider concludes that Yoder's work cannot be used as a textbook account of church history. Because 'if it were indeed giving such an account it would be subject to devastating criticism' (Sider, *History*, 131).

16 Sider, *History*, 131.

falls short in applying this in his own historiographical work.

In his polemic work *Defending Constantine* (2010)¹⁷ Peter Leithart picks up Sider's argument (Yoder falls short of his own historical method), but uses it to disqualify Yoder's reading of the fourth century and his use of Constantinianism altogether:¹⁸

Yoder's narrative of the church's fall comes under his own judgment as 'Constantinian'. We should abandon it, if for nothing else than for Yoderian reasons.¹⁹

Sider does, however, nuance this conclusion. In response to Leithart's work, Sider argues that Yoder's main question was not: did a shift occur? But: how do we judge which changes should be welcomed as revelatory and which should be denounced as betrayal? It is Sider's perspective that Yoder's evangelical revisionism offers constructive ways to evaluate changes in the life of the church.²⁰

In engaging Yoder's work with Judith Lieu's question in mind, we must conclude that Yoder's work falls short of what historiographical work requires. Yoder does avoid some of the traps Lieu is afraid of,²¹ but brings other biases to the matter that in turn lead to other 'unnecessary' dichotomies. Yoder is, however, very open about the theological agenda his research is driven by, and this is where his usefulness lies. Not in historiography per se, but in finding words to evaluate changes in the life of the church.

¹⁷ Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine. The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010).

¹⁸ See for a more extended discussion section 4.3.

¹⁹ Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 321.

²⁰ J. Alexander Sider 'Constantine and Myths of the Fall of the Church: An Anabaptist View,' in *Constantine Revisited. Leithart, Yoder and the Constantinian Debate*, ed. John D. Roth (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013), 174.

²¹ The earlier mentioned points of (1) working with an abstract or universal conception of each religion, Judaism and Christianity, when what we know about is the specific and local, and (2) Jewish and Christian doctrine or practices are traced back to earlier roots within the first-century variety.

4.2.2 *Yoder's reading of the Old Testament*

Yoder's reading of the Old Testament in general and his reading of Jeremiah in particular is an important part of his ecclesiological argument. To reflect on Yoder's reading and use of Jeremiah as a turning point in the biblical narrative, I use the work of Daniel Smith-Christopher and John C. Nugent. Both are Old Testament scholars who relate directly to Yoder's work. It is also helpful to use Walter Brueggemann's reading of Jeremiah to mirror Yoder's 'Jeremiad Turn'. Brueggemann is an Old Testament scholar and Jeremiah specialist. Although he does not interact with Yoder's work directly, his reading of Jeremiah helps us conclude to what extent Yoder's use of Jeremiah makes sense. Because Jeremiah 29 is central to Yoder's argument, it is helpful for this research to exegetically engage the text and use this exegesis to evaluate Yoder's reading of Jeremiah 29.

4.2.2.1 *Daniel Smith-Christopher*²²

In 2002, Smith-Christopher published *A Biblical Theology of Exile*²³ and he placed this book within an emergence of 'diasporic theologies,' which he associates with the work of Yoder, Brueggemann and Hauerwas, and that of Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin in the Jewish context.²⁴ In discussing some of Yoder's themes, Smith-Christopher refers to Yoder's diaspora as mission proposal as 'Yoder's unfinished project'²⁵ and 'his unfortunate-

²² As mentioned in Chapter 1, Daniel Smith was a former student of Yoder. He received his PhD in Old Testament studies and became professor in Old Testament and Peace Studies. They shared an interest in pacifist aspects of Judaism. There is a lot of correspondence in Yoder's archive about plans to translate texts from Jewish pacifist thinkers into English, about recent discoveries, about checking new theological perspectives, about feedback on each other's articles. Yoder wrote a couple of recommendation letters for Smith and their correspondence is informal and friendly. Daniel Smith also became a student and friend of Steven Schwarzschild. Although this is not so clear from Yoder's published work, from his archives and correspondence you get the impression that Daniel Smith is a major influence on Yoder's development of his perspectives on Judaism and the Free Church, especially from the 1980s onwards.

²³ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*. Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

²⁴ Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology*, 6-9.

²⁵ Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology*, 7.

ly undeveloped Christian theology of exile.²⁶ This raises the question as to what extent Smith-Christopher found Yoder's work unfinished. In his introduction Smith-Christopher offers an agenda for a theology of exile. This contains first, an *ad fontes*: a critical and careful 'reading of history of the events of the Babylonian exile itself.' Second, a theology of exile calls for a certain hermeneutical approach, in which 'Constantinian exegeses'²⁷ should be avoided and the texts should be read with the presumption of resistance.²⁸ If Yoder's theology of exile were unfinished, it would seem logical that any perceived lack would be in these two areas.

In *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (2002) Smith-Christopher expands Yoder's perspective by working out these two points. Although not always reacting directly to Yoder's line of thinking, Smith-Christopher shows where Yoder's approach falls short: precisely in this careful reading of the context of the Hebrew diaspora before reflecting on its meaning for a Christian theology of exile.

One of the issues Yoder and Smith-Christopher differ on is Yoder's selective reading of the canonical texts. This is evident, for example, in their different appreciation of Ezra and Nehemiah. Smith-Christopher finds Yoder's reading too pejorative. Smith-Christopher and Yoder corresponded on these issues. In their correspondence from July 1993 Smith-Christopher explains his reading of Ezra and Nehemiah, and shows how Yoder reads them differently to himself. From his research on the books of Ezra and Nehemiah Smith-Christopher gained new insights, for example on the practice of fasting and nonviolent resistance. Smith-Christopher writes that he arrived at a position of contrast between Ezra and Nehemiah. It is worth quoting his conclusion on this at length. After a description of what

26 Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology*, 9. Although Daniel Smith-Christopher might refer to Yoder's (untimely) death, which did not give him enough time to expand his line of thinking, I take his comments as referring to the content of Yoder's theology of exile.

27 Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology*, 21-24 'not all the biblical descriptions of responses to exile are positive models for contemporary faith and practice.'

28 Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology*, 24.

this difference looks like, he comments:

Speaking not too metaphorically, I think that the “two ways” begin to be articulated in the Persian Period. The way of Ezra and the way of Nehemiah. The way of Ezra leads to nonviolence and resistance, the way of Nehemiah leads to violence and resistance and messianism of the monarchical sort. Of course, there are problems with the politics of Ezra. But they are problems that radical reformationists know only too well. Maintenance of the alternative community can lead to ghettoization – precisely the danger of Ezra’s separation for mixed marriages. But one can analyze this according to the concerns behind the action and judge the action as an over-reaction to a legitimate concern (e.g. nonconformity to the world). So, I think Ezra was certainly a step forward, because I believe Ezra’s work created the roots for a non-state conception of the Kingdom of God. Ghetto is not the inevitable result of radical reformation theology – but it is a constant danger, because it is an easy way around confronting dominant culture.²⁹

Yoder responds by writing:

Your distinguishing Ezra and Nehemiah is fine, at the point of non-violence and fasting. But both are prolongation of the Chronicles style and agenda. Nehemiah wants to restore the fortress, whereas Ezra uses his status as imperial functionary to impose the ghetto’s rules on the Samaritans. Each extends part of the identity preserved in Babylon but without seeing Babylon as mission. Ezra is Amish, Nehemiah is puritan, neither has a vision to “seek the shalom of the city to where YHWH has sent you.” Neither was “messianic” the way Jeremiah and Schwarzschild were.³⁰

The course of their correspondence shows their difference in approach. Smith-Christopher’s methodology of cultural exegesis uses insights and

²⁹ Smith-Christopher to Yoder, July 13, 1993 (Box 211).

³⁰ Yoder to Smith-Christopher, July 19, 1993 (Box 211).

models from social studies to read the texts carefully in their context from a minority perspective. He shows in his work how this careful reading respects the whole of the Old Testament narrative (while differentiating the different sources and themes), where Yoder has a less careful approach, is less thorough in dealing with context, is selective, and finds dichotomies where they do not need to be.³¹ This is visible in that Yoder highlights mainly 'the Jeremiac Turn' and 'the Joseph paradigm',³² where Smith-Christopher uses a broad variety of canonical and extracanonical texts to study the context and theology of exile.³³

One of the reasons for this difference has to do with how Smith-Christopher and Yoder view the normativity of exile for ecclesiology. Yoder reads it as calling for the people of God, where Smith-Christopher tries to avoid that level of normativity. He sees exile as a suggested paradigm for the current context, even more, as 'a radically sobering diagnosis for the present reality of Christian existence in the world.'³⁴ But he does not approach exile as the normative way of living for Jewish or Christian communities.

In conclusion, although Smith-Christopher is sympathetic towards Yoder's diaspora as mission approach, he does criticize Yoder's work on two levels: first, his selective reading of the sources and second, Yoder's biased – ecclesial normative – hermeneutic in his reading of these sources.

31 Yoder would not agree with this conclusion. In a letter to Smith-Christopher he writes:

'Or rather: the way you make the wider normative argument is not based on the galuth literature but is illustrated by showing the congruence between it and John Naas, Marcellus, Ed. Said or John Yoder. I would argue on a more normative-theological level from the story itself, in addition to adducing the facts you have brought out.' (July 13, 1993, box 211). Yoder refers to the normative aspect of a calling to diaspora, which I think he finds undervalued in Smith-Christopher's method.

32 Jeremiah 29:1-10 and the narratives of Joseph, Daniel and Esther.

33 See for example the variety of texts Smith-Christopher uses in his *Biblical Theology* (2002).

34 Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology*, 191.

4.2.2.2 John C. Nugent

John C. Nugent is an Old Testament scholar who extensively engaged with Yoder's work, especially his reading of the Old Testament. In *The Politics of Yahweh. John Howard Yoder, The Old Testament, and the People of God* (2011) Nugent offers a sympathetic overview and syntax, so to speak, of Yoder's Old Testament reading.³⁵ In 'Biblical Warfare Revisited' (2009)³⁶ Nugent engages more explicitly with Yoder's diaspora as mission approach. Nugent discusses in his work three major points of criticism which Yoder's reading of the Old Testament received.

The first critique highlights Yoder's selective reading of the Old Testament in two respects. First, that he 'fails to discuss Old Testament books and events that are relevant to his approach.'³⁷ Scholars who point to this are, for example, Reimer, Schlabach and Cartwright. James A. Reimer argues that Yoder should have engaged the substance of Torah, 'which is essential to understanding the dynamics of Israel's life.'³⁸ Gerald Schlabach argues that a careful reading of Deuteronomy 6-9 could have helped Yoder in reflecting on how to faithfully live in the land, something Yoder missed because of his emphasis on how not to.³⁹ Michael Cartwright observes that Yoder ignores post-exilic literature, 'which would presumably compromise his reading of that period.'⁴⁰

The second aspect of this critique is that Yoder 'routinely' neglects texts that show the other side of the story. It is worthwhile quoting Nugent at length on this:

³⁵ John C. Nugent, *The Politics of Yahweh. John Howard Yoder, The Old Testament, and the People of God* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011).

³⁶ John C. Nugent, 'Biblical Warfare Revisited: Extending the Insights of John Howard Yoder,' in *Power and Practices. Engaging the Work of John Howard Yoder* ed. Jeremy M. Bergen and Anthony G. Siegrist (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2009), 167-184.

³⁷ Nugent, *Politics*, 105.

³⁸ Nugent refers to A. James Reimer and Paul G. Doerksen (eds.) *Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology. Law, Order, and Civil Society* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), 18-47.

³⁹ Nugent refers to Schlabach's article 'Deuteronomic or Constantinian: What Is the Most Basic Problem for Christian Social Ethics,' in *The Wisdom of the Cross. Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas (et. al.) (Eugene: Wipf&Stock, 1999), 449-471. See also section 4.5.3.

⁴⁰ Nugent, *Politics*, 105, JCSR, 223.

For example, Yoder highlights (a) the anti-monarchical streams of the Old Testament to the neglect of the pro-monarchical streams, (b) the positive accounts of exile to the neglect of the negative, (c) the divine involvement in Yahweh war violence to the neglect of human participation, (d) the conditionality of the divine promises to Israel to the neglect of the irrevocability of certain promises, and (e) the diminishing importance of Jerusalem, the temple and the land to the neglect of the eschatological significance of these. Such neglect could be multiplied many times over and the fact would remain that Yoder simply told the Old Testament story the way he saw it and felt no need to seriously engage (at least in print) several passages that did not agree with his telling and rival interpretations to his way of understanding a given passage.⁴¹

Nugent is very sympathetic to Yoder's work in the sense that he finds excuses for Yoder's omissions. Although Nugent realizes that 'the cumulative effective of these omissions appears devastating for Yoder's project,' he argues that 'this need not be the case' for four reasons: (1) that he did not include all voices does not falsify a given position (certainly not in this case), (2) Yoder did not feel qualified and (3) he did not have the time, (4) his selective reading does not necessarily undermine Yoder's trajectory. In Nugent's opinion Yoder's selectivity does not disqualify his work altogether, but his work does need to be expanded, it requires a broader picture.⁴²

The second critique concerns Yoder's 'choice to derive theological constructions from events of questionable historicity.'⁴³ Nugent demonstrates that Yoder reasons from his Biblical Realist hermeneutics, where he focuses more on the biblical account than discerning whether the events that lay behind it are historical or not. In that sense Yoder is more concerned with 'how the communities that produced and received the texts

⁴¹ Nugent, *Politics*, 106.

⁴² Nugent, *Politics*, 106-107.

⁴³ Nugent, *Politics*, 126. Nugent only refers explicitly to J.J.M. Roberts, who criticizes the work of Millard Lind, a major source for Yoder's reading of the Old Testament.

would have appropriated them into their understanding of who God is.’ Yoder worked in other words with a literary critical or narrative approach instead of a historical critical one.⁴⁴

The third critique is that in view of his strong criticism of Israelite monarchism, Yoder’s work has Marcionite tendencies. Nugent refers in particular to the critique of John Milbank, who reads the Mennonite anti-Constantinianism of Yoder and Hauerwas as a rejection of ‘the monarchy, the political structures of the Old Testament, and thus, the Old Testament as a whole.’⁴⁵ Nugent argues that Milbank makes the mistake of ‘assuming that “the political level of the Old Testament” is most fundamentally expressed in Constantinian or monarchical structures.’⁴⁶ Yoder’s reading of the Old Testament, however, sees the kingship of Yahweh, expressed in the anti-monarchistic/ prophetic line, as the main political structure in the Old Testament. This line finds its fulfillment in Christ and can – in that sense – never be at risk of being Marcionite. Nugent supports Yoder on this.

Reflecting on Yoder’s diaspora as mission approach in ‘Biblical Warfare Revisited’ (2009)⁴⁷ Nugent highlights the originality and anti-Marcionism of Yoder’s proposal. Most studies about the problem of warfare in Scripture cover the subject either from a duality, plurality or continuity approach. The critical turning point in all three options ‘takes place with the proclamation of Jesus, thereby driving a wedge between the testaments.’⁴⁸ According to Nugent, the specific of Yoder’s proposal is that he narrates

44 Although, according to Nugent, Yoder ‘worked freely with the basic tools and categories of historical criticism,’ Yoder specified that in using terms such as myth or legend, ‘he is not making judgements about historicity but about genre.’ Which actually shows a literary critical approach. Nugent, *Politics*, 127.

45 Nugent responds to John Milbank ‘Power is Necessary for Peace: In Defense of Constantine’ *ABC Religion and Ethics* (Oct 29, 2010).

46 Nugent, *Politics*, 146.

47 Nugent follows the same line in ‘Re-Formation of a People Revisited,’ the chapter on Jeremiah in *The Politics of Yahweh* (Nugent, *Politics*, 149-171).

48 Nugent, ‘Biblical,’ 167.

the biblical history in such a way that long before Jesus 'God reconfigured Israel's life and mission so that warfare would become obsolete.'⁴⁹

Nugent is aware of the critical receptions Yoder's reading of Jeremiah received, which have to do with, for example, Yoder's obvious free church agenda (James A. Reimer),⁵⁰ his reading of Jeremiah, which puts too much weight on a few verses of chapter 29 (Peter Ochs),⁵¹ or his poor reading of Ezra (John Goldingay⁵² and Paul J. Kissling⁵³). Taking this into account, Nugent raises three fundamental questions to evaluate Yoder's approach: first, can Yoder's reading of Jeremiah be maintained? Second, do post-exilic biblical texts truly support Yoder's thesis? And, third, does Yoder do justice to the manifold nature of post-exilic Judaism?⁵⁴

Nugent answers these question by focusing on Yoder's specific perspective: namely that he is a Christocentric, postliberal, biblical realist.⁵⁵ Notwithstanding the specific hermeneutical approach this generates, Nugent is critical of one major weakness in Yoder's narration: 'Yoder's needlessly pejorative reading of palestinocentric existence, the city of Jerusalem and the return from exile.'⁵⁶ Nugent notes that the Promised Land is a main theme in the Old Testament narrative, and throughout this narrative (and early Christian texts) Jerusalem is and stays a special city. This explains the way in which the return to the land and Jerusalem was seen as a providential act of God, according to Ezra and Nehemiah's narration.

49 Nugent, 'Biblical,' 167.

50 Nugent, 'Biblical,' 172. Nugent refers to A. James Reimer's article 'Mennonites, Christ and Culture: The Yoder Legacy,' *CGR* 16, no. 2 (1998).

51 Nugent, 'Biblical,' 173. Nugent refers to Peter Ochs' commentary in *JCSR*, 204.

52 Nugent, 'Biblical,' 173. John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 764.

53 Nugent, 'Biblical,' 173. Nugent refers to the paper presented by Paul J. Kissling, 'Can John Howard Yoder's Ethics Embrace the Entire Old Testament as Scripture?' at the November 17, 2005, gathering of ETS in Valley Forge, PA. Later published in *Theological Reflections*, no. 8 (2007): 10-22.

54 Nugent, 'Biblical,' 173.

55 Nugent, 'Biblical,' 174.

56 Nugent, 'Biblical,' 174-175.

Because of these narrative lines Nugent proposes a fourfold revision of Yoder's narration in which

- 1 the promise to Abraham is seen as a constitutive phase in God's plan for Israel,
- 2 the Jeremiad turn is seen, not as a definitive break from palestinianocentric faith, but as the initial embrace of diaspora as a way of life,
- 3 the return to the land is seen as the successful reestablishment of Jerusalem in a diverse new phase, and
- 4 Jerusalem's ongoing significance is narrated in terms of 'an eschatological home base'.⁵⁷

Just like Smith-Christopher, Nugent is mostly sympathetic towards Yoder's project. Summarizing, he does however criticize Yoder's work on two particular levels: first, his selective reading of the sources and second, his biased hermeneutic in his reading of those sources.⁵⁸

4.2.2.3 *Walter Brueggemann*

Walter Brueggemann, Old Testament scholar of the postliberal kind⁵⁹ and associated with the emergence of 'exilic theology',⁶⁰ has written extensively on Jeremiah. His publications are both scholarly and popular and focus on both Old Testament theology and (flowing from this) reflections on church and culture. Because the works of Smith-Christopher and Nugent are so intertwined with Yoder's own, comparing Yoder's approach to an Old Testament scholar whose work is not so connected will give new insights .

⁵⁷ Nugent, 'Biblical,' 175-177.

⁵⁸ Nugent also notes that there are texts that support Yoder's reading, but which were never engaged by Yoder in the way they could have been. Nugent mentions for example the book of Daniel, Ezekiel's ethic of thrust and the Gedaliah movement in Jeremiah 40-41 (Nugent, *Politics*, 162n35.).

⁵⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology the Old Testament. Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 86,87; Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home. Preaching among Exiles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 150.

⁶⁰ Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology*, 6.

Brueggemann reads the Old Testament as documents which show that the exile emerged as 'the decisive shaping reference point for the self-understanding of Judaism,'⁶¹ together with the promise of return and restoration. This exile-homecoming paradigm is prominent in Brueggemann's reading of Jeremiah.⁶² Hope is first of all hope of return.

Brueggemann distinguishes between the Babylonian and Persian exile. In *Out of Babylon* (2010) Brueggemann sketches the new situation when Babylon disappeared as a world power and Persia arose. Although Persia allowed return to the land, the reach of Persia was further and longer lasting than that of Babylon: 'There would be no going home from Persia, for everywhere Jews went, including back to Jerusalem, it was still Persia.'⁶³ Instead of the exile-homecoming paradigm, something else was needed. Brueggemann calls this accommodation and resistance: 'accommodation enough to prosper, resistance enough to maintain a distinctive identity and ethic.'⁶⁴ He places Ezra and Nehemiah, Daniel, Joseph and Esther within this accommodation-resistance paradigm.⁶⁵

In examining Brueggemann's work we discover that Jeremiah 29:1-10 is of minor interest to Brueggemann. Because of his exile-homecoming paradigm, most of the time he jumps straight to Jeremiah 30-33 (the book of comfort),⁶⁶ to the promise of return.⁶⁷ Brueggemann does consider Jer-

61 Walter Brueggemann, *Like Fire in the Bones. Listening for the Prophetic Word in Jeremiah* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2006), 116; Brueggemann, *Theology*, 77.

62 His commentary on Jeremiah has 'Exile and Homecoming' as its subtitle for this reason. See Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah. Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

63 Walter Brueggemann, *Out of Babylon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 130.

64 Brueggemann, *Out of Babylon*, 131.

65 Brueggemann, *Out of Babylon*, 135-153.

66 Brueggemann, *Commentary*, 264-322.

67 Jeremiah 29:1-10 is, for example, not mentioned at all in Old Testament studies such as Walter Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament. The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003); or in Jeremian studies such as *Like fire in my bones*, or ecclesial publications such as *Out of Babylon*, Walter Brueggemann, *Mandate to Difference. An Invitation to the Contemporary Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), Walter Brueggemann, *Deep Memory Exuberant Hope. Contested Truth in a Post-Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), to mention a few publications. Jeremiah 29:1-10 is very briefly referenced in *Theology*, 435 and Walter Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah*, Old Testament Theology (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 119. An exception is Walter Brueggemann, *The Land. Place as Gift*,

emiah 29:1-10 in his commentary on Jeremiah. Here he links Jeremiah 29 to chapter 24, where the same exiles are addressed as carriers of God's future.⁶⁸ Jeremiah 24 and 29 characterize Jeremiah as practicing pastoral care to the exiles, expressed around two convictions: first, there must be a realistic and intentional embrace of the exile as a place where Jews must now be and where God has summoned them to obedience (29:5-7) and second, there is a long-term hope for return and restoration that can be affirmed and accepted (vv10-14). Both affirmations are important for the exiles and for the shape of the Jeremiah tradition.⁶⁹ On Jeremiah 29:5-7 Brueggemann comments:

Prophetic faith is powerfully realistic about the political situation of the Jews in exile. The Jews have no option to Babylon, which is God's chosen habitat for the exiles. There is, however, more than realism in this assertion. The imperative bestows upon this vulnerable, small community a large missional responsibility. In this way, the community is invited into the larger public process of the empire. Such a horizon prevents the exilic community from withdrawing into its own safe, sectarian existence, and gives it work to do and responsibility for the larger community.⁷⁰

This reading is at several points in line with Yoder's: the imperative or calling, the missionary responsibility, the diaspora communities as part of the larger public process of the empire.

When Yoder's exilic approach is compared to that of Brueggemann, the following differences come to light:

Brueggemann is first of all an Old Testament scholar. His main focus is to closely exegete the biblical texts. From that reading he moves to his reflections on church and western culture. He uses exile as a 'dynamic

Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 118-119, where Brueggemann reflects for two pages on Jeremiah 29:1-10, albeit also in the context of the promise of return.

⁶⁸ Brueggemann, *Commentary*, 255.

⁶⁹ Brueggemann, *Commentary*, 255.

⁷⁰ Brueggemann, *Commentary*, 257-258.

equivalent',⁷¹ as an 'analogy'⁷² or 'metaphor'⁷³ to reflect on the situation of the church in Western society. In this process he is very reluctant to make normative ecclesiological claims,⁷⁴ where for Yoder this is the reason for his reading of the exilic texts in the first place.

Brueggemann uses the whole of the Old Testament testimony for his theology of exile and sees different patterns that might be helpful in different times.⁷⁵ Yoder clearly chooses one model and in that process has to ignore or dismiss parts of exilic literature as not constructive for his theology of exile.

Although Brueggemann sees the exile as executed by God, and as a new situation, which asks for faithfulness and prophetic creativity from the people of God, he always emphasizes the temporary character of the exile and the promise of homecoming. Brueggemann never talks about exile as calling or as the normative shape for the people of God.

For Brueggemann it became clear, just as it did for the (rest of the) field of Old Testament studies from the 1970s onwards, that one of the determining categories in the Old Testament was concerned with 'place': land or landlessness.⁷⁶ That is why in Brueggemann's reading of the Old

71 Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination. Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), ix.

72 Brueggemann, *Cadences*, 78.

73 Brueggemann, *Cadences*, ix, 1-11, 115.

74 See for example his chapter 'Rethinking church models through Scripture' in Brueggemann, *Cadences*, 99-109, where he discusses three phases in the history of the people of Israel and links them to church models. He suggests three models: premonarchical model as "new church start", monarchical as temple community, postexilic as a textual community. It takes discernment to see which model is helpful for the particular situation the church is in. Although Brueggemann is very clear in his reading of temple and monarchy (God wanted this to end), he does not make the normative step (analogous) to the church models. One example of the reluctance of Brueggemann is the following sentence: 'While we may find wilderness – exile models less congenial, there is no biblical evidence that the God of the Bible cringes at the prospect of this community being one of wilderness and exile' (109).

75 Brueggemann, *Cadences*, 99-109.

76 See Brueggemann, *The Land*, which shows that a major theme in Brueggemann's work is land as God's covenantal promise for his people. He even calls the promise of land 'a return into history'. See, Brueggemann, *The Land*, 101-122. See also 'Israel's sense of place in Jeremiah' in Walter Brueggemann, *The God of All Flesh and Other Essays* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 44-60, where Brueggemann concludes: 'The prominence of land as space is a central motif of biblical faith, which has been largely unexplored both by an existential and by an historical hermeneutic concerned with covenantal, relational, eventful

Testament, exile is always interpreted within the hope of return (to the land). Yoder missed this development in Old Testament studies, or ignored it, because it did not fit into his reading of Jeremiah and diaspora.

Jeremiah 29:1-10 is of minor interest to the work of Brueggemann, because of his dominant exile–homecoming paradigm. In his reading of the Babylonian and Persian exile Brueggemann hardly reflects on these verses. He does however occasionally use these verses in his reflections on church and culture, through which he emphasizes that ‘sectarian withdrawal’ is not an option.⁷⁷ For Yoder these verses are central in his reading of the events of the exile, even a ‘turn’ in biblical narrative. They are also central in his ecclesiological conclusions that follow from it. Brueggemann’s reading in his commentary of the verses as they are do, however, not conflict with Yoder’s reading.⁷⁸ Where the two differ is on the importance of these verses in the bigger narrative: for Brueggemann they play a minor part, because he reads them in his ‘exile and homecoming’ paradigm. For Yoder they are key to the reading of the biblical narrative and the calling of Israel and the church.

Brueggemann reads the exilic texts primarily from the perspective of YHWH’s will, actions and promises and their implications for the people of God. Yoder reads the texts primarily from the perspective of the calling of the people of God. Most of Brueggemann’s theological reflection is therefore focused on YHWH and most of Yoder’s theological reflection on the calling of the people of God, namely on Israel and the church.

Mirroring Yoder’s Jeremiatic turn with Brueggemann’s reading of the Old Testament in general and Jeremiah in particular we see that Yoder has a plausible reading of Jeremiah 29. The ecclesiological normativity Yoder

categories. Biblical faith in the upheaval of exile returned to the basic land of promise (...) In so doing, it affirmed that Yahweh wills rootage and rootlessness for his people.’

⁷⁷ Brueggemann, *Cadences*, 13, 53, 90. Although in using this term Brueggemann is not agreeing with the (Niebuhrian) critique on Hauerwas’ theology as being sectarian (See, 13, 140n32). See also Walter Brueggemann, ‘Wright on Exile,’ in *Exile. A Conversation with N. T. Wright*, ed. James M. Scott (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017), 83-92.

⁷⁸ They both agree for example on the missional content of the verse and in not taking the 70 years of Jeremiah 29:11 literally. See Brueggemann, *Commentary*, 258.

reads in this chapter can however not be maintained, nor the claim that his reading is the only viable one. Yoder's reading highlights some helpful aspects, but he does so at the expense of others. For example, a calling to diaspora at the expense of the theme of land, or the calling of the people at the expense of God's acting in history.

4.2.2.4 *An exegesis of Jeremiah 29*

Jeremiah 29 is the foundational text for Yoder's concept of 'the Jeremiatic Turn', but I have not been able to find an article or chapter in which Yoder exegetically engages with Jeremiah 29. Although this chapter is of major importance for his diaspora ecclesiology, he fails to show why this is so from analysis of the text of the letter itself. In his writings on Jeremiah and diaspora Yoder elaborates on how the letter worked out in the lives of the exiles in terms of the development of synagogues, Torah reading and the rabbinate⁷⁹ and in how the exiled Jews served the surrounding culture.⁸⁰ At several points he refers to the 'paradigm' of Joseph, Daniel and Esther serving at the pagan courts.⁸¹ Yoder does not really exegete the text but primarily reflects on what Jeremiah 29 means or could mean for the mission of the people of God.⁸²

The exegetical work that is discernable in Yoder's publications on Jeremiah 29 is minimal. He mainly concludes that Jeremiah 29:5-7 means that the exiles were there to stay for the long term. He states for example:

Originally and prototypically this 'mission' applied to Babylon; but by implication it extended to all Jewry outside Palestine: in "all the peoples and places I have sent you" (29:14).⁸³

He does not explain the statement from the text itself. Moreover, it is fas-

79 JCSR, 171.

80 JCSR, 192.

81 JCSR, 71,78,172, 244.

82 See also RCF, 'Singing in Exile,' 175-186, where Yoder makes the same move.

83 JCSR, 178n.

cinating that he quotes from verse 14, which is in fact a promise of return:

I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from *all the nations and all the places where I have driven you*, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile. (ESV, italics mine)

This is an inadequate way of working with the text. Related to this, if you read Jeremiah 29:1-7 as a ‘Jeremiatic turn’ you have to attend to Jeremiah 29:10, which seems to state the opposite. This verse contains a divine promise of return within seventy years. Yoder does address this issue, albeit very briefly: seventy years ‘means on a deeper level “a long time”, so long that present plans should not be based on the idea of return.’⁸⁴ This is a common reading of this verse,⁸⁵ but again, Yoder does not explain this exegetically nor does he refer to any commentaries to back up his reading.

Because Jeremiah 29,1-7 is central to Yoder’s diaspora as mission approach, it is helpful for this research to engage these verses exegetically to discern if and how Yoder’s reading is fair to the text itself, that is if the text provides enough evidence itself to claim ‘a Jeremiatic turn.’⁸⁶

Jeremiah 29:1-7 reads:

These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. ²This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem. ³The letter was sent by the hand of Elishah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king

⁸⁴ JCSR, 77.

⁸⁵ See for example, Brueggemann, *Commentary*, 258. For an overview see Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, WBC, vol.27 (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 73-75.

⁸⁶ The following exegesis is my own.

of Babylon. It said: ⁴“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (ESV)

Some exegetical remarks:

The context of Jeremiah's letter to the exiles is the question of how to deal with exile; is God in this? Will we return soon? There were prophets who proclaimed peace and said that God would not inflict harm and exile upon his people. In exile these prophets proclaimed that God would end the exile soon. Jeremiah prophesized the opposite, and this caused a clash with both his rival prophets and the citizens of Judah who did not like to hear his prophecies. Jeremiah 29 consists of two communications with the exiles in Babylon. First, the letter to build and plant (Jeremiah 29:1-23) and second, a letter to confront Shemaiah, who opposed Jeremiah's first letter (Jeremiah 29:24-32).

Verses 1-3 are superscription: address, date and couriers.

Verse 4:

Notice the difference with verse 1, where the exiles are said to be taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar. Verse 4 states that it is God who sent them into exile. The exiles are within God's will, which is important for the following orders in the letter.

Verse 5:

‘Build’ and ‘plant’ is an often-used combination in the book of Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 1:10, 18:7-10, 24:6, 29:5, 31:4,28, 42:10) where building and planting are activities of God that are connected with his divine will and blessing. God is the one who builds and plants peoples and nations, including the people of Israel. There are two exceptions to this connection of building and planting as an activity of God: Jeremiah 1:10 and 29:5. Jeremiah 1 describes the calling of Jeremiah. In 1:9-10 Jeremiah receives the divine authority to build and plant:

Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me,

“Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” (ESV)

The other exception is Jeremiah 29:5 where the exiles receive the divine commission to build and plant. That the exiles receive this specific command means that they are no longer under the judgment of God, but under his blessing. In living this commandment, they will be doing God’s work: to build and to plant. Moreover, if the words build and plant echo Jeremiah’s call, then the commission to build and plant can be seen as ‘the small beginning of God’s plan to build and plant nations and kingdoms.’⁸⁷

In the wider context of the Torah and prophets, building and planting also plays a significant role. In his final speech to the people of Israel, at the entrance of the promised land, Moses urges them to follow God’s commandments. If they do so, they will be blessed, if they fail to do so they will fall under judgment: ‘You shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it. You shall plant a vineyard, but you shall not enjoy its fruit’ (Deuteronomy 28:30). The eschatological picture of Isaiah 65 describes that ‘they shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards

⁸⁷ WBC, *Jeremiah* 26-52, 71

and eat their fruit' (Isaiah 65:21). To build and not live, and to plant and not eat, is a sign of God's judgement. Conversely, to build and live, and to plant and eat, is a sign of God's blessing. Therefore the commission to build *and live*, plant *and eat*, characterizes the exiles' time in Babylon as a time of blessing.

Gerald Keown (1995) points to the fact that in Israel, newly built houses were dedicated (Deuteronomy 20:5) and the first fruits were presented to God (Deuteronomy 26:2). The commission to build and plant implies that these ceremonies could also take place in a foreign land. Keown draws the conclusion that 'these commandments lay the foundation for survival in the Jewish diaspora.'⁸⁸

Babylonian documents, archeological findings and biblical data show that the exiles did indeed settle themselves, mostly in the region of the city of Nippur.⁸⁹

Verse 6:

The commandment to marry and multiply echoes Israel's first commandment (Genesis 1:28). The implication of being directed to the first commandment of the Torah, is that they should also pay heed to the rest of the commandments within this new exilic setting.

Jeremiah 30:19 uses the same verbs in God's promise: 'I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will make them honored, and they shall not be small.' Again, the text shows an interaction between what God is doing and what the exiles are called to.

⁸⁸ WBC, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 71. Keown writes: 'the commandments to settle and eat implied either that these ceremonies could take place in a foreign land or that such rituals were no longer necessary. Rudolph (167) opts for the latter possibility, seeing it as an example of prophetic piety that opened the way for the mission to the Gentiles announced by Deutero-Isaiah.' I opt for the former, mainly because of the halachic developments in the Babylonian context, resulting centuries later in the Babylonian Talmud.

⁸⁹ I refer to the Murashu Archives, a library of 700 inscribed tablets, found near Nippur. These show contracts and loan certificates of a Jewish family in the fifth century B.C.E. See WBC, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 71; Elmer A. Martens, *Jeremiah*, BCBC (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1986), 177. For biblical data, see for example Ezekiel 3,15, which refers to 'the exiles at Tel-abib, who were dwelling by the Chebar canal.'

Verses 5-6:

Where Jeremiah earlier prophesized the judgment of God over the people of Judah in terms of houses, fields and wives ('their houses shall be turned over to others, their fields and wives together,' Jeremiah 6:12), here they are commanded to receive it back. To build, to plant, to marry. It shows that God's judgment is over, the time of God's blessing has begun.

There is a fascinating link between Jeremiah 29:5-6 and Deuteronomy 20. Both texts relate to building, planting and marrying. Deuteronomy 20 is a text on warfare. It starts with the proclamation that YHWH fights for Israel, followed by instructions for men who are to be excused from the battle:

Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying, 'Is there any man who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it. And is there any man who has planted a vineyard and has not enjoyed its fruit? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man enjoy its fruit. And is there any man who has betrothed a wife and has not taken her? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man take her.' (Deuteronomy 20,5-7, ESV)

It is as if in his letter Jeremiah is excusing the exiles from battle with the Babylonians on the same grounds: build, plant, marry. Or even more strongly, these words warn 'the exilic community to refrain from revolt against Babylon.'⁹⁰

Verse 7:

Jeremiah had been forbidden to pray for 'the good' of the people of Judah (Jeremiah 14:11). The prophets who proclaimed 'peace, peace' were labeled as false prophets, who did not speak on God's behalf (Jeremiah 6:14

⁹⁰ WBC, *Jeremiah* 26-52, 72.

and 14:13-14). Here however, the exiles are commissioned to pray for the city of Babylon and search her peace. Keown concludes:

This transfer of blessing and protection from Jerusalem (26:6) to Babylon (29:7) parallels the transfer of royal authority from the kings of Judah and her neighboring states to Nebuchadnezzar (27:6-7).⁹¹

We may conclude that a careful reading of Jeremiah 29:1-7 backs up Yoder's use of this chapter at several points:

- To build (and live), to plant (and eat) is the language of blessing and calling, not of punishment. Although recipients of the letter live in exile, they are called to live like they are in the land.
- The connection between the instructions to build, plant, marry and the language of Deuteronomy 20 suggests a disapproval of revolt against the Babylonian empire, which is made explicit in verse 7: seek the peace of the city.
- The commandments given in this letter are an encouragement to live an observant life according to the Torah, even in exile. Especially in exile.
- The divinely approved royal authority is transferred from the kings of Judah and Israel to the king of Babylon. The people of Israel have to find a way of living faithfully under foreign rule.
- The commandments of Jeremiah 29:1-7 seem to surpass a literal timeframe of seventy years for the exiles (Jeremiah 29:10). The first readers already interpreted it as 'a long time' (Jeremiah 29:28), and in Daniel 9 it is extended to seventy weeks of years, which literally is 490 years. Ackroyd (1968) concludes that it appears that the exilic age, according to Daniel, will last until the age to come.⁹²

⁹¹ WBC, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 72.

⁹² Peter R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration* (London: SCM Press, 1968), as quoted in Keown, *Jeremiah 26-52*, WBC 75. See also John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC, Vol. 30

As Yoder's reading for a Jeremaic turn depends on the lasting aspect of exile as a way of life, a calling, the key point that counts against Yoder is what is explicitly missing from Jeremiah 29: namely any indication that the commandment is 'forever' (in Hebrew: *olam*) and 'for the generations to come.' This is a well-known phrase in the Hebrew Bible that is used in the context of divine promise (for example the promise of the land to Abraham),⁹³ calling (for example the calling of the priests and Levites)⁹⁴ and commandments.⁹⁵ There is no mention in Jeremiah 29 of 'you shall keep it forever, through the generations,' the *terminus technicus* for a normative change or turn that is there to stay. When the Hebrew Bible has explicit language for such a turn, but it is not used here, we are not allowed, at least if we want to read the text carefully, to assume it.

4.2.2.5 Conclusion

Nugent and Smith, who did engage with Yoder's work, are mainly positive about Yoder's Old Testament reading. They question, however, his selective reading, his either/ or approach and the dichotomies this generates, especially with regard to Yoder's pejorative reading of palestinocentric existence (Ezra and Nehemiah),⁹⁶ the city of Jerusalem and the return from exile.

(Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 257-260, 266-268.

93 See for example Genesis 13:15 and 17:8, Exodus 32:13.

94 See for example Exodus 40:15, Numbers 18:23, Deuteronomy 18:5.

95 See for example Exodus 12, Leviticus chapters 7,10,16,17,23,24,25, Numbers 10 and 19, Deuteronomy 5 and 12.

96 Paul Kissling agrees that Yoder has a poor reading of Ezra and Nehemiah, but argues that a more careful reading might have supported Yoder's approach. He points to the commentary on Ezra–Nehemiah by Tamara Cohn Eskenazi. She has an interesting reading in which she argues that three dominant themes are combined in Ezra–Nehemiah to 'deemphasize the heroic and affirm the prosaic.' Each of these echoes prominent Yoderian themes which, argues Kissling, Yoder would describe as arising out of Diaspora. Cohn Eskenazi reads in Ezra–Nehemiah that these books

shift the focus from leaders to participating community,

expand the concept of the house of God from temple to city,

emphasize the primacy of the written text over the oral as a source of authority.

These shifts originate in Ezra–Nehemiah and support Yoder's diaspora as mission paradigm. See Paul J. Kissling, 'John Howard Yoder's reading of the Old Testament and the Stone-Campbell Tradition' in *Radical Ecumenicity. Pursuing Unity and Continuity after John Howard Yoder*, ed. John C. Nugent (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2010), 140-141. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1988).

They both contend that a revision is needed on these points and both offer a proposal. Both also embrace the concept of diaspora ecclesiology, but not as the only normative ecclesiology to be derived from the Old Testament texts. Both suggest a more contingent approach. The same goes for Brueggemann. He also has a less normative ecclesiological approach to the texts, he chooses to read them carefully in the first place and then relate them to the current context. In sum, all three of these Old Testament scholars question the rigidity of the ecclesiological frame Yoder uses to approach the Old Testament texts, and the normative ecclesiological consequences that follow from it. My exegesis of Jeremiah 29 confirms these readings.

4.2.3 Yoder's reading of the New Testament

A main part of Yoder's ecclesiological argument builds on his reading of the New Testament and in particular his reading of Paul. Douglas Harink has reflected extensively on Yoder's reading of Paul and raises some critical questions. Although N.T. Wright does not engage with Yoder's work directly, his well-known reading of Jesus' ministry as a return from exile questions whether it is appropriate to speak of a diaspora ecclesiology after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

4.2.3.1 Yoder's reading of Paul according to Douglas Harink

Harink reads Yoder as 'a thoroughly Pauline theologian'⁹⁷ for whom the writings and theology of Paul are essential to his theological project.⁹⁸ This is shown first of all in *The Politics of Jesus* (1972), which is actually for the greater part about the politics of Paul. Harink notices that

the angle from which Yoder approached the Pauline letters in *The Politics of Jesus*, namely as an extension into the gentile world of Jesus' political mission to Israel, enabled Yoder (already in 1972) to render a version of Pauline theology that incorporated and antici-

⁹⁷ Douglas Harink, *Paul Among the Postliberals. Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), 23.

⁹⁸ Harink, *Paul*, 106.

pated some of the most important developments in recent Pauline scholarship.⁹⁹

In *Paul amongst the Postliberals* (2003), Harink relates Yoder's work to New Testament scholarship since 1972 and he shows how some insights have become widely accepted,¹⁰⁰ and where others did not find such widespread attention.¹⁰¹ Yoder's reading of the Old Testament shed new light on Jesus, Paul and church and kingdom, as he read them within the context of Israel's calling to be a diaspora people.¹⁰² Central to Yoder's reading of Paul, is his claim that, were the church faithful to Paul, it would really discover its true character as the Gentile diaspora people of God whose life would mirror that of diaspora Judaism.¹⁰³ This reading of Paul and Judaism is enlightening, but is not without its challenges. Harink shows that Yoder's reading of Paul and Israel is failing in focus, in the sense that Paul did not write a moral history of Israel, as Yoder did, but testified to God's action and election. Yoder never really addresses Romans 9-11 and the election of Israel, but he should in order to avoid certain dilemmas. Without reasoning from Israel's election, Yoder is in danger of losing sight of the church as a people constituted by God's apocalyptic action, and is in risk of a too modernist and voluntarist approach to ecclesiology (we will return to this in section 4.4.6).¹⁰⁴

Harink is impressed by Yoder's reading of Paul in *The Politics of Jesus* (1972) and with his work on 'diaspora as mission'. He does however question Yoder's selective reading of Paul's letters and, thereby his ignoring

99 Harink, *Paul*, 106.

100 Harink, *Paul*, 118-119. What has been widely supported according to Harink, is first, Yoder's reading of the powers as social structures, and second, that the context of Paul's language of powers is apocalyptic.

101 Harink, *Paul*, 111. Yoder's reading that the cross is central to Paul's social ethics has not received widespread attention in Pauline scholarship.

102 Harink, *Paul*, 198-200. Yoder reads the Jewish history differently: By reading the Jewish exile in the light of Jeremiah 29:4-7 and the patterns of faithfulness-in-exile exhibited in the stories of Joseph, Daniel and others, Yoder opens up the history of Judaism as a positive model for the church's own way of faithfulness. Further, he opens up a new way of understanding Jesus' mission and his message of the reign of God.

103 Harink, *Paul*, 201-203.

104 Harink, *Paul*, 203-207.

of major Pauline themes, such as the election of Israel. Yoder's ecclesiology would be strengthened if it were to engage the whole of the Pauline corpus.

4.2.3.2 *NT Wright's reading of Jesus' ministry as a return from exile*

New Testament scholar N.T. Wright is famous for his thesis of continuing exile. In his publications, Wright reads Second Temple Judaism as comprising a people who in the majority considered themselves to be in continuing exile. Although the Jewish people had returned to the land Israel, they had not yet seen the promised restoration that would lift up the exilic state. 'YHWH had not yet returned to Zion.'¹⁰⁵ According to Wright, Jesus interpreted his ministry, life, death and resurrection within that narrative. In Jesus YHWH returned to Zion and brought an end to exile.¹⁰⁶ The early church, and Paul in particular, testified to the gospel within this end of exile frame. Paul realized that 'what God was supposed to do for Israel at the end of history, this God had done for Jesus in the middle of history.' In Jesus exile is over.¹⁰⁷

The emergent question for this research is whether Wright's notion of Jesus' ministry as return from exile stands as a contrasting position to a diaspora approach to ecclesiology.¹⁰⁸ In his not undisputed thesis of con-

105 N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*. Christian Origins and the Question of God. Volume 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 215-243, 268-272, 299-301. N.T. Wright, 'Yet the Sun Will Rise: Reflections on the Exile and Restoration in Second Temple Judaism, Jesus, Paul and the Church Today,' in *Exile*, ed. Scott, 19-80, especially 20-45.

106 This is the main argument of N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Christian Origins and the Question of God. Volume 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), see especially 612-654. See also Wright 'Yet the Sun,' 45-61.

107 N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. Christian Origins and the Question of God. Volume 4. (London: SPCK, 2013), 139-163, 644-708, 1049-1061. See also Wright 'Yet the Sun,' 62-72.

108 Stephen Chapman formulates this question very succinctly: 'If Wright is correct about Jesus' being the bearer of restoration, however, then his theory ultimately undermines Yoder's, because for Wright "exile" should cease to be a decisive reality for the people of God post-Jesus.' Stephen B. Chapman, 'The Old Testament and the Church after Christendom,' *JTI* 9.2 (2015): 171.

tinuing exile,¹⁰⁹ Wright however reads ‘exile’ differently from the way that Yoder reads ‘diaspora.’

Wright argues that ‘many Second Temple Jews interpreted that part of the continuing narrative in which they were living in terms of the so called Deuteronomic scheme of sin – exile – restoration.’¹¹⁰ Because there was no sign of the restoration the prophets had promised, the people considered themselves to be still in exile, and therefore in sin. Jesus embodied ‘forgiveness of sins’ and ‘the return of YHWH to Zion.’ He embodied the return from exile and restoration of Israel. Wright uses ‘exile’ in his argument specifically in a soteriological (and therefore eschatological) way.¹¹¹

Yoder on the other hand, works with the term diaspora. This emerges from his reading of a ‘Jeremiac Turn’ in Jeremiah 29, which consists, according to Yoder, in a turn from exile (punitive language, as seen in the Deuteronomic scheme) to diaspora (language of calling). Yoder interprets diaspora as an ecclesiological category, in other words, as the social shape of the faith communities within their surrounding context. This also seems to be the case in the letters of Peter and James, where the recipient churches are referred to as being ‘in the diaspora.’¹¹² This has no soteriological meaning, in the sense that they are considered to be far from God in Jesus, but it refers to the social and geographical shape of the communities.

We are safe to conclude that Wright’s perspective of the return from exile, and Yoder’s proposal for a diaspora ecclesiology, are not contrasting

109 For an overview of critics of Wright’s ongoing exile and return from exile, see Michael F. Bird, ‘Jesus and the Continuing Exile of Israel in the Writings of N.T. Wright,’ *JSHJ*, 13 (2015): 215-219. See also James M. Scott ‘N.T. Wright’s Hypothesis of an “Ongoing Exile” Issues and Answers, in *Exile*, ed. Scott, 3-16. For an example of a critical reading see Larry W. Hurtado, ‘YHWH’s Return to Zion. A New Catalyst for Earliest High Christology?’ in *God and the Faithfulness of Paul. A Critical Examination of the Pauline Theology of N.T. Wright*, ed. Christoph Heilig, J. Thomas Hewitt and Michael F. Bird (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 417-438. For an affirmative response see Craig A. Evers, ‘Jesus & the Continuing Exile of Israel,’ in *Jesus & the Restoration of Israel. A Critical Assessment of N.T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God*, ed. Carey C. Newman (Downers Grove: IVP, 1999), 77-100.

110 Wright ‘Yet the Sun,’ 21.

111 Wright, *Paul*, 150.

112 1 Peter 1:1, 17, 2:11; James 1:1.

perspectives but they describe different theological fields, using, however, similar language.

4.2.4 Yoder's reading of Rabbinic Sources

Yoder's personal files show that he kept up an extensive correspondence with different Jewish scholars in order to gain new insights or to check the development of his way of thinking against the knowledge of some experts in the field.¹¹³ How did Yoder use the rabbinic sources in his ecclesiological discourse? To answer this question, it is helpful to look at the correspondence with Rabbi Jacob Neusner¹¹⁴ and Rabbi Steven Schwarzschild.¹¹⁵ Peter Ochs¹¹⁶ responded to Yoder's work after Yoder's death and also addresses the question of Yoder's use of rabbinic sources.

4.2.4.1 Jacob Neusner

Yoder approached Neusner with a question on the normativity of pacifism within Judaism. In a letter from September 2, 1982 Neusner responds by explaining his own theological project.¹¹⁷ He confirms that Judaism as a whole developed non-violent tendencies as it lived in diaspora:

Accordingly, the Jewish people became apolitical and lived out its long history on a plane other than the one meant to support the march of armies; it had a history about other things than kings and wars; and it framed a life of sanctification in which what mattered had nothing to do with force, but only with the will and intention-

¹¹³ Scholars such as Steven Schwarzschild, Jacob Neusner, Pinchas Peli, Charles Primus and Reuven Kimelman. See also section 1.2 of this study.

¹¹⁴ Jacob Neusner (1932-2016) was an American scholar of Judaism, who taught at various universities and wrote and edited numerous books. He is widely considered to be an authority on Judaism and Jewish studies.

¹¹⁵ Steven Schwarzschild (1924-1989) was a rabbi and neo-Kantian scholar of Judaism, philosopher and theologian.

¹¹⁶ Peter Ochs is a postliberal scholar of Judaism. He is the Edgar M. Bronfman Professor of Modern Judaic Studies at the University of Virginia.

¹¹⁷ Letter Neusner to Yoder, September 2, 1982 (Box 133).

ality of the human being – the opposite of what can be forced, or subjected to violence.

He invites Yoder to read some of his publications and continues in a very critical mode towards Yoder's method:

This is different from collecting and arranging sayings – all of them taken out of whatever context might have produced them and imparting meaning to them. I tend to think your remarks on the traits of Judaism too apologetic, but they also are one dimensional, so that we can make sense of the vast varieties of Christianity, but there is only one Judaism.

We notice that Neusner recognizes the outcome of Yoder's research (the non-violent tendencies of diaspora Judaism) but questions his agenda and method.

4.2.4.2 *Steven S. Schwartzschild*

The same critique is offered by Steven Schwartzschild, with whom Yoder had a lifelong correspondence on these issues. Yoder approached Schwartzschild in 1967 with a question about André Trocme's reading of Jubilee.¹¹⁸ In his first letter Schwartzschild is affirming and writes that they share a common agenda.¹¹⁹ A few letters later Schwartzschild is more critical, especially concerning methodology: Yoder reflects on Judaism while ignoring the rabbinic sources¹²⁰ or when he tries to relate to them, he does not know how to.¹²¹ Schwartzschild criticizes the fact that Yoder – like many Christians – is in risk of using Judaism for his own Christian

118 Letter Yoder to Schwartzschild, May 4, 1967 (Box 110).

119 Letter Schwartzschild to Yoder, May 19, 1967 (Box 110). Schwartzschild writes, 'Actually, what we are both really interested in, I presume, is the radical, social dimension of biblical messianism.' He even calls Yoder 'A fellow messianic revolutionary.'

120 Letter Schwartzschild to Yoder (no date), in response to Yoder's letter of May 3, 1968 (Box 110). Schwartzschild writes 'Like practically all Christians, with characteristic "ethno" centrism, you obviously ignore all of authoritative Judaism – rabbinic, Talmudic.'

121 From the same letter: 'Your inquiry is so full of basic misunderstandings and (unintended) distortions.' And 'I don't want to bother you with the literature, in general or my own, but your misapprehension of what it's all about is really so gigantic I don't know where to start.'

questions¹²² or of trying to 'salvage the otherwise hopeless Christianity by getting on the Jewish lifeboat.'¹²³ In reflecting on method, Schwarzschild wants to make clear that he, just like Neusner, does not read the rabbinic tradition as Yoder reads the Christian. As Schwarzschild puts it: 'You disagree with mainstream Christianity, I agree with mainstream Judaism.'¹²⁴ Both Neusner and Schwarzschild are critical of an approach to Judaism that would be similar to Yoder's approach to Christianity: selecting a few lines that can be affirmed as faithful and disavowing the rest as 'a fall' or as apostasy to the original vision. Any study of Judaism requires a reasoning from the whole of the rabbinic corpus.¹²⁵

These critical comments date from the 1960s, yet during the 1970s Schwarzschild has come to feel that they share a way of reasoning, even to the degree that he accuses Yoder of thinking as a Jew.¹²⁶ This, in turn, raises for Schwarzschild the question of Christology: why is Jesus still necessary in Yoder's approach? We will return to this question in section 4.5.1.

4.2.4.3 Peter Ochs

Peter Ochs never met Yoder in person, but engaged with his work posthumously as he was asked by Michael Cartwright to publish, together with Stanley Hauerwas, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003) in 'the Radical Traditions' series.¹²⁷ Ochs began to read this work and started to 'spar' with Yoder's argument. Contact with Mennonite scholars and students deepened this bond.¹²⁸ In his response to Yoder's work, Ochs has

122 Letter Schwarzschild to Yoder, July 9, 1968 (Box 201). He writes: 'as I am tired of so many other things that Christians do, I am also exceeding tired of having Judaism used for their intra Christian disputes.'

123 Letter Schwarzschild to Yoder, November 27, 1971 (Box 201).

124 Letter Schwarzschild to Yoder, July 9, 1968 (Box 201).

125 Letter Schwarzschild to Yoder, July 9, 1968 (Box 201). Schwarzschild writes 'The bible in fact is what 'the oral bible', i.e. the Talmud says it is.'

126 In a response to PJ, letter Schwarzschild to Yoder, September 25, 1972 (Box 132), Schwarzschild writes 'I think you are a good Jew, and though you do not like to hear this – a bad Christian.' Later he adds, letter Schwarzschild to Yoder, May 27, 1974 (Box 110), 'I think, you really are a Jew.'

127 Ochs, *Free Church*, 84n3.

128 Ochs, *Free Church*, 1-3.

been both appreciative and critical.¹²⁹ One of the issues Ochs has been very critical about is Yoder's use of rabbinic sources. He is critical, in his own words, from the perspective of both a Jewish and a postliberal scholar.¹³⁰

According to Ochs, 'postliberal' is a term used to refer to the 'Yale school' of Christian theology and cultural criticism. It proposes doctrinally warranted and community-based readings of Scripture. Postliberals seek a non-Marcionite reading of Scripture and read the Gospel narratives 'as meaningful only in relation to the old testament narratives and therefore, as extending our understanding of God's enduring covenant with Israel.' Postliberals criticize 'liberal theology', theologies that are made 'subservient to western paradigms of reason and of socio-economic-political organization.' In other words, postliberals propose a post-Constantinian approach to doing theology and being church.¹³¹

Ochs' hermeneutical method is based on the work of C.S. Pierce (1839-1914), who works with a triadic approach (A is sign, B is object and C is context of interpretation). Pierce developed his approach as a critic of modernist ways of reasoning, which he calls binary (subject and object relate in a direct matter). Consequences of this binary approach are generalizations and fixations of meaning. Ochs understands the postliberal hermeneutical project as a critic of this binary way of reasoning. For Ochs, triadic ways of reasoning open the way to 'the relational logic of God's reparative presence' in approaches to the biblical narratives, but also in Christian approaches to Judaism. Binary approaches tend to supersede Judaism in one way or another.¹³²

Ochs notes in Yoder's work a tendency to come to the sources with a 'binary,' either/ or approach: the sources either confirm or deny the con-

129 Ochs has written extensively in response to Yoder's work in three major publications: the commentary on JCSR (2003), the 2009 J.J. Thiessen Lecture Series, published as Ochs, *Free Church* (2010), and Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation. Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

130 Ochs, *Free Church*, 16-17.

131 Ochs in JCSR, 38,39; Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 1-31.

132 Ariaan Baan, 'Peter Ochs en het postliberalisme,' *Soteria* 32^e jaargang, nummer 2, (2015): 9-16; Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 8-17.

ceptual framework Yoder brings to the sources. Ochs considers this to be 'a hermeneutical problem (rather than a historical one) because it concerns how the evidences of history are interpreted, not how they are collected.'¹³³ Ochs finds this 'binary' approach highly problematic from a postliberal point of view. Ochs sees not only how this distorts Yoder's historiographical work, but how it presents even more problematically in his engagement with rabbinic sources.

As a postliberal, Ochs questions Yoder's reading of Judaism in terms of methodology in two key areas. Ochs states that postliberals seek renewal by the practice of scriptural interpretation, with the roots in the entire biblical canon, but whose prototype is articulated only in the rabbinic literatures. In other words, postliberals want to recover 'the genius of this entire literature,' not just highlight one or two preferred lines as the only truthful reading. In other words, as a postliberal Ochs is critical of Yoder's selective reading of the sources. Ochs is also troubled by Yoder's tendency to 'conceptualism' or his tendency to 'non-Scriptural hermeneutics.'¹³⁴

As a postliberal, Ochs criticized Yoder over methodology, but as a scholar of Judaism he also questions Yoder's perspective on the rabbinic corpus as a whole. According to Ochs the notion of 'full articulation over time' challenges Yoder's approach. 'Virtually all of today's Jewish denominations' inherit the rabbinic Judaism that was already present in the first century (although not fully articulated) and that achieved its full articulation over time. So, from Judaism's point of view, there is no such thing as going back to one single thread of Judaism and highlighting this as faithful to the original vision. Students of Judaism have to relate to the whole of the rabbinic corpus. Sometimes Yoder seems to find the Mishna on his side at certain points, but Ochs questions this methodologically, especially in light of the character of the rabbinic literature.¹³⁵ The character of

133 Ochs, *Free Church*, 21.

134 Ochs, *Free Church*, 17.

135 Ochs, *Free Church*, 24-26. Daniel H. Weiss, scholar in Judaism at Cambridge University, studied Yoder's work and Ochs' critique and draws conclusions along the same lines: 'On the whole, while Yoder's misrepresentations of rabbinic Judaism remain prob-

Judaism and the Rabbinic sources does not call for one original vision, or one faithful thread through the generations, but a careful studying and interpretation *in every generation*. Ochs calls this ‘the ongoing revelation of God’s word’.¹³⁶ In other words, Yoder approaches the rabbinic sources in a way that is alien to them.

Ochs’ postliberal and rabbinic criticism is fairly similar: from both perspectives Ochs argues that Yoder cannot pick and choose one line from rabbinic literature and call this ‘true Judaism’ at the expense of everything else there is. Studying Rabbinic literature asks for an engagement with the whole corpus.

In conclusion, Neusner, Schwarzschild and Ochs are sympathetic to the outcome of Yoder’s reading of Judaism on certain issues such as the nonviolent tendency of Judaism, and landedness and exile. They share the same criticism on the methodology Yoder employs in approaching the rabbinic sources. Yoder brings his theological framework to the texts so they can either affirm or deny his reading. This is a fundamentally non-Jewish reading of these texts, and risks annexing the texts by bringing external criteria to them and using them to discern what is truthful and what is apostate Judaism. All three Jewish scholars find this problematic and Ochs

lematic, particularly in terms of their conceptual and logical dynamics, he nevertheless displays great insight into the basic rabbinic orientation towards the Sword and towards the task of faithful obedience in an unredeemed world. Thus, while the preservation of individual self-defense and the retained theological centrality of *eretz yisrael*—and the connection of both of these to the broader question of whether or not the Messiah has already come—point to significant points of difference between the rabbinic stance and Yoder’s Christian stance, the points of theological commonality, as gestured towards by Yoder, do represent a strong foundation for exploration and dialogue between contemporary Jews and Christians. In a basic sense, his characterization of Judaism as a ‘peace church’ seems on balance to be a useful and illuminating description of the classical rabbinic representations of Israel’s theopolitical task before God and the nations. Accordingly, once Yoder’s mischaracterizations have been addressed, the evidence of classical rabbinic literature provides a highly apposite resource for Yoder’s project of illuminating the ‘Jewish background’ to early Christianity. Likewise, Yoder’s account provides a very useful starting point for tracing out the ways in which these classical rabbinic themes were carried forward in later periods of Jewish thought and practice.’ See Daniel H. Weiss, ‘John Howard Yoder, Classical Rabbinic Judaism, and the Renunciation of the Sword: A Reappraisal’ in *JSR*, ‘Navigating John Howard Yoder’s *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*.’ Vol. 13, No. 2 (November 2014):12-13.

¹³⁶ Ochs, *Free Church*, 24-30.

even asserts that Yoder's approach is in danger of being just another 'supersessionist strategy' (see section 4.4.2 below).¹³⁷

4.2.5 Conclusion

The conclusion of this section is that Yoder's methodology comes under fire. Historical, biblical and rabbinic scholars are in agreement in discerning two major shortcomings in Yoder's approach. First, Yoder is too selective in his choice of sources. He should engage the whole of the Old Testament, the whole of the New Testament and the whole of the rabbinic literature instead of some preferred lines.¹³⁸ He should reflect on the historical sources he works with, instead of choosing those that confirm what he already knows. Second, Yoder is too biased in his reading of these sources. Yoder reads exclusive normativity in texts where the experts in the fields do not find this.

These methodological faults lead to several blind spots in his overall argument, three of which are mentioned here as illustrative. First, a focus on the faithfulness of the people at the expense of the action and election of God. Second, a focus on diaspora at the expense of the centrality of land and Jerusalem. Connected with this is a focus on the calling to diaspora at the expense of what living in the (strange) land actually means. Third, Yoder's reading has the tendency to lead to a separation of the sheep and the goats: who is faithful to God's mission and who is not? Who is 'Constantinian' and who lives a diaspora life? Who is church and who is empire? This is exactly what Ochs means by binary reasoning. It is in danger of disavowing the majority of church and synagogue and in that becoming violent and supersessionist.

At the same time Yoder is assessed by these scholars in a sympathetic way, sometimes even excused because he is an ecclesiological theologian

¹³⁷ Ochs in JCSR, 68.

¹³⁸ Although it is difficult to engage the whole of the biblical narrative (a biblical scholar always makes choices), one should at least be aware of different readings, and be careful in evaluating whether these readings make sense within the whole corpus of the literature.

and not an expert in the field. But most of the scholars discussed above agree that his work in their specific field is not as thorough as it should be. And is thus in need of revision.

4.3 The Historical Question

In this section we turn to the historical part of Yoder's diaspora as mission argument. Not so much on the level of method, but with a focus on the historical work itself. Yoder's historical revision of the parting of the ways and his use of Constantinianism are the particular subjects of discussion.

The study of the parting of the ways is constantly in motion, there is ongoing discussion from different points of view. I will use the work of Daniel Boyarin to reflect on Yoder's reading of 'the Schism.' Although Boyarin's work is also part of this ongoing discussion, he is of interest for this research because he describes the parting of the ways from a Jewish perspective.

For Yoder 'Constantinianism' does not primarily refer to the fourth century or the Emperor Constantine. Yoder does not use the term primarily as an historical one. At the same time the term Constantinianism, which points to a particular emperor and particular century, and Yoder's use of this term, does give the impression that there is a major historical component to it. The term is therefore often criticized from an historical point of view, most outspokenly by Peter J. Leithart, and we will use his work to question Yoder's use of Constantinianism.

4.3.1 First century Judaism and the 'parting of the ways'

For a critical reading of Yoder's historical work on 'the parting of the ways' we turn to Daniel Boyarin. Boyarin is a professor in Talmudic Culture and has published several books on the history and theology of Judaism, especially on the subjects that relate to this research: the history of 'the parting

of the ways¹³⁹ and the meaning of diaspora for Judaism and the Jewish people.¹⁴⁰ Boyarin mentions that he is influenced by Yoder's approach¹⁴¹ and this is recognizable throughout his work, although he does not relate to him explicitly very often in discussions or footnotes.¹⁴² There are some instances however in which Boyarin does respond directly to Yoder's work, especially in his article 'Judaism as a Free Church: Footnotes to John Howard Yoder's *The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited*.'¹⁴³ This article and the rest of Boyarin's work will be used to put Yoder's approach to the test.

In 'Judaism as a Free Church' Boyarin refers to the fact that he himself wrote *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (2004), also 'a revisionist reading of the Jewish/Christian schism.'¹⁴⁴ Boyarin agrees 'with nearly every aspect of Yoder's account of the historical revision itself.'¹⁴⁵ He does, however, not follow Yoder in using this historiographical work to question the current situation. But Yoder's work challenges him to push the boundaries:

In my own work, I retold the whole story strikingly along the lines of Yoder's own retelling, but I still (through my baroque denial and defiance of all logic) managed to leave standing the overall outline, of knowing

139 See for example Daniel Boyarin, *Borderlines. The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) and Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God. Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

140 See for example Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora. Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) and Daniel Boyarin, *A Traveling Homeland. The Babylonian Talmud as Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

141 Daniel Boyarin, foreword to *States of Exile. Visions of Diaspora, Witness and Return* by Alain Epp Weaver (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2008), 9.

142 There was some contact between Yoder and Boyarin in the early 1990s. They met at least once. Yoder tried to increase this, but it did not work out. Yoder wrote Boyarin a letter December 28, 1993 (Box 211), in which he explained his own position and asked for feedback. Yoder mentioned this in his correspondence with Daniel Smith-Christopher, whom he asked for Boyarin's email (letter Yoder to Smith-Christopher, December 13, 1993, Box 211) and mentioned later that Boyarin did not respond (letter Yoder to Smith-Christopher, December, 1995, Box 211). Yoder perceived Boyarin as someone who reasoned on exile in a similar fashion to both himself and Smith-Christopher. Yoder even talks about 'the Boyarin idiom' (Letter Yoder to Smith-Christopher, February 11, 1994 [Box 201]).

143 Daniel Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church.'

144 Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church,' 2.

145 Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church,' 3.

perfectly well what Christianity and Judaism are, or at least that they are not each other.¹⁴⁶

In Chapter 3 we raised the question of whether it really matters that ‘it did not have to be?’ According to Yoder it does, and that is why he works with his evangelical revisionist agenda. As noticed in chapter 3, the events of history are not just the events, but also identity-shaping moments by virtue of the way they are captured in the narratives of peoples and faith communities. Is it possible to change formative narratives by a different interpretation and a moral evaluation of the events that shaped the identity of a community? Does it make sense for a historian to claim retrospectively that things did not have to go as they did? Will a historical revision ever have the power to change the formative narrative of peoples or faith communities? As Boyarin states:

The real point of the exercise, of course, is to find a way to change history, as it were, to go back to a moment of real decision, of real openness, when it did not have to be that way and make it otherwise, now and for our future.¹⁴⁷

Boyarin is sympathetic to this ‘repentant’ mode of doing historiography, it comes close to his own approach, although he used different language for it. Yoder’s claim that ‘doubting that things had to go as they did way back then correlates logically with doubting the rightness of how they continued to go later,’¹⁴⁸ strikes Boyarin as a non-sequitur. He does however agree that it might permit such doubt. But this is also the point where a difference comes to the surface: for Yoder the schism is a tragedy and it would be healing to undo it, for Boyarin this is not necessarily the case.¹⁴⁹

Boyarin agrees largely with the content of Yoder’s historiographical work on ‘Jewish-Christian Schism’ and first-century Judaism: ‘most of Yoder’s historical instincts seem to me to be spot on.’¹⁵⁰ He mentions for

146 Boyarin, ‘Judaism as a Free Church,’ 4.

147 Boyarin, ‘Judaism as a Free Church,’ 7.

148 JCSR, 45.

149 Boyarin, ‘Judaism as a Free Church,’ 8.

150 Boyarin, ‘Judaism as a Free Church,’ 6n10.

example the diversity of first-century Judaism, the reading that Paul did not intend to break away from Judaism, that rabbinic Judaism historically speaking cannot claim to be the one true Judaism coming forth from first-century diversity, and that the project of Jewish orthodoxy, in large part, was a response to the forming of Christian orthodoxy. According to Boyarin, in his reading of Judaism Yoder 'truly and successfully supersedes supersessionism'.¹⁵¹

Boyarin does however state that Yoder is not always as accurate as he could be in his historiographical work. He mentions Yoder's use of certain terms in an anachronistic way (for example 'rabbinic' and 'messianic') and his incidental careless dating of Jewish sources. But he makes the point that a more careful reading would in fact only strengthen Yoder's point.¹⁵² There is one issue where Boyarin does specifically challenge Yoder's approach and this is in his reading of Jewish mission.¹⁵³ We will return to that in section 4.4.2 below.

Boyarin's framing of Yoder's reading of Judaism as 'Judaism as a free church' also points to a biased approach from a free church perspective. Boyarin says that Judaism is not a free church, just as Christianity is not. But, according to Boyarin, this approach highlights the best that Jewish history and tradition has to offer. 'Not mistaking that,' as Boyarin astutely adds, 'with the dominant or historically essential truth.'¹⁵⁴

When Yoder's work is tested against Boyarin's historiographical work some similarities and some differences or questions appear. In terms of the similarities that emerge, four main areas are outlined below. First, Boyarin questions the standard account (Yoder's term) that there was a single 'orthodox' Judaism in the first century from which Christianity developed, either as a deviation (the Jewish perspective) or as a supersession (the Christian perspective). Boyarin calls this a 'myth' that was shaped

151 Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church,' 9.

152 Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church,' 6n10.

153 Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church,' 8-13.

154 Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church,' 13.

more by the self-understanding of religious communities than by historical facts.¹⁵⁵ Second, Boyarin talks about twin births, when it comes to the development of Christianity and rabbinic Judaism. The way rabbinic Judaism is influenced by ‘its slightly older brother, Christianity’ is the main research question of *Dying for God* (1999).¹⁵⁶ This is comparable to Yoder’s reading of rabbinic Judaism as a non-non-Christian religion.¹⁵⁷ Third, for his deconstruction of the ‘standard narrative’ Boyarin emphasizes the historical importance of Jewish Christians, just as Yoder does in his revision of the schism.¹⁵⁸ Fourth, Boyarin uses linguistic historiography to describe his field of research. Against a common form (the *Stammbaum* approach), Boyarin chooses the wave theory

on the assumption that an innovation takes place at a certain location and then spreads like a wave from that site to others, almost in the fashion of a stone thrown in a pond. In this model, convergence is as possible as divergence.¹⁵⁹

In his introduction to *For the Nations* (1997), Yoder uses Yiddish, as a third language between Hebrew and the language of the host culture, to describe how the fluidness of identity in Jewish communities in diaspora developed. He uses this as a metaphor to describe the development of his own position over time. It is fascinating that both Yoder and Boyarin use a theory of language to describe the contingency of Jewish communities, culture and religion in diaspora.

One of the main differences in Yoder’s and Boyarin’s approach is Boyarin’s use of ‘heresiology.’ In *Dying for God* (1999) Boyarin notices that ‘without the power of the orthodox church and the Rabbi’s to declare people heretics and outside the system it remained impossible to declare phenomenologically who was a Jew and who was a Christian.’¹⁶⁰ In *Bor-*

155 Boyarin, ‘Judaism as a Free Church,’ 7.

156 Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 5.

157 JCSR, 147-159.

158 Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 17.

159 Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 9.

160 Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 15.

derlines (2004) Boyarin chooses heresiology as a phenomenon that sheds some light on 'the parting of the ways'. In doing so Boyarin highlights the schismatic influences of the (trans-local) leadership of the faith communities in the process, where Yoder tries to relativize this and emphasizes the local situation.¹⁶¹

Although 'Christian writers of orthodoxy and the Rabbis were evolving in important and strikingly parallel ways,'¹⁶² the focus on heresiology also shows something else. According to Boyarin, Christianity wanted to be a religion and the focus on heresiology helped the construction of a Christianity that would not be Judaism. Judaism on the other hand, refuses to be a religion and that is why there is hardly such a thing as heresiology in Judaism. The Rabbis categorize Judaism as something different than religion.¹⁶³ This shows another difference in approach between Yoder and Boyarin: Boyarin knows 'what Christianity and Judaism are, or at least that they are not each other.' Yoder gives the impression that if there was no fall from (diaspora as mission) grace, Christianity and rabbinic Judaism might be one.

Concluding, in bringing the work of Boyarin to bear on Yoder's argument, three key areas of conflict or weakness are highlighted. First of all, the difference between Judaism and Christianity, something which Boyarin likes to maintain, but which for Yoder is not necessary. Second, Yoder is not always as careful as he could be in reading and dating his sources. Third, the role of heresy in the parting of the ways, which presupposes trans-local leadership structures within early Judaism. Despite these

161 Yoder argues for example that Yavneh (the city where Rabbinic Judaism originated) was not a Vatican (i.e. a center of power and doctrinal authority), *JCSR*, 52-58.

162 Boyarin, *Borderlines*, 5.

163 Boyarin, *Borderlines*, 7-13. See also Daniel Boyarin, 'Semantic Differences; or "Judaism"/ "Christianity"' in *The Ways that Never Parted. Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Am H. Becker et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 65-85. Boyarin's perspective on this is not undisputed. Jacob Neusner for example disagrees with him on this and even talks about 'the debate with Daniel Boyarin.' See Jacob Neusner, 'The Norms of Conviction of Rabbinic Judaism: Orthodoxy and Heresy. The Debate with Daniel Boyarin', *RRJ* 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2011); 235-247. See also Jacob Neusner, 'Review Essay. Daniel Boyarin's *Border Lines. The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*,' *RRJ* 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

challenges however, the overall picture that emerges is that in large part, Yoder's portrayal of the parting of the ways makes sense and holds up under scrutiny.

4.3.2 *What about Constantinianism?*

There has been a lot of criticism about the blunt way Yoder uses the term Constantinianism and the way he frames Emperor Constantine and the fourth century. One of his most outspoken critics is Peter J. Leithart, who published *Defending Constantine* (2010) to counter 'Yoder, Hauerwas, and their increasing tribe'¹⁶⁴ in their use of Constantinianism. Most of his argument is aimed at Yoder, because he provided 'the most sophisticated and systematic treatment of the concept.'¹⁶⁵ The heart of Leithart's argument is theological, but to get there he needs to challenge Yoder's historical work because, according to Leithart, 'Yoder's theology is so deeply bound up with an account of Christian history. If he got Christian history wrong, that sets a question mark over his theology.'¹⁶⁶ In *Defending Constantine* Leithart delivers therefore essential critique to Yoder's use of Constantinianism and the consequences for his historical and theological project. John C. Nugent summarizes Leithart's argument in five 'accusations'.¹⁶⁷

First, Yoder is wrong in supposing a Constantinian shift.¹⁶⁸ Leithart summarizes this point at the end of his very detailed critique in these terms:

Yoder cannot know as much as he claims about the pacifist consensus of the early church, badly misreads major figures like Eusebius and especially Augustine, oversimplifies the history of "mainstream Christianity" to the point of caricature and tries to convince us that

¹⁶⁴ Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 10-11.

¹⁶⁵ Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 11.

¹⁶⁶ Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 254. See also 11: 'Yoder gets the fourth century wrong in many particulars, and this distorts his entire reading of church history, which is a hinge of his theological project.'

¹⁶⁷ John C. Nugent 'A Yoderian Rejoinder to Peter J. Leithart's *Defending Constantine*,' in *Constantine Revisited*, ed. Roth, 1-24.

¹⁶⁸ Nugent, 'Yoderian Rejoinder,' 5-14.

the orthodox church handed missionary activity to heretics for a millennium after Constantine.¹⁶⁹

Second, Yoder is Constantinian in his historical methodology.¹⁷⁰ Leithart questions Yoder's use of inferior and outdated sources,¹⁷¹ and the fact that Yoder makes no effort to penetrate the biases and politics that animate the work he uses. Leithart accuses Yoder of a monologic approach to Constantinianism: 'when it comes to the fourth century, he seems to forget everything he has warned us about.'¹⁷² Leithart concludes,

In sum: Yoder's narrative of the church's fall comes under his own judgment as 'Constantinian'. We should abandon it, if for nothing else than for Yoderian reasons.¹⁷³

Third, Yoder is Constantinian in the emphasis he places on the emperor.¹⁷⁴ Or as Stanley Hauerwas paraphrased in his review of *Defending Constantine*: 'To suggest that with Constantine things went to hell in a handbasket reveals the presumption that we are in control of history.'¹⁷⁵ Fourth, Yoder is a poor exegete of Jeremiah and Ezra.¹⁷⁶ According to Leithart, Yoder's reading of Jeremiah and the Old Testament is questionable. Leithart poses questions such as: What about the promise of return? How and for what reasons does Yoder distinguish between Daniel, Esther and Ezra and Nehemiah? Fourth century Christians did live according to the Joseph Paradigm as Yoder described it, argues Leithart, so why does Yoder disavow that as Constantinian?¹⁷⁷ And fifth, Yoder is blind to how the teaching and ethics of Jesus are relevant to governing authorities.¹⁷⁸

169 Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 305.

170 Nugent, 'Yoderian Rejoinder,' 14-17.

171 Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 317. Leithart refers to the work of Sider, *History*, 136.

172 Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 319.

173 Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 321.

174 Nugent, 'Yoderian Rejoinder,' 17-19.

175 Stanley Hauerwas 'Review of *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* by Peter J. Leithart,' *Christian Century* (October 19, 2010): 49.

176 Nugent, 'Yoderian Rejoinder,' 19-21.

177 Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 293-297.

178 Nugent, 'Yoderian Rejoinder,' 22-23.

In his challenging book Leithart wants to dismiss Yoder's use of Constantinianism and instead show that 'Constantine provides in many respects a model for Christian political practice.'¹⁷⁹ One of the problems with Leithart's approach is the basic misunderstanding there seems to be of Yoder's theological conviction, which is nonviolence as the heart of the gospel and the whole of scriptures. Somehow Leithart did not engage Yoder's work on nonviolence in the Old Testament, Rabbinic Judaism and the Jewishness of Jesus' nonviolent teachings. That is how Leithart can simply denounce Yoder's critical reading of the monarchy in Israel as Marcionitic. That is why he also does not seem to get to grips with what Yoder means by Constantinianism and why it is problematic. For Yoder it is not so much an historical phenomenon, but a theological term that describes the temptation as church to seek power and influence, often resulting in the connection between church and state.

Leithart is reasoning from a different perspective as he sees the Bible from beginning to end as a story of war. He draws other narrative threads than Yoder would from the wars of Yahweh: yes, when we were children Yahweh fought for us, but now we are mature, we are given greater responsibilities. The story of the Bible according to Leithart is 'not a story of increasing passivity but of increasing participation in the activity of the ever-active God.' We are called to fight side by side with Jesus. He closes his argument with the alarming words:

if the Lord lets Christians wield the most powerful of spiritual weapons, does he not expect us to be able to handle lesser weapons? If he has handed us a broadsword, does he not assume we know how to use a penknife?¹⁸⁰

The use of the word 'passivity' shows his Niebuhrian way of thinking: pacifism is irrelevant for society, it is passive, while we are called to take responsibility in society, and should not back away from the use of political

¹⁷⁹ Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 11.

¹⁸⁰ Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 336.

power or influence to achieve our goals.¹⁸¹ Leithart's way of doing theology shows why Constantinianism as a theological term is very much needed. *Defending Constantine* (2010) does however also highlight that using the term Constantinianism can never be an excuse for not engaging a fair and careful historical reading of the fourth century.

Besides the historical questions as formulated by Leithart, Yoder's concept of Constantinianism seems outdated in its theology of power. Does Yoder locate dynamics of power where they actually are?¹⁸² James K.A. Smith observes with regard to this that the main question is: 'what is the most important competitor of Christ and his body, the church?' From the first century on the church has identified this main 'competitor' as the state. The church questioned the empire's claim to supreme power in the first fifteen hundred years and did the same with the claims of the nation-state in the nineteenth century.¹⁸³ Yoder's Constantinianism works typically within this church-state paradigm. Smith however states:

Bell suggests that this is a dated and therefor somewhat impotent mode of analysis and critique, for in a globalized world it is no longer states that wield imperialist power but rather capitalism and the market. . . ., the new empire is capitalism as a global, transnational phenomenon – an empire of which states are only colonies.¹⁸⁴

Although Yoder has a differentiated view of Constantinianism, as he shows in his discourse on the various forms of neo-Constantinianisms,¹⁸⁵ his Constantinianism paradigm is too much shaped by an outdated view of the power of the state as a threat and temptation for the church.

181 In his reaction to *Defending Constantine*, D. Stephan Long points to TCWS to explain that Yoder does have a theology for the presence of the church in the world (D. Stephan Long, 'Yoderian Constantinianism?' in *Constantine Revisited*, ed. Roth, 104-108).

182 See Pitts, *Principalities*, 149-150.

183 James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy, Mapping a Post-secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 247-254. This is part of Smith's argument on technologies of desire.

184 Smith, *Introducing*, 248. Smith works with Daniel M. Bell, *Liberation theology after the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (London: Routledge, 2001).

185 OR, 141-145; PK, 141-144.

Stanley Hauerwas' work is in this a helpful complement to Yoder's. Hauerwas is a Yoderian theologian, who identifies the Constantinian temptation not primarily with state power, but with liberalism (as the ideology behind capitalism). In *Against the Nations* (1985) Hauerwas gives a definition:

In the most general terms I understand liberalism to be that impulse deriving from the Enlightenment project to free all people from the chains of their historical particularity in the name of freedom. As an epistemological position liberalism is the attempt to defend a foundationalism in order to free reason from being determined by any particular tradition. Politically liberalism makes the individual the supreme unit of society, thus making the political task the securing of cooperation between arbitrary units of desire. While there is no strict logical entailment between these forms of liberalism I think it can be said they often are interrelated.¹⁸⁶

Although nationalistic desires regularly pop up, Hauerwas' identification of the 'competitor' of the church as liberalism instead of state power is more accurate than Yoder's approach, which is rather dated.¹⁸⁷

To conclude, the questions posed by both Boyarin and Leithart to Yoder's historical discourse show, just as Sider's work did, that Yoder was not always the careful reader of history he could have been. Taking this into account, the overall picture that Yoder sketches on the Schism does pass the test. On the other hand, both Sider and Leithart agree that Yoder never really engaged with the historical fourth century, but only scratched the surface. So, for a historiography of the fourth century we have to look elsewhere. Leithart's criticism makes it clear that a use of the (theological) term Constantinianism cannot include a caricatural reading of the fourth century. This is both historically wrong and theologically inconsistent.

¹⁸⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, *Against the Nations. War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 18.

¹⁸⁷ See Nathan R. Kerr, *Christ, History and Apocalyptic. The Politics of Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 93-126 for a critical reading of Hauerwas on this.

4.4 Yoder's Reading of Judaism

Yoder's diaspora as mission paradigm leads to a particular perspective of diaspora Judaism. Although there have been sympathetic responses to Yoder's reading of Judaism, it does raise tensions when a Christian theologian has a reading of Judaism that must support his soteriology, eschatology, or in this case, ecclesiology. In this section we discuss Yoder's perspective on a Jewish calling to diaspora (4.4.1), Judaism as a missionary religion (4.4.2), exile and land (4.4.3), the Joseph paradigm (4.4.4), Yoder's attempt to move beyond supersessionism (4.4.5) and finally, the necessity for a theology of election (4.4.6).

4.4.1 *A calling to diaspora*

In his foreword to *States of Exile* (2008) Boyarin mentions that he is 'deeply inspired by Yoder's profound theological thinking about diaspora.'¹⁸⁸ It is therefore helpful to engage Boyarin's reading of Judaism and exile and compare this to Yoder's perspective. Boyarin does not reflect much directly on Yoder's theology of diaspora, except on the mission part of Yoder's reading, to which we will turn later (4.4.2). Boyarin published two books that explicitly focus on the subject of diaspora, *Powers of Diaspora* (2002) and *A Travelling Homeland* (2015). Boyarin opens the preface of *Powers of Diaspora* (2002) with the following statement:

Herein two brothers seek to evoke the diasporic genius of Jewishness, that genius that consists in the exercise and preservation of cultural power separate from the coercive power of the state.¹⁸⁹

Powers of Diaspora (2002) is written as an argument for diaspora,¹⁹⁰ because diaspora offers an alternative ground which can avoid the violence the state claims.¹⁹¹ Boyarin shows that in Judaism the experience and reflection on diaspora is multilayered and never a simple contradiction to

188 Boyarin, 'Foreword,' in Epp Weaver, *States of Exiles*, 9-10.

189 Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers*, vii. The introduction to *Powers* is written by Jonathan Boyarin.

190 Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers*, 6.

191 Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers*, 10.

the notion of homeland Israel, because on the one hand homeland can be found elsewhere and on the other hand living in Israel might be experienced as living in diaspora.¹⁹² He mentions for example (just like Yoder)¹⁹³ that most of authoritative Judaism was shaped in diaspora, in Babylonia and not in Palestine, thus ‘effectively supplanting the “homeland” Palestinian tradition.’¹⁹⁴ The complexity between homeland and diaspora is explored further in *A Travelling Homeland* (2015) in which Boyarin works from the perspective that in some deep sense, a book has been the portable homeland of the Jewish people.¹⁹⁵ He shows how the Babylonian Talmud created a diaspora people on three levels. First of all, the Babylonian Talmud imagines its own community. Second, halachic discussions are made up from Palestinian and Babylonian materials which come together in one land: the land of Talmud. And third, the Talmudic study itself has constituted the Jewish people as a diaspora. Boyarin draws out five points on the process of how the Talmud imagines and creates its own community:¹⁹⁶

- 1 There are many (local diverse) diasporas.
- 2 It is not trauma that is constitutive of diaspora for Jews.
- 3 Jewish communities are not necessarily suffering and oppressed communities.
- 4 A diaspora can be produced out of already existing communities by the production of new cultural ties and connections.
- 5 These common cultural practices constitute the multiple collectives as a diaspora.

Although Yoder sees Jeremiah 29 rather than the Babylonian Talmud as the text that creates (a calling to) diaspora, Boyarin’s approach is strikingly similar to Yoder’s. All of the above-mentioned points are comparable with Yoder’s perspective on diaspora.

192 Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers*, 11-30.

193 JCSR, 186-187.

194 Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers*, 30.

195 Boyarin, *Travelling*, 5.

196 Boyarin, *Travelling*, 25.

There are however two differences to Yoder's approach. First, Boyarin sees the rabbinic revolution as a revolution of diaspora. In other words, this perspective on diaspora is created within the very same rabbinic Judaism that Yoder accuses of giving up such a perspective.¹⁹⁷ Second, in his prelude Boyarin writes that he approaches diaspora 'as a particular kind of cultural hybridity and as a mode of analysis rather than as an essential thing.'¹⁹⁸ Although Boyarin does not explicitly refer to Yoder in this case, he has made the accusation that Yoder makes a too essentialist reading of Judaism regarding her calling to diaspora. Boyarin's approach creates space to avoid the binary oppositions Yoder is tempted to enter.¹⁹⁹

In concluding, Boyarin is affirmative of Yoder's perspective on the importance of diaspora for Jewish identity. But not exclusively and not in an essentialist way. By reading Judaism like that, Judaism is forced into a frame that is alien to her.

4.4.2 Mission in Judaism

A main part of Yoder's grand narrative is the perspective that Judaism was a missionary movement. Was this historically the case? To what extent does Judaism understand itself as a missionary movement? To answer this question I turn to the work of Daniel Boyarin, Peter Ochs and two recent studies on the subject.

4.4.2.1 Daniel Boyarin

Yoder summarizes his perspective on exile in the words 'diaspora as mission'. Where for Yoder 'diaspora' and 'mission' are intertwined, for Boyarin this is not the case. He largely embraces Yoder's thinking on diaspora, but

197 See also Magid, 'Christian Supersessionism,' 117.

198 Boyarin, *Travelling*, 3-4.

199 Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church,' 12-13.

is very critical on the mission part of Yoder's approach. In his foreword to *States of Exile* (2008), Boyarin writes:

Among the most disturbing aspects of Yoder's theological colonization of Judaism is his insistence that the so-called "abandonment" of a missionary vocation constituted a Constantinianization of Judaism on the part of the Mishnah and the succeeding rabbis.²⁰⁰

In 'Judaism as a Free Church' Boyarin interacts more extensively with Yoder's line of thinking regarding 'diaspora ethics'. Responding to Yoder's work Boyarin contends that there is no such thing as a pacifist tradition in Judaism, but he thinks Yoder is right in 'insisting that there is a pietist "peace" tradition as early as Jeremiah and continuing throughout.'²⁰¹ Boyarin disagrees with Yoder's assumption that 'nonviolence is missionary' and that 'non-missionary is Constantinian'. Boyarin therefore does not affirm Yoder's reading of Judaism before the Mishnah as a missionary peace tradition, that subsequently abandoned its missionary calling in reaction to Christian missionary efforts, and in that process became Constantinian (and in the end Zionist). Boyarin points to three problems in Yoder's argument.

First of all there seems little historical evidence 'to support a notion of Jewish mission prior to the Rabbis that was abrogated by them.'²⁰² On the one hand, the available evidence about the Pharisees does not suggest that they were a peace or missionary party.²⁰³ On the other hand, there are many reports of Gentiles (Christians) attending synagogues long after the Mishnah was promulgated, even in Caesarea, 'near the very epicenter of rabbinic power itself.'²⁰⁴ Second, Yoder's picture of Jochanan ben Zakkai is entirely a product of the Babylonian Talmud, and thus part of what Yoder refers to as 'Constantinian Judaism'.²⁰⁵ Third, Boyarin shows how Yo-

200 Boyarin, Foreword to Epp Weaver, *States of Exiles*, 9.

201 Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church,' 10.

202 Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church,' 10.

203 Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church,' 11.

204 Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church,' 10.

205 Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church,' 11.

der's binary oppositions break down on closer inspection. Antitheses such as Constantinianism versus mission, being out of power versus caring for the world, rabbinic Judaism versus Pharisaism, do not hold on historical grounds. Yoder has, in other words, a too essentialist/ binary approach towards Judaism, an approach that does not do justice to how Judaism appears in practices and writings.²⁰⁶ This is what Boyarin's use of the word 'colonization' refers to. Yoder brings alien, free church categories to the history and practices of Judaism, and from that alien perspective analyzes what is faithful and what is apostate Judaism.

4.4.2.2 *Peter Ochs*

Peter Ochs also responded to Yoder's reading of Second Temple Judaism as a missionary movement. He affirms Yoder's view that the Jews of the Roman era were the first missionaries to the Gentiles.²⁰⁷ Ochs writes that this 'matches the plain sense historical evidence' and refers to the work of David Novak, which supports this claim. Novak shows how Jewish leaders sought ways of including non- Jews.²⁰⁸ Ochs adds:

There is also plain sense historical warrant for Yoder's claim that the Jewish apprehension about missionary work was largely an expression of their reaction against Christian missionizing.²⁰⁹

Yoder is however pushing the notion too far by saying that Mishnaic Judaism is 'defined' by this apprehension.²¹⁰ Moreover, Yoder's concept of mission does not fit Judaism. Ochs notes how the historical evidence points to the 'in between' character of rabbinic beliefs and practice, neither inclining the view Yoder rejects (strict anti-missionizing) nor to the one he advances (missionizing in the manner of Christianity). Yes, there was an openness to the Gentiles, but not in the way Yoder portrays.²¹¹

206 Boyarin, 'Judaism as a Free Church,' 13.

207 JCSR, 101-102.

208 JCSR, 102; David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism*, 2d. ed. (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011).

209 JCSR, 102.

210 JCSR, 102.

211 Ochs, *Free Church*, 96, 97.

4.4.2.3 *Michael Bird and James Ware*

Ochs' critique of Yoder is confirmed by two recent studies on Jewish missionary activity by Michael Bird and James Ware.²¹² To what extent was 'Judaism' missionary before the early Christian movement? In *Crossing over Sea and Land* (2010), Bird gives an overview of perspectives: around the turn of the twentieth century, it was common to argue that Judaism was indeed a missionary religion (see the work of, for example, Adolf von Harnack, Emil Schürer, Julius Wellhausen, T. Mommsen). This position was reinforced by several scholars versed in Jewish sources (G.F. Moore, B.J. Bamberger, W.G. Braude, S. Sandmel).²¹³ However, in the last twenty-five years this consensus has been contested by Scot McKnight and Martin Goodman, as they claim that postexilic Judaism cannot be properly characterized as a missionary religion.²¹⁴

Bird notes the response of Louis Feldman to the work of McKnight and Goodman and that Feldman contested their findings at every level. Feldman argues that the proof for Jewish missionary activity is considerable: first, proselytism is at least one possible explanation for the drastic increase of the Jewish population; second, Jewish literature shows that many Jews were very active in seeking to win proselytes; third, Roman resentment of conversion to Judaism possibly because of their missionary activities; fourth, the expulsion of the Jews from Rome had to do with their aggressive missionary activities; fifth, the tradition of Jewish propaganda-apologetic literature was an effective medium; sixth, the oral proclamation in the agora or synagogue was influential; and seventh, there are various instances of Gentile conversions, that indicate widespread missionary activity.²¹⁵ Against this background, Bird concludes regarding Jewish mission in the Second Temple Period, that

212 Michael F. Bird, *Crossing Over Sea and Land. Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010); James P. Ware, *Paul and the Mission of the Church. Philippians in Ancient Jewish Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

213 Bird, *Crossing*, 8.

214 Bird, *Crossing*, 9-11.

215 Bird, *Crossing*, 11.

although proselytes to Judaism were made in significant numbers, there is no evidence for concerted, organized, or regular efforts to recruit Gentiles to Judaism via the process of proselytizing. Conversion to Judaism was a difficult affair, and was usually done at the initiative of the Gentile.²¹⁶

What was the relation between Jewish proselytizing activities and the emergency of early Christian missions to the Gentiles? According to Bird, first of all, Christian mission arose within a Jewish framework. Secondly, a difference emerged concerning 'conversionist attitudes towards the Gentiles' that arose from specific insights in Christology, eschatology and pneumatology. The Christian perspective represents, in the third place, a transformation of the Jewish perspective on the inclusion of the Gentiles, in four respects:

- 1 The Christian movement took Gentiles as full and equal members,
- 2 It represented a move from a spasmodic approach to a methodical and organized one,
- 3 A move from centripetal to centrifugal,
- 4 Christianity gradually disengaged from Jewish identity markers.²¹⁷

James Ware emphasizes in *Paul and the Mission of the Church* (2011) the widespread Jewish interest in conversion of the Gentiles, both in diaspora and Palestine. This did not result in active, organized mission, but in an 'eager expectation' of an eschatological pilgrimage of the nations to Zion. Ware concludes that early Christian mission originated not in Jewish missionary practice, but in Jewish expectation regarding the Gentiles.²¹⁸

In conclusion, First Temple Judaism lived in the eschatological expectation of the ingathering of the Gentiles, and there was an open attitude towards conversion of Gentiles into the synagogues. There are howev-

216 Bird, *Crossing*, 13.

217 Bird, *Crossing*, 152-156.

218 Ware, *Paul*, 54-55, 153.

er no signs of an organized, active missionary practice. Therefore, there can be no ‘fall’ from this nonviolent missionary practice into a non-missionary Constantinian mode.

4.4.3 Exile and land

Yoder’s judgement of Zionism as Judaism’s version of Constantinianism, in other words as the unwanted connection between religion and state power, has in turn been severely criticized. For example, by Michael Cartwright in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003) itself. He states that by breaking the triad of Torah, land, and people, Yoder’s work suffers from neo-supersessionist tendencies.²¹⁹

Peter Ochs is also critical in his responses to Yoder’s work at this point. He points to Yoder’s essentialist and binary reasoning in this matter. Rabbinic Judaism has ‘a tendency to equalize the power and importance of dozens of virtues,’ instead of choosing one, such as ‘not being in charge,’ as the essence of obedient living, argues Ochs.²²⁰ Binary tendencies are visible in the fact that for Yoder there is no middle ground between ‘Israel’s exilic separation from the land’ and ‘the Maccabean strategy for remaining in it.’ Or between ‘national sovereignty in that land’ and ‘Israel’s forced separation from it in this world.’²²¹ Ochs does not accept Yoder’s oppositions, for several reasons, which can be boiled down to the statement that things are not as clear and obvious as Yoder portrays them. There are several forms of landedness for example, the one against which Yoder argues is not the only one.²²² As Ochs writes:

Post-liberal Jews tend, for example, neither to affirm Zionism in the way Yoder fears, nor reject it in the way he advises. They would, above all, not reduce the broad spectrum of nineteenth-to twenty first-century Jewish theo-political options under the rubrics of ‘Zi-

219 JCSR, 219.

220 JCSR, 179.

221 JCSR, 203.

222 JCSR, 203-204, 180.

onism' and non-Zionism'. They know that the biblical records ties them to the land of Israel, whether they like it or not, in ways that Exilic Judaism never abrogated and in ways with which all disciples of the gospels are not burdened. But to be burdened with the land of Israel is not simply to apply a very modernist notion of national-political-ethnic sovereignty to that land. Or is it to reduce all discussions of the land to the single issue of political governance.²²³

Questions on landedness are more complex than Yoder show them to be, argues Ochs. The same goes for Yoder's reading of Jeremiah. Ochs states that Yoder has a sympathetic reading of Jeremiah, but that the image Yoder has of Jeremiah is not Jeremiah's own.²²⁴

In other words, Yoder's reading of Zionism as Judaism's version of Constantinianism suffers from old dichotomies at various levels. In that sense Yoder's work is not helpful. Ochs is however not willing to dismiss it all together. 'There is an important place for Yoder's pacifism within discussions about Judaism's relation to politics, to land, to Israel and to Palestine and Palestinians after the Shoah.'²²⁵

4.4.4 The Joseph Paradigm

One of the themes within Yoder's reading of diaspora as calling is 'the Joseph Paradigm'. In Chapter 3 the question was raised as to whether 'the Joseph paradigm' or the connection and cooperation with governments in Western Europe is not a way of being responsible and being in charge. In Yoder's reasoning, is this not a way of abandoning the calling to diaspora and nonviolent 'quietism' and, in fact, of taking responsibility to make history come out right? The work of Hannah Arendt and Peter J. Leithart will sharpen this question.

223 JCSR, 180.

224 JCSR, 204.

225 JCSR, 180. Examples of these discussions are the before mentioned books on diaspora by Daniel Boyarin, or the recent article by Shaul Magid, 'Christian Supersessionism,' 135-136, where Magid argues that Yoder's work has the potential to raise questions which others, like Peter Ochs' theology of reparation, cannot.

Hannah Arendt researched the historical and political reasons for antisemitism in western Europe in two publications, both called ‘Antisemitism’. One is an article from the 1930s and the other is published as Part I of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951).²²⁶ Arendt is not satisfied with mythical explanations of antisemitism, such as the ‘ventilation theory’ – that a scapegoat has to be found for national discontent – or the theory of the ‘notorious’ Judaization of parts of society, against which at a sudden moment people rise up. According to Arendt both theories are attempts to avoid taking fascism and antisemitism seriously.²²⁷ As a political thinker she tries to unravel and understand ‘what at first and even second glance appeared simply outrageous.’²²⁸ According to Arendt, modern antisemitism arose in the context of the development of the nation-state, and ‘at the same time its source must be found in certain aspects of Jewish history and specifically Jewish functions during the last centuries.’²²⁹

In short, Arendt describes how Jews through the centuries were connected with state and government, as bankers, financiers or tax collectors. Although most of the time these Jews did not have any real political power or influence, they were seen as powerful and influential, not only by society but also by their own kin.²³⁰ ‘Because of their close relationship to state sources of power, the Jews were invariably identified with power.’²³¹ Arendt describes how in different times this led to situations that followed the same pattern: ‘each class of society which came into conflict with the state as such became anti-Semitic because the only social group which seemed to represent the state were the Jews.’²³² In other words, ‘Jews became the symbols of Society as such and the objects of hatred for all those whom society did not accept.’²³³

226 Arendt, *Jewish Writings*; Arendt, *Origins I*.

227 Arendt, *Jewish Writings*, 47; Arendt, *Origins I*, 1-9.

228 Arendt, *Jewish Writings*, x.

229 Arendt, *Origins I*, 9.

230 Arendt, *Origins I*, 47, 48.

231 Arendt, *Origins I*, 28.

232 Arendt, *Origins I*, 25.

233 Arendt, *Origins I*, 53.

What Yoder describes as 'the Joseph Paradigm' is described by Hannah Arendt as a position of power, or at least as a position that suggests power. Arendt describes how Jews did not really trust the people of the countries where they lived and therefore sought to stay connected with rulers, the state or the government.²³⁴ They placed their options for survival in the hands of the rulers, the powerful.²³⁵ It could be said that this is as close to a definition of Constantinianism one might get. Yoder states in 'Jesus the Jewish Pacifist':

For two millennia Judaism has lived its ages of toleration and its ages of renewed exile or even martyrdom, sometimes within and sometimes outside the 'Christian' empires of East and West, but they have never reached for the sword. ...Occasionally privileged after the model of Joseph, more often emigrating, frequently suffering martyrdom non-violently, they were able to maintain identity without turf or sword, community without sovereignty. They thereby demonstrated pragmatically the viability of the ethic of Jeremiah and Jesus.

In sum: for over a millennium the Jews of the Diaspora were the closest thing to the ethic of Jesus existing on any significant scale anywhere in Christendom.

Simple social analysis tells us this.²³⁶

Although these are inspiring words, they raise a lot of questions. What does it mean that 'they never reached for the sword'? What is 'they'? Judaism as a religion? The Jews as a people? What does 'reach for the sword' mean? Does it refer to not starting a war as a nation or people, or does it relate to the use of power and influence? Arendt's analysis shows that Jews (as individuals and as a people) did not stay away from power, but allied with

²³⁴ JCSR, 81-82.

²³⁵ Arendt, *Origins I*, 33, where Arendt notices 'thus a perfect harmony of interests was established between the powerful Jews and the state.'

²³⁶ JCSR, 81-82.

it for reasons of their own survival. This alliance was perceived as a position of power, both by society (and its detractors) and by their own kin.

Similar concerns over Yoder's 'Joseph Paradigm' – albeit from a Christian perspective – are posed by Leithart in his *Defending Constantine* (2010). 'It is not clear,' he writes, 'how Yoder distinguishes between the "deviations" of Ezra and Nehemiah on the one hand from what he sees as the faithful witness of Joseph, Daniel, Esther and others on the other.'²³⁷ What are the measures Yoder employs? Leithart aims this question also at Yoder's assessment of the fourth century as Leithart lists a comparison between the behavior of Joseph, Daniel, Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah and fourth century Christians, concluding:

By what measure does Yoder characterize "legends" about the conversion of pagan Pharaoh and pagan Nebuchadnezzar as fulfillments of the Jeremian mission "to seek the salvation of the city," while dismissing the imperial church of Constantine as apostate and heretical?²³⁸

The difference Yoder reads between the faithfulness of Joseph, Daniel and Esther on the one hand and Ezra and Nehemiah on the other hand (on the issue of power) are somewhat arbitrary and are not there in the biblical narrative.²³⁹ The same goes for Yoder's historical and political reading of diaspora Judaism on the one hand (they did not live as a people of the sermon on the mount regarding power, as Arendt shows), and fourth century Christianity on the other hand (they did not *en masse* embrace power as a means to an end, as Leithart shows).

4.4.5 Modernism and supersessionism? A postliberal critique

Earlier we noticed how Peter Ochs criticized Yoder's work in terms of his use of the rabbinic sources. He did so both as a Jewish and a postliberal

²³⁷ Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 296.

²³⁸ Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 297.

²³⁹ See also section 4.2.2.

scholar. This section will focus on Ochs' critique that Yoder's approach is implicitly at risk of being supersessionist.

In general Ochs is appreciative of Yoder's theological project. But he is very critical where he sees Yoder's reasoning as having binary tendencies, which, he contends, leads to superseding Judaism in one way or another. As a Jewish scholar Ochs criticizes Yoder for reading the rabbinic sources and Judaism in a way that is strange to them. As a postliberal he criticizes Yoder over hermeneutical method, pointing to the problematic consequences of Yoder's binary reasoning.

In *Another Reformation* (2011) Ochs systematically reads *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003) from this postliberal perspective. First Ochs demonstrates where Yoder's work is indeed postliberal²⁴⁰ and non-supersessionist,²⁴¹ but then he points at 'marks of non-postliberalism and non-non-supersessionism' in it. Ochs presents this argument in three steps: (1) data, (2) an explanatory account and (3) a demonstration how one thing (non-postliberal reasoning) leads to another (non-non-supersessionist tendencies).

First of all, in terms of 'the data': Ochs reads Yoder's argument as both self-contradictory and non-non-supersessionist. It is self-contradictory because Yoder claims on the one hand that first-century Judaism is more diverse than rabbinic scholars might suggest and on the other hand he highlights one version of Judaism as essential, the Jeremiatic form that anticipates his free church. It is non-non-supersessionist because it only valorizes this one version of Judaism. According to Ochs, Yoder identifies five features of Judaism that are essential to Judaism and to Christianity:

- 1 Judaism is exilic: the Jeremiatic model.
- 2 Judaism is not, therefore, a religion of any land.
- 3 Judaism is nonviolent and separates itself from any dealings with worldly powers and principalities.

240 Ochs, 132-140.

241 Ochs, 140-146.

4 Judaism is open to mission work amongst the nations.

5 Judaism is not specifically Rabbinic (Mishnaic and Talmudic).

Ochs argues how Yoder's reasoning from 'apparently nonsupersessionist premises leads to supersessionist conclusions, by way of non-postliberal practices of reasoning.' This is the binary, dyadic, essentialist, modernist, either/or way of reasoning that Ochs criticizes throughout Yoder's work. Ochs gives various examples of how this leads to non-non-supersessionism in Yoder's work. To mention four: (1) Binary reasoning from "there is historically no single, normative Judaism" to "rabbinic Judaism is not authoritative" or "rabbinic Judaism is a fall from what Judaism ought to be." (2) Binary reasoning from "Judaism can live in exile" to "Judaism is exile per se" or that "Jeremianic Judaism" is Judaism per se, or God's will. (3) Binary reasoning from "Judaism is non-violent" and "Judaism can stand outside of worldly powers and principalities" to "Judaism is pacifist" and "Judaism, like the Free Church, will not involve itself with land, state, or world powers." (4) Binary reasoning from Judaism's scriptural reasoning and covenantal premises to various clear and distinct definitions of the essence of Judaism.

Ochs is a very careful reader of Yoder's work and his critical approach of what he sees as Yoder's tendencies to binary reasoning is a helpful way of measuring Yoder's work. It does however raise some questions. Ochs himself is pretty firm in his own approach: triadic ways of reasoning are postliberal and therefore, non-supersessionist; binary ways of reasoning are failing as a postliberal approach and therefore as non-supersessionist. Is this not the same binary, either/or criterion that Yoder poses on the church and Judaism? Where Yoder makes the assumption that you are either pacifist and faithful or Constantinian and apostate, Ochs equally assumes that you either reason in a way that is triadic and non-supersessionist, or in a manner that is binary and supersessionist.

John C. Nugent questions Ochs' approach in the sense that he finds Ochs' (and Cartwright's) reading of Yoder's work as suffering from mod-

ernistic binary tendencies 'neither well-founded nor relevant.'²⁴² Nugent brings several issues to the fore to show how Yoder does not engage in binary reasoning, but instead offers a third option. For example, on the subject of land and people, Nugent reads Yoder's diasporic argument as an attempt to offer a third option to break up the dualism of physical earthly home and spiritual heavenly home.²⁴³ He offers a second example in Yoder's reading of Ezra and Nehemiah, which Nugent also reads as a third option: it is about Jewish residence in the land, yet with an exilic posture. This represents a third way, moving beyond the either/or of landed or exilic.²⁴⁴ Nugent concludes: 'Yoder's views of pacifism and mission are equally polyvalent.'²⁴⁵ According to Nugent, the modernistic accusation (which also risks a tendency towards individualism and foundationalism) also 'simply cuts against the grain of Yoder's lifework and its stringent critique of precisely these things.'²⁴⁶

The accusation of supersessionism is also addressed by Nugent. He does so by first questioning Ochs' and Cartwright's definitions of supersessionism,²⁴⁷ and second, by pointing to Yoder's intentions.²⁴⁸ Nugent thinks it is not clear what Ochs and Cartwright use as a definition of supersessionism. Kendall Soulen distinguishes three forms of supersessionism (economic, punitive and structural supersessionism). According to Nugent, Yoder is not supersessionist in any of the above-mentioned ways.²⁴⁹

Nugent is not always, however, a careful enough reader of Ochs' critique. Ochs' questioning of binary tendencies is not simply about two or three options to choose from, but has to do with Ochs' postliberal her-

²⁴² Nugent, *Politics*, 156.

²⁴³ Nugent, *Politics*, 156, JCSR 'Earthly Jerusalem and Heavenly Jerusalem,' 160-166.

²⁴⁴ Nugent admits that the pejorative language that Yoder sometimes uses to describe Ezra and Nehemiah's work can obscure this third option they represent (Nugent, *Politics*, 157n20).

²⁴⁵ Nugent, *Politics*, 157.

²⁴⁶ Nugent, *Politics*, 157. Nugent points to PWK.

²⁴⁷ Nugent, *Politics*, 164-166.

²⁴⁸ Nugent, *Politics*, 167-171.

²⁴⁹ Nugent, *Politics*, 166. Nugent refers to Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 29-31.

meneutical approach (where binary means that subject and object relate in a direct matter, see section 4.2.4.3). Regarding the accusation of supersessionism, Ochs does in fact note the danger of one of Soulen's forms of supersessionism within Yoder's work. A reading that has the tendency to delegitimize rabbinic Judaism, has a tendency towards economic supersessionism. Furthermore, Ochs is not directly accusing Yoder of supersessionism, but warns of the 'non-nonsupersessionist' consequences of Yoder's work.

4.4.6 Exemplary or election: Israel in Yoder's ecclesiology

Several readers and critics of Yoder have drawn attention to the lack of a theology of the election of Israel in his discourse on peoplehood. Douglas Harink finds Yoder's reading of diaspora Judaism, and how he presents it to the church as a model, compelling. But it falls short, according to Harink, in embracing 'the Pauline doctrine of Israel's nonsuperseded election.'²⁵⁰ In his introduction to *Paul among the Postliberals* (2003) Harink poses critical questions and an agenda for those who want to work with a Yoderian diaspora ecclesiology:

This raises the questions, whether his ecclesiology... is itself still somewhat determined by an individualist voluntarism and liberalism that runs against the grain of his otherwise very Pauline vision of the church? Yoder's ecclesiology requires a more emphatic rooting in the Pauline theology in which Israel's election is not only canceled or replaced, but in fact sustained and preserved in the apocalypse of Jesus Christ.²⁵¹

Harink reads in Yoder's approach of diaspora ecclesiology a strong conviction that non-Christian Jews continue to be God's people, but Yoder does not work from the category of election. Harink discusses how Yoder rejects supersessionism, but is also critical of various forms of "philo-Judaism", as

²⁵⁰ Harink, *Paul*, 23-24.

²⁵¹ Harink, *Paul*, 24.

he characterizes for example liberal Christianity which sees Judaism as just one more Christian denomination. Or the dispensationalists who see Israel as a people of God, but within their own apocalyptic agenda. The 'most profound' type of respect for Judaism is, according to Yoder, proposed by Karl Barth, who emphasizes the irrevocable character of Israel's election, an election 'which is not only not thwarted by Jewish rejection of Jesus the Messiah, but in fact proved by it.' Yoder is however critical even on this last model: it depends on a hardening of the categories Judaism and Christianity that are the result of an adversarial and exclusionary Christian self-definition.²⁵² Yoder does not elaborate on any of these perspectives and he – strangely enough – never really engages Romans 9-11. Harink concludes with respect to Yoder's approach that

the promise of Jewish-Christian relations is to be found more in the exemplary character of diaspora Judaism than in Pauline doctrine of Israel's election.²⁵³

Harink sees Yoder as a very careful reader of Paul's letters and theology, but as being at odds with Paul on this very subject. Yoder gives more attention to the question of Jewish faithfulness to God (Israel's moral history),²⁵⁴ where Paul concerns himself more with what God is doing with Israel (God's election). Harink argues that because Yoder does not start with the election of Israel, his attention is drawn toward the moral and even voluntary character of Judaism. In other words, in Yoder's approach 'the biblical and Pauline doctrine of a specific, not-substitutable, fleshly historical people tends to disappear behind a set of "Jewish" ideas or practices.'²⁵⁵

252 Harink, *Paul*, 197, 198; JCSR, 115-117.

253 Harink, *Paul*, 198.

254 Interestingly enough, Harink engages the discussion in New Testament studies on the faithfulness of Jesus (*pistis Jesou Christou*) and relates it to Yoder's discourse. He concludes that Yoder's Christology is a Christology of 'the faithfulness of Christ' in its significance as atonement and as normative pattern for the church. Harink does however not link it to God's acting in history or to Yoder's (lack of a) theology of election. See Douglas Harink, 'The Anabaptist and the Apostle: John Howard Yoder as a Pauline Theologian' in *A Mind Untamed*, ed. Ollenburger and Koontz, 278-281.

255 Harink, 'Anabaptist,' 284.

Tommy Givens argues along the same lines as he emphasizes that according to the Bible the people of God are not self-constituted but formed by God's election. In other words: by God's action and not people's faithfulness.²⁵⁶ Yoder's discourse confronts modern perspectives of peoplehood by emphasizing that Christians have to follow Jesus as a people. This constitutes the people of God. However, by his voluntary approach, which according to Givens means refusing one form of self-election for another,²⁵⁷ 'he cannot adequately subvert and resist the violence of the modern imaginary and discourse of peoplehood, but instead plays into some of its central tendencies.' One of them is the tendency to decide who are the real people of God and who are not.²⁵⁸

"The people" is understood to constitute itself by its own faithfulness, and it therefore polices itself (including the imagination of its past) according to regnant standards of faithfulness, thereby disowning the unfaithful and repudiating God's election. In Yoder's case, these standards of faithfulness are conceived explicitly in terms of "Jewishness".²⁵⁹

Givens proposes that Karl Barth's thinking on election would strengthen and correct Yoder's discourse on peoplehood. Barth, however, concludes Givens, also falls short because he can offer only 'formal Christological poles that are supposedly always pulling Israel's existence dialectically towards its fullness in Christ', and because of that, Barth cannot really answer the question 'Who is Israel according to God's election in the flesh?'²⁶⁰

Richard Bourne has a slightly different reading of Yoder and notes in Yoder's work a tacit understanding of election. This is visible in Yoder's understanding of what Bourne terms the 'voluntariety' of the exilic community, and in his attempt to avoid supersessionistic readings of Juda-

256 Givens, *We the People*, 4-5, 76.

257 Givens, *We the People*, 7.

258 Givens, *We the People*, 8.

259 Givens, *We the People*, 76.

260 Givens, *We the People*, 10-11, 177-230.

ism.²⁶¹ Bourne discusses how Oliver O'Donovan reads Yoder's emphasis on the voluntariness of the exilic community as a modernist perspective on peoplehood. According to O'Donovan, Yoder conforms the church to the model of a club or political party. Although he admits Yoder's language of voluntariness might be confusing, Bourne disagrees with O'Donovan's reading.²⁶² Yoder's reason for speaking about voluntariness is not to safeguard the individual rational freedom, but the construction of a community of authentic witness. 'A committed community is an essential precondition for authentic protest.'²⁶³ According to Bourne, there is a tacit understanding of election in Yoder's discourse on exilic communities, if election is taken not as a soteriological category, as in the Calvinistic individual approach, but as an ecclesiological and missiological category.²⁶⁴ Bourne summarizes:

The exilic community (Israel and the Church) is the subject of God's elective blessing, and thus the conduit of his reconciling purposes.²⁶⁵

This theology of the election of the exilic community marks, according to Bourne, a contrast with the modernist, voluntarist, individual approaches Yoder is sometimes accused of.

In his own work Yoder does on several occasions refer to election explicitly, but he does so to justify the particularity of the practices of the church. God does not choose the world to start something new, but he

²⁶¹ Richard Bourne, *Seek the Peace of the City. Christian Political Criticism as Public, Realist, and Transformative*, Theopolitical Visions (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), 252-253.

²⁶² Bourne, *Seek*, 254 and 257 where Bourne states: 'Part of the problem lies in O'Donovan's mistaken reading of free-church ecclesiology as necessarily voluntarist in its view of the gathered community. To affirm the aspect of voluntariness in ecclesial election does not negate the divine work of constituting of the Church. It is not the individual's or the community's act of gathering that, in and of itself, constitutes the Church. Rather "the Spirit of God, acting through the word of God and the sacraments, is the real subject of the genesis of the church." The act of constitution is not based in an ecclesiological form of the social contractarian theory.' The quote is from Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness. The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 176.

²⁶³ Bourne, *Seek*, 254.

²⁶⁴ Bourne, *Seek*, 256.

²⁶⁵ Bourne, *Seek*, 258.

chooses in Abraham a small people. Jesus' commandments are not for the world, but for the church. Imposing an ethic upon all of society is what Yoder calls Constantinian. Yoder uses the narrative of election to explain why this is so.²⁶⁶ In 'Withdrawal and Diaspora' (1989) Yoder uses election-like language, when he states that 'the content of liberation in the biblical witness' is 'the covenantal peoplehood already existing because God has given it, and sure of its future because of the Name ("identity") of God, not because of trust in the success of a coming campaign.'²⁶⁷ But again, this is not a focus on election as God's acting in history, but the narrative background of how the church should live its practices before the watching world.

Harink, Givens, Bourne and others are therefore right to suggest that a more explicit line of reasoning from election would strengthen Yoder's diaspora ecclesiology.²⁶⁸

4.4.6.1 *Election in the work of George A. Lindbeck*

The work of postliberal theologian George A. Lindbeck (1923-2018) offers such an explicit theology of election. Lindbeck worked for several years on a similar project to Yoder, namely the development of an Israel-like view

266 See PWK, 69-70; RP, 172.

267 John Howard Yoder, 'Withdrawal and Diaspora: The Two Faces of Liberation,' in *Freedom and Discipleship. Liberation Theology in an Anabaptist Perspective*, ed. Daniel S. Schipani (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 84; John Howard Yoder, 'Exodus and Exile: the Two Faces of Liberation,' *Cross Currents* (Fall 1973): 308.

268 Different scholars see different reasons why a more developed theology of (the election of) Israel might be helpful for Yoder's ecclesiology. Alain Epp Weaver thinks the temptation to frame diaspora Judaism in a free church way might be avoided by a more developed theology of the election of Israel (Epp Weaver, *States of Exiles*, 35). Fernando Enns thinks a more developed theology of Israel and the church would help to address the necessary ecclesiological questions on the tension between faith and reality, and would give tools to question problematic salvation models (Enns, *Peace Church*, 142, 143). See also Pitts, *Principalities*, 45n50 for an overview. Park works with Newbigin's 'logic of election' to overcome some dilemmas in Yoder's work. Election functions here as a missiological category, rather than as a soteriological individual one. Newbigin's logic of election assumes election to be (1) corporate rather than individual (2) for responsibility, not privilege, (3) connected with a distinctive moral identity. Park argues that election gives such a strong identity that it helps being distinctive, but not at the cost of solidarity and presence with (in) society, something Yoder is in risk of. (Joon-Sik Park, *Missional Ecclesiologies. H. Richard Niebuhr and John Howard Yoder* [New York: Peter Lang, 2007], 142-147).

of the church. Lindbeck did not really engage with Yoder's work, but his approach is very helpful for my critical reading and revision of Yoder's diaspora as mission ecclesiology. In the first chapter of *The Church in a Post-liberal Age* (2002) Lindbeck writes:

Whether or not re-Christianization occurs, however, our era is a new one and the churches are in the midst of a vast transformation. My understanding of what is needed has developed in three inter-related directions in the past decade: hermeneutical, organizational and ecclesiological. Renewal depends, I have come to think, on the spread of proficiency in premodern yet postcritical Bible reading, on restructuring the churches into something like pre-Constantinian organizational patterns, and on the development of an Israel-like understanding of the Church.²⁶⁹

Lindbeck's understanding of the election of Israel and the church, and his proposal for restructuring organizational patterns of the church (see section 4.5.3.1) are both very helpful to formulate a constructive revision of Yoder's ecclesiology.

What is the line of argument in Lindbeck's proposal for an Israel-like view of the church?²⁷⁰ Working with a classical narrative reading in combination with historical critical awareness, Lindbeck describes how the early church considered themselves to be the people of God.²⁷¹ He distinguishes four 'heuristic guidelines' in his reading of the early church. First, the early Christian communal self-understanding was narrative shaped.

²⁶⁹ George A. Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, ed. James J. Buckley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 7.

²⁷⁰ It is helpful to spend some time outlining Lindbeck's perspective here, although it will be a (too) brief summary of what he developed over decades. To do so, I work especially with: George A. Lindbeck, 'The story-shaped church: critical exegesis and theological interpretation,' in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*, ed. Garret Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 161-178. George A. Lindbeck, 'Postmodern Hermeneutics and Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Case Study' and 'What of the Future? A Christian Response,' in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, ed. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, David Fox Sandmel, and Michael A. Signer (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 106-113, 357-366. Lindbeck, *Church*, (2003). George A. Lindbeck, 'The Church as Israel: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism,' in *Jews and Christians. People of God*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jensen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 78-94.

²⁷¹ Lindbeck, 'Story-shaped,' 161-162.

Second, for the early Christians Israel was their only history. Third, it was the whole of the story which they appropriated, and fourth, from this it follows that Israel and the Church were one people for the early Christians. There was a strong sense of uninterrupted peoplehood, according to Lindbeck.²⁷² From this reading of the early church Lindbeck proposes a retrieval of an Israel-like view of the church. He is aware of the history of supersessionism within the church (the church replacing Israel), but he argues that a wrong theology of election does not beg for an avoidance of the topic, but instead for a right theology of election.²⁷³ An Israel-like view of the church is for Lindbeck the conviction that because Israel is elected, the church is elected, for the church is the expanding²⁷⁴ or enlarging²⁷⁵ of Israel.

This sharing in the election of Israel is constructive for the renewal of the church in many ways, according to Lindbeck. Sharing in the election of Israel is sharing in its election narrative. Aspects of this narrative are for example, that the identity and being of the church rests on God's election, not on its faithfulness. As an implication of this, the elect communities are stamped by objective marks which are both blessing and curse depending on how they are received. Election is first of all communal, and the primary mission of this chosen people is 'to witness to the God who judges and who saves, not to save those who would otherwise be damned.'²⁷⁶ Elsewhere Lindbeck mentions three other (slightly overlapping) aspects of election.²⁷⁷ It is first of all based on grace alone (*sola gratia*). This means that there was no reason for it, but also that election is irreversible. Second, that God had a purpose with the election of his people, which is the redemption of the world. And third, that the proper response to election should be doxological: 'the fundamental witness of the elect peoples to the

272 Lindbeck, *Church*, 149-151. See also Lindbeck, 'Story-shaped,' 165-167.

273 Lindbeck, 'Postmodern Hermeneutics,' 110.

274 Lindbeck, *Church*, 240.

275 Lindbeck, *Church*, 151.

276 Lindbeck, *Church*, 157-158. Lindbeck refers to circumcision, baptism and eucharist, the *shema* and the *apostolicum*, in other words formative practices and creeds.

277 Lindbeck, *Church*, 244-249.

coming Kingdom is in being in communities which whole-heartedly laud and bless the Holy Name.' Obedience is doxological itself.²⁷⁸

Sharing in election is sharing in God's mission. The church's mission is therefore very 'Jewish sounding,'²⁷⁹ Lindbeck argues. 'It is above all by the character of its communal life that it witnesses, that it proclaims the gospel and serves the world.'²⁸⁰ Just like Israel, the church's first (ecumenical) task as a people is to take care of each other:

Its primary task should be to build up sisters and brothers in the faith, not to liberate the oppressed everywhere; and it is only through performing this task that it becomes a liberating force in world history.²⁸¹

Lindbeck argues that this task has consequences for the organization of the church, to which we will turn in section 4.5.3.1.

According to Lindbeck, the early church had the whole of the Old Testament as their formative narrative. He therefore notices that 'the ecclesiology of the Apostolic writings is, one might say, Israel-ology.'²⁸² This perspective helps us study the ecclesiology of the early church,²⁸³ but also grants us the freedom to turn to the Old Testament for our ecclesiological questions on which the New is silent, just like the early church was accustomed to.²⁸⁴ One point that Lindbeck refers to in this matter, and he does so on several occasions,²⁸⁵ is how it frees the church to be more thoroughly self-critical, without giving in to the tendency to schism. The Old Testament is full of very self-critical prophetic voices. 'To understand the church as Israel is to recover such critical voices.'²⁸⁶ Reflecting on the irre-

278 Lindbeck, *Church*, 249.

279 Lindbeck, *Church*, 158.

280 Lindbeck, *Church*, 158.

281 Lindbeck, *Church* 159.

282 Lindbeck, *Church*, 238.

283 Lindbeck, *Church*, 150. Lindbeck notes 'when the New Testament is silent we need to turn to the Hebrew Scriptures, the ecclesiological text par excellence, to discover how the early Christians thought about the church.'

284 Lindbeck, *Church*, 238.

285 Lindbeck, *Church*, 246-247; Lindbeck, 'What of the Future?', 364.

286 Lindbeck, 'What of the Future?', 364.

versible character of election, Lindbeck notes:

The potential for communal self-criticism embedded in election when this is undergirded by the *sola gratia* is perhaps unparalleled. It implies that Jews and Christians can be maximally critically of their own communities without disloyalty, as is abundantly illustrated by their own scriptures.²⁸⁷

Thinking from the notion of the election of Israel and the church, finally, frees Christians to see God speak through post-biblical Judaism. This freedom follows from the belief that the covenant with Israel has not been revoked. Lindbeck gives two examples of where the church can learn from post-biblical Judaism. First, Jews learned in diaspora about ‘faithful survival,’ or what it takes to sustain faithful communities in a strange culture. Second, Lindbeck points to the hermeneutical strategies of the rabbis, and how these community building practices can help Christians to sustain communities in a post-Christendom world.²⁸⁸ Both points are intertwined with Israel’s election narrative, according to Lindbeck. Just like Israel, the church ‘needs to understand itself as a witness that God has irrevocably chosen to testify to his glory,’ whether faithful or unfaithful, in both God’s mercy and God’s judgement. And, ‘it needs to acknowledge that its election despite unfaithfulness is the source of its identity.’²⁸⁹ Lindbeck argues that Israel’s history shows that because of this election narrative, this identity, Israel could survive in ever-changing cultural environments.²⁹⁰

The post-Christendom setting is why Lindbeck is also more confident in speaking of Israel and the church as people of God. Judaism does not have to be afraid of assimilation anymore because the church is also small and dispersed. At the same time the church can be renewed by an Israel-like view of herself. This Israel-like view of the church is, according

287 Lindbeck, *Church*, 246.

288 Lindbeck, ‘What of the Future?’, 364-365.

289 Lindbeck, ‘Story-shaped,’ 175.

290 Lindbeck, ‘Story-shaped,’ 175.

to Lindbeck, both biblical and faithful.²⁹¹

The similarities between Yoder's diaspora as mission approach and Lindbeck's Israel-like view of the church are many, although they use different vocabularies and different ways of reasoning. Similarities are found in their reading of the early church as Jewish community, and the strong sense of continuing peoplehood. Both agree that this reading has consequences for contemporary ecclesiology. Both see the Old Testament as the 'formative narrative,' although Yoder would not use this language. Both see the church as sharing in the mission of God, and both see this mission expressed first of all in the practices of the faith community. Finally, both scholars have a strong focus on the practices of the church, instead of the world.

4.4.6.2 *Revision*

The main difference in approach is Lindbeck's straightforward thinking from the notion of election, where Yoder avoids the subject. As Harink, Givens and Bourne showed, this leaves Yoder's ecclesiology vulnerable on the one hand to modernist, voluntary, individualist tendencies of peoplehood, and on the other hand to supersessionist tendencies. Revising Yoder's diaspora as mission approach with Lindbeck's Israel-like view of the church could significantly strengthen Yoder's proposal.

Hermeneutical: the whole story. Thinking from the notion of election is in line with the whole of the biblical narrative and the early church's self-understanding, especially as addressed in the Pauline letters. As Lindbeck shows in his exegetical work, the early church recognized the whole of the Old Testament as formative narrative, not only some strains that seem useful.²⁹² This is a helpful revision for Yoder's approach, since he has the tendency to highlight some strains at the expense of others. The differ-

291 Lindbeck distinguishes between 'biblical' or 'scriptural' and 'faithful.' Some things can be biblical in the sense of linked to a theme, thread or line of thought in the bible, but might not necessarily be faithful. See Lindbeck, *Church*, 152-155.

292 Lindbeck, *Church*, 150.

entiation Yoder uses does not come about from exegetical work, but from the criterion of usability for his ecclesiological argument. Using election as the interpretive lens gives a freedom to embrace the whole of the Old Testament as ecclesial texts, according to Lindbeck.

A self-critical peoplehood. Lindbeck argues that reasoning from the notion of the irreversibility of election creates an openness to self-criticism, without being apostate or faithless, or the need to schism.²⁹³ Yoder emphasizes the voluntary character of the church because the church should be a community of authentic witness. As we have seen, this leaves Yoder's ecclesiology vulnerable to modernist, voluntary, individualist tendencies of peoplehood. Yoder reasons in a binary way: you are either faithful, or you are not part of the church. Yoder disavows the Constantinian church on this basis, and the world outside the church. Applying the same method to Judaism leads to the danger of supersessionism, as we noted before.

Chapter 2 discussed Yoder's problems with addressing violence or other varieties of evil within the church. The dichotomy that the church is faithful or that she is not at all, might be a major factor in Yoder's avoidance of self-critical language for the church. If the very survival or identity of the church is not at stake because it is guaranteed in God's election, as Lindbeck proposes, this would create space to critically reflect on the practices of the church. For Yoder this would be a hard pill to swallow, because the identity of the true, anabaptist church is found in obedience to the words of Jesus, as embodied in the practices of the church. If this can be questioned, what will there be left? Will there even be a community of authentic witness?

The problem with Yoder's 'idealistic' approach is however twofold. First, in terms of biblical theology: there is no such ecclesiology in the New Testament. There are only concrete, believing and at times failing communities. For example, Acts 2-4 is followed by Acts 5.²⁹⁴ The failing com-

²⁹³ Lindbeck, *Church*, 246; Lindbeck, 'What of the Future?', 364.

²⁹⁴ Acts 2-4 tells of Pentecost and the life of the early church: 'And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and

munity in Corinth is still addressed by Paul as 'church' and 'saints.'²⁹⁵ The second problem is empirical. There is no such church in the present either. How do we approach this tension between ideal and praxis? Lindbeck addresses this issue from a somewhat different angle.

In *The Church in a Postliberal Age* (2003), he explains that the church in post-biblical times has always been struggling with these high expectations, because the church ought to be the fulfillment (antitype) of that which Israel was the type.²⁹⁶ This raises the bar, and Lindbeck therefore states that 'the dissonance between antitypical claims to fulfillment and empirical reality was the central difficulty.'²⁹⁷ The church's high claims were therefore expressed, not on the level of the practices of the church, but on the level of doctrine or *notae (ecclesiae)*. Something which Lindbeck maintains 'could not but evoke sectarian reactions.' Lindbeck finds these reactions however even more problematic.²⁹⁸ He deems the sectarian solutions 'less biblical' because 'for the most part they have no longer understood God's people in terms of Israel's story but rather have been modeled after New Testament depictions of fervent first-generation communities especially as found in Acts.'²⁹⁹ Yoder's project is of course an attempt to move beyond that to (at least a part of) the narrative of Israel. But Lindbeck's other words on sects do indeed have resonance with Yoder's ecclesiology: 'The intense effort to make the empirical reality of Christian com-

the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.' (Acts 2:42-47, ESV) These texts have been regularly used as a source for church renewal movements. Chapter 2-4 is however followed by Chapter 5, the first major conflict within the church. Acts 5 tells the story of Ananias and Sapphira who died because they lied to the community and to 'the Spirit of God' (Acts 5:9).

²⁹⁵ See I Corinthians 1:1-2 and the following chapters which sum up the problems of the church in Corinth.

²⁹⁶ Lindbeck, *Church*, 150, 152-153.

²⁹⁷ Lindbeck, *Church*, 153.

²⁹⁸ Lindbeck, *Church*, 153.

²⁹⁹ Lindbeck, *Church*, 153-154.

munities conform' to the high standards 'can have consequences in some ways worse than institutional triumphalism.'³⁰⁰ Lindbeck does not give any examples, but church history provides plenty of them, not to mention Yoder's own troubled life and the church's dealings with it.

Lindbeck's line of argumentation from election highlights an important issue. Yes, the practices of the community are the expression of the gospel, but if the practices fail, this does not deny the truth of the gospel nor the identity of the church. If they are not grounded in the realized ethical standards of the community but in God's election, it gives the space to critically question the practices of the community. This is an important revision of Yoder's anabaptist approach.

To make election explicit in the biblical theological discourse also takes away the suggestion of supersessionism. There might be internal or external criticism towards certain streams of Judaism, but this can happen without dismissing these streams as being the people of God. God's election is irreversible. This creates space to critically engage each other as Christian or Jewish communities of faith.

4.4.7 Conclusion

Yoder's reading of Judaism has received positive responses, but only if seen as one of the possible readings, or as a partial reading. Yoder's exclusive reading has proven to be too normative and too essentialist, for example on the missionary and diaspora character of Judaism. It is also too idealistic in portraying Judaism as a peace church that never reached for the sword.

Yoder's lack of thought around the election of Israel proved to be problematic for several reasons. George Lindbeck's Israel-like view of the church, based on the election of Israel, strengthens Yoder's argument at several points. It encourages an engagement with the whole of the Old Testament narrative, it encourages the development of a self-critical peo-

300 Lindbeck, *Church*, 154.

plehood whose identity lies in God's choice instead of realized moral standards, and it helps a move beyond supersessionism.

4.5 Diaspora as Mission: Theological Questions

The major theological questions regarding Yoder's diaspora as mission ecclesiology center around two themes. The first theme is Christology in relation to the practices of the church. Some scholars, such as Steven Schwarzschild and Paul Martens question the necessity of Christology for his ecclesiology (section 4.5.1). Others question his orthodoxy in relation to the creeds. For Yoder this is also a question of Christology (section 4.5.2). The second theme is that of faithful living in a strange land. Yoder seemed so preoccupied with Constantinianism that it was hard for him to develop a positive theology of (Christian presence in) the world. But if we are called to build and plant, some sort of organization is required (section 4.5.3.1). And what does diaspora as mission mean for Christian presence in society beyond the church? We will turn to that in section 4.5.3.2.

4.5.1 The Christological content of Yoder's diaspora ecclesiology

4.5.1.1 Schwarzschild's Christological question

Over the course of his academic career, Yoder corresponded with Steven Schwarzschild, a neo-Kantian Jewish scholar and fellow pacifist thinker. Schwarzschild questions at various instances the necessity of Jesus Christ for Yoder's theological discourse. Sometimes Schwarzschild is irritated by Yoder's attempts to interpret the gospel in a Jewish way, in content and in character, and his attempt to reconcile two worlds that, according to Schwarzschild, should not be reconciled. Schwarzschild shows for example that he is annoyed by the person of Jesus Christ,³⁰¹ by Christian tenden-

301 In his reaction to *The Politics of Jesus* (1972), Schwarzschild writes; 'I agree passionately with your ethics, but, bluntly, Jesus offends and bores me. Ergo, your problems are not my problems' (September 25, 1972 [Box 132]).

cies to use Judaism ‘for their intra Christian disputes,’³⁰² or to use Judaism to save Christianity in one way or another.³⁰³ When Yoder’s reasoning becomes more Jewish (which means recognizable to Schwarzschild), Schwarzschild accuses Yoder of becoming less and less of a Christian thinker (albeit in a friendly fashion). In a letter from July 9, 1968, for example, Schwarzschild writes:

You disagree with mainstream Christianity, I agree with mainstream Judaism. (I think that makes you less a Christian and a “judaizer” of which, again I am very glad.) Your reading of Jesus comes in many ways close to my – normative - reading of Judaism. In this I rejoice.³⁰⁴

A few years later Schwarzschild read *the Politics of Jesus* (1972) and responded by writing

Again, you are, I think, substantively and importantly right in identifying imitation with ethical following (discipleship) and the Messiah with the Servant, but for neither is – to use the phrase again – Jesus needed (p 122,124); in fact, all of Jewish literature is full of these identifications. In these matters, in other words, I think you are a good Jew, and though you do not like to hear this – a bad Christian.³⁰⁵

Yoder responds:

You suggest that I would not like to have you say that my position is that of a good Jew but of a bad Christian. I hardly consider that description to be a bad one since what you would call a “good Christian” is something you would not be interested in being. I understand what you would call a “good Christian” would be using the adjective good as meaning “true to type”; and the definition

302 Schwarzschild to Yoder, July 9, 1968 (Box 201): ‘as I am tired of so many other things that Christians do, I am also exceeding tired of having Judaism used for their intra Christian disputes.’

303 Schwarzschild to Yoder, November 27, 1971 (Box 201): ‘...salvage the otherwise hopeless Christianity by getting on the Jewish lifeboat.’

304 Schwarzschild to Yoder, July 9, 1968 (Box 201).

305 Schwarzschild to Yoder, September 25, 1972 (Box 132).

of that type is discussing Hellenistic ontology and persecuting the Jews. That is my definition of a bad Christian.³⁰⁶

On another occasion Schwarzschild writes:

It's still impressive to me how you and I agree. Of course I do all that, and just like that, without your Christology. I wonder what that proves about your and my methodology and its rationale.³⁰⁷

Throughout their correspondence Schwarzschild poses a methodological question to Yoder's approach; he questions the Christological necessity in Yoder's Anabaptist theology.

4.5.1.2 *Paul Martens: from Christological to sociological categories*

Paul Martens poses the same question, but more specific to Yoder's discourse on diaspora ecclesiology. One of the questions regarding Yoder's work is whether he is a consistent thinker throughout his life, or whether he changed his mind at certain moments and on certain issues. In 'Universal History and Not-Particularly Christian Particularity,' Martens sets out the argument that Yoder did change his mind after *the Politics of Jesus* (1972).³⁰⁸ Martens perceives a development from eschatology to doxology to worship in Yoder's understanding of the Christian's relation to history. In other words, a move from Christological to sociological categories.³⁰⁹ Martens uses three articles/ chapters by Yoder, spanning 1954 ('Peace without eschatology?'), 1988 ('To serve our God and rule the world') and 1995 ('See how they go with their face to the sun') to 'sketch Yoder's gradual evolution from articulating a strong Jesus-centered ethic towards an articulation of a less than-particularly Christian social ethic'.³¹⁰ Martens sees these texts as representative snapshots illustrating this development.³¹¹ He uses

306 Yoder to Schwarzschild, November 8, 1972 (Box 132).

307 Schwarzschild to Yoder, December 11, 1980 (Box 201).

308 Paul Martens, 'Universal History and Not-Particularly Christian Particularity: Jeremiah and John Howard Yoder's Social Gospel,' in, *Power and Practices*, ed. Bergen and Siegrist, 131-146.

309 Martens, 'Universal History,' 131.

310 Martens, 'Universal History,' 131-132.

311 Martens, 'Universal History,' 134.

the role of Jeremiah in these articles to describe the shift. In 'Peace without eschatology' (1954) Martens reads Yoder's use of eschatology as unseen and as hope that defines the present position. Christologically, Martens reads that Christ is unique and the life and death of Jesus is the beginning of something new. Martens emphasizes the unseen, the uniqueness and the strong discontinuity between old and new. From that perspective he reads the other articles, and sees that this emphasis is fading or changing.³¹²

Although I am impressed by his careful reading, I think he is framing the articles too much. Yoder is simply expanding his argument from eschatology as hope that defines *the present* position to the point that it might also be discerned *in history*. Yoder calls this evangelical revisionism. The key criterion for his critical revision of historiography was and stayed for Yoder the ministry of Jesus Christ. Yoder stayed a Christologically driven thinker, but expanded his argument from ethics or practices (present) to historiography (the past). The sharp break between Jesus and Judaism that Martens reads in 'Peace without eschatology' is not representative of Yoder's way of thinking. It is the only place in Yoder's work where it is articulated this strongly. Yoder keeps emphasizing the uniqueness of Christ, also in his later work on diaspora ecclesiology. But this uniqueness did not arise from the contrast with Judaism, but was given in his death and resurrection.

I agree with Martens that the Christological content in 'See how they go with their face against the sun' is hardly made explicit. However, Yoder wrote this article in the context of his other work on diaspora ecclesiology in which he emphasizes the necessity of a high Christology and the particularity of Jesus' ministry.³¹³ 'See how they go with their face against the sun' is also published as part of *The Jewish-Christian Schism revisited* (2003). Yoder himself collected these articles in his 'Shalom desktop file'

312 Martens, 'Universal History,' 139-141.

313 See for example John Howard Yoder, 'That Household We Are,' address at the Believers Church Conference on "Is There a Believers' Church Christology?" (Bluffton, Ohio, Oct. 23-25, 1980), and John Howard Yoder, 'Jezus belijden in de zending,' *Wereld en Zending*, 'Christologie in context,' 1996.3: 13-20.

and apparently read them as one theological discourse, inclusive of the articles with an explicit high Christology and articles such as 'See how they go with their face against the sun.'³¹⁴ Carter distinguishes between Christology as the source, eschatology as the context and ecclesiology as the shape of Yoder's social ethics.³¹⁵ I recognize this throughout Yoder's work, and part of Martens's critique might be a confusion of these categories. Focus on the shape (diaspora ecclesiology) does not necessarily mean a neglect of the source (Christology).³¹⁶

In *The Heterodox Yoder* (2012) Martens works in a well-informed and fascinating way through Yoder's correspondence with Schwarzschild, describing their personal and theological relation, with its theological culmination in the last letters. According to Martens, in these final letters the question that lurked in the shadows over all these years is made explicit. Yoder asks Schwarzschild about the 'inner criterion' of his Judaism, according to Martens, 'for an answer to what makes him similar to Yoder and different from his Zionist "confreres" who have the same texts at their disposal.'³¹⁷ In a complex response Schwarzschild explains from his neo-Kantian perspective how "the primacy of practical reason" = ethical values, must be and is the ultimate meta-criterion.³¹⁸ The same goes for

314 In the same way Yoder kept reprinting old articles in newer publications, as if there was no change whatsoever. See for examples the articles from OR, that were reprinted in RP 27 years later

315 Carter, *Politics*, 13-28.

316 Branson L. Parler responded extensively to Paul Martens critique. He argues that Yoder did not change his mind. Yoder does not change the meaning of sacraments, but expands it. See Branson L. Parler 'Spinning the Liturgical Turn. Why Yoder is not an Ethicist' in *Radical Ecumenicity*, ed. Nugent 173-191; Branson L. Parler, *Things Hold Together. John Howard Yoder's Trinitarian Theology of Culture* (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2012), 75-100. See also his *The Forest and the Trees: Engaging Paul Martens' The Heterodox Yoder* (2012), a forty page critical review of Paul Martens, *The Heterodox Yoder* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012) <http://englewoodreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/BParler-Forest.pdf>. James Reimer writes on Yoder: 'Here was a man who never seemed to have changed his mind' (James Reimer, 'Mennonites, Christ and culture,' 6).

317 Martens, *Heterodox*, 110.

318 Martens, *Heterodox*, 110, letter Schwarzschild to Yoder, May 20, 1981 (Box 132).

historiography. Schwarzschild proposed the same thing in other works, albeit in another vocabulary.³¹⁹

Martens, following Schwarzschild ('I wonder what that proves about your and my methodology and its rationale') sharpens the question: although Yoder argues for the unique role of Jesus in defining the Christian community and its practices, to what extent is Yoder's reading of Jesus framed by an ethical meta-criterion? Is this the reason why Yoder and Schwarzschild agree so much, because they share the same ethical meta-criterion, which is peace? According to Martens, Schwarzschild's questions during their years of correspondence force us to ask whether Yoder '– even if couched in the familiar language of discipleship – operated with the assumptions of the primacy of practical reason, with the assumption that ethics is the "ultimate meta-criterion" by which one should interpret Christianity.'³²⁰ In other words, should we read Yoder in the first place not as the Christological, biblical realist or postliberal theologian he is often perceived to be, but as a neo-Kantian thinker who works from the meta-criterion of peace?

This was the last letter in the correspondence between Yoder and Schwarzschild, so we do not know how Yoder would have responded. He did however defend his (high) Christology in another discussion, namely on the necessity of the creeds. Engaging in that discussion will help formulate an answer to Schwarzschild's and Marten's critique.

4.5.2 The content of mission

In Yoder's ecclesiology the Jeremiatic turn contains a calling to diaspora as mission. But what is the content, the message, the good news of that mission? In 'Withdrawal and Diaspora: the Two Faces of Liberation' (1989) Yoder gives a résumé of his perspective:

³¹⁹ Martens, *Heterodox*, 11, points to Steven Schwarzschild, 'Introduction,' in *Roots of Jewish Nonviolence*, ed. Jewish Peace Fellowship (New York: Jewish Peace Fellowship, 1981), 5.

³²⁰ Martens, *Heterodox*, 115.

The *form* of liberation in the biblical witness is (...) the creation of a confessing community that is viable without or against the force of the state.

The *content* of liberation in the biblical witness is (...) the covenantal peoplehood already existing because God has given it, and sure of its future because of the Name ("identity") of God.

The *means* of liberation in the biblical witness is (...) "mighty Acts."

The *atmosphere* of liberation is (...) wonderment and praise, doxology. (Italics JHY)³²¹

The content of the mission is the people of God and their practices 'before the watching world.'³²² This approach raises many questions, as Marten's critique showed. How do you read practices? How do you measure their orthodoxy (if you would want to)? 'In short, behind a good social ethic is a good theology,' as James Reimer says, and Yoder would agree.³²³

How does Yoder relate to the creeds?³²⁴ How orthodox is 'the content' of Yoder's 'diaspora as mission'? Throughout Yoder's work it is clear that he reasons from the basis of a high Christology. This is how Yoder reads the Gospels, Acts and the letters.³²⁵ When it comes to the creeds, Yoder finds them helpful if they safeguard the normativity of Jesus for the practices of the church. He discussed high Christology in the same way in *The Politics of Jesus* (1972). In the first chapter he phrases the question:

What becomes of the meaning of incarnation if Jesus is not normatively human? If he is human, but not normative, is this not the

321 Yoder, 'Withdrawal and Diaspora.'

322 This is part of the subtitle of BP.

323 Reimer, *Toward*, 174.

324 The subject of discussion are the ecumenical creeds: The Apostle's Creed, Nicaea (325) and Chalcedon (451).

325 See for example PK, the chapter "'But We Do See Jesus": The Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth,' 46-62, JCSR, 106. See also J. Denny Weaver, 'Christology: From the Root,' in *Radical Theologian*, ed. Weaver, 27-85, and J. Denny Weaver and Earl Zimmerman, 'Interfaith Conversations: Judaism to Islam to Hinduism,' in *Radical Theologian*, ed. Weaver, 279.

ancient ebionitic heresy? If he be somehow authoritative but not in his humanness, is this not a new gnosticism?³²⁶

Yoder considers the creeds to be a fence, and a good attempt to answer the questions that had to be answered. In his discussion of the Trinity during classes he gave at AMBS (later published as *Preface to Theology*, 2002) Yoder remarks:

But the problem the doctrine of the Trinity seeks to resolve, the normativity of Jesus as he relates to the uniqueness of God, is a problem Christians will always face if they are Christian. The doctrine of the Trinity is a test of whether your commitments to Jesus and God are biblical enough that you have the problem the doctrine of the Trinity solves. It may be that there will be other solutions, words, phrasings or ways to avoid tripping over the problem the way the Greeks did. But we shall have to examine them with the same commitment to the man Jesus, and the same commitment to the unique God that they had, or else we shall have left the Christian family.³²⁷

J. Denny Weaver recalls how in a class Yoder mentioned that the classic creeds used ontological categories, but that we are not necessarily bound to these categories. ‘For us, he said, perhaps the category of continuity is ‘ethics’ or ‘history.’³²⁸ In *The Original Revolution* (1971) Yoder states the same idea in different words: ‘when, in the New Testament, we find the affirmation of the unity of Jesus with the Father, this is not discussed in terms of substance, but of will and deed.’³²⁹

Yoder embraced a high Christology as it safeguarded the normativity of Jesus for the life of the church, and therefore concluded that ‘the development of a high Christology is the natural cultural ricochet of a mis-

326 PJ, 10.

327 PT, 204.

328 Weaver and Zimmerman, ‘Interfaith,’ 275.

329 OR, 136. I am following Weaver’s line of argument here (Weaver and Zimmerman, ‘Interfaith,’ 275).

sionary ecclesiology.³³⁰ This quote comes from a lecture Yoder delivered as an introductory orientation to a conference on the question 'Is there a Believer's Church Christology?' It is worth following the line argument in this lecture. Yoder arrived at this quote as he exegeted four texts from the New Testament that engage the Christological question in new contexts. In each of these texts, the prologue to John, Hebrews, Colossians and the first vision of Revelation, Yoder notices how the writers all make the same moves. Yoder calls this 'a syndrome' or 'a deep structure':³³¹

- 1 The writers become at home in the new linguistic world, using its language and facing its questions.
- 2 Jesus is placed above the cosmos, in charge of it, instead of fitting Jesus into the space the cosmic vision has ready for it.
- 3 Christ's lordship is accredited by his suffering (kenosis).
- 4 Salvation is interpreted as participation in 'the self-emptying and the death – and only by that path, and by grace, the resurrection – of the Son.'
- 5 Jesus is identified with God (pre-existence, participation of the Son in creation and providence).
- 6 The writers and the readers share by faith in all that that victory means.

Yoder continues,

What does this tell us about the missionary self-confidence of the apostolic church? A handful of messianic Jews, moving beyond the defenses of their somewhat separate society to attack the intellectual bastions of majority culture, refused to grant that they should take the world on its own terms; refused to contextualize their message by clothing it in the categories the world held ready. Instead, they seized the categories, hammered them into other shapes, and turned the cosmology on its head, with Jesus both at the bottom,

³³⁰ Yoder, 'Household,' 6.

³³¹ This list is from "But We Do See Jesus" PK, 53, an extended version of this lecture.

crucified as a common criminal, and at the top, pre-existent Son and creator, and the church his instrument in today's battle.³³²

According to Yoder, it is not the world and its cosmological visions that are the defining categories within which the church works, either to criticize or complement. 'The Kingdom of God is the basic category. The rebellious but already in principle defeated cosmos is being invaded and brought to its knees by the Lamb.' In concluding this line of reasoning, Yoder asserts that 'the development of a high Christology is the natural cultural ricochet of a missionary ecclesiology,'³³³ and applying it to the believer's church context of the conference, he states: 'A high Christology is a prerequisite for the renewal of a believers' church.'³³⁴ Only if Christ is above and under, the Christology of pre-existence and kenosis, transcending the categories the world has to offer, only then Christ can renew the church and the world. And this is the point where Yoder finds the creeds helpful, as they came into being in a missionary context and tried to translate this high Christology into new contexts. In every new time, Yoder observes as he closes his lecture, we have three options. 'Encapsulation' or 'apology', which are both in risk of doing things on terms of the world or the powers. Or,

A renewal of the missionary arrogance (arrogance need not be a pejorative term) that dares to claim that Jesus, proclaimed as Messiah and Kyrios, transcends rather than being transcended by each new cosmos as well. When that happens, there is again a believer's church Christology.³³⁵

This lecture shows – and this is recognizable throughout his work – how, for Yoder, a high Christology is the prerequisite of both the life of the (diaspora) church and mission. This high Christology is the source and is expressed in ecclesiology, in practices, in 'witness' and 'proclamation'.³³⁶ This

332 Yoder, 'Household,' 6.

333 Yoder, 'Household,' 6.

334 Yoder, 'Household,' 7.

335 Yoder, 'Household,' 7.

336 PK, 56-59.

high Christology does not lead to a dominant or triumphalist way of doing mission, but invites to a life of *Nachfolge*, or as Epp Weaver puts it, 'of not being in charge.'³³⁷

With this in mind I conclude, contra Martens, that Yoder did not change his mind, nor was he a neo-Kantian thinker working from the meta-criterion of peace. Throughout his theological publications, from the earliest to the latest, Yoder works from a high Christology as the source of the practices of the church.

4.5.3 Deuteronomic or Constantinian? Or how to live in the land faithfully

One of the questions that keeps emerging regarding Yoder's ecclesiology is 'the sectarian question': does Yoder's approach suffer from sectarian tendencies? Free church ecclesiology and its criticism of Constantinianism is often associated with a 'sectarian' withdrawal from society. Although Gerald W. Schlabach does not argue from that perspective, he does pose a somewhat related question. He formulates this as 'the Deuteronomic challenge,' or 'how to receive and celebrate the blessing, the *shalom*, the good, or "the land" that God desires to give, yet to do so without defensively and violently hoarding God's blessing.'³³⁸ This is the main question for Christian ethics, according to Schlabach, and he argues that persisting in being anti-Constantinian will not do the ecclesiological job. Free churches have to find a positive way to respond to this invitation. As Schlabach puts it:

Even as peace churches argue that the Constantinian way "living in the land" has been wrong, however, they must eventually take on the challenges not only of faithful critique, but of faithful settling, faithful institution-building, and of faithful management of community life. They cannot expect their critique to be credible if they bring a principled suspicion to all institution-building, or to

³³⁷ Epp Weaver, *States of Exiles*, 78,79. See also Yoder's 'Postscript after the comments of D. Brown' at the end of Yoder, 'Household,' 8,9.

³³⁸ Schlabach, 'Deuteronomic,' 451.

all exercise of authority by leaders called to focus communal life, or to all forms of discipline. If the only alternative that peace churches, free churches, and other reform movements within Christianity have to offer is a perpetual starting over with primitive forms of face-to-face community, then they are admitting that they really have no idea how to live in the land that God would give them.³³⁹

Schlabach points to a serious flaw in Yoder's approach. Yoder takes Jeremiah 29 as paradigmatic for the people of God. In his diaspora as mission narrative he describes how the Jewish people from that moment on builds, plants and marries, seeks the peace of the city and prays for it. His description of how the Jewish people embody this Jeremiatic vision includes (1) the development of the synagogue, (2) the Jewish contribution to the surrounding culture and (3) the Joseph Paradigm: Jewish faithful presence at the imperial courts. It was noted that Yoder is very appreciative of diaspora Judaism to the point that he concludes that for the last two thousand years they could be considered the people of the sermon on the mount.³⁴⁰

When he draws analogies to Christian faithful presence following this Jeremiatic paradigm, he only draws them at the level of synagogue and free church (1). Yoder does not draw analogies to the other two aspects of the paradigm, that is (2) serving the surrounding culture and (3) serving at the courts of the kings and emperors. Furthermore, the analogies Yoder draws between synagogue and free church, are made from a perspective of the development and practice of synagogue life that is at least questionable.

Schlabach's critique is therefore relevant to this research in respect of two themes where Yoder's approach is one-sided, or at least questionable. The first theme is the organization of the church in diaspora. The second is a reflection on being present in society and how to faithfully plant, build and marry in our Western context.

339 Schlabach, 'Deuteronomic,' 464-465.

340 JCSR, 81-82.

4.5.3.1 *Organization of the church in diaspora*

Yoder has a particular free church reading of the organization of faith communities in diaspora. He focuses on local community practices in contradiction to central, supra-local leadership structures. Yoder's perspective on ecclesiological structures is shaped by his reading of the early church communities and of diaspora Judaism, and vice versa, his reading of the early church and diaspora Judaism are shaped by his ecclesiology.

As we have seen before, his historical reading is questionable. John W. Miller, for example, a specialist in Hebraic literature and part of the Concern group together with Yoder, has a different reading of Israel's history to Yoder.³⁴¹ Miller disagrees with Yoder 'on the role of the Jewish establishment in Jerusalem in compilation and dissemination of the Jewish scriptures.'³⁴² He agrees with Yoder that with the development of synagogues in the diaspora a paradigm shift took place, but Jerusalem and the temple stayed of major importance. The synagogue never replaced the temple and the hope for its restoration. Miller is therefore very critical of the tone of certainty in Yoder's historical work.³⁴³ According to Miller, we know little about the exact development of synagogue culture. He concludes that 'John's notion that the canon and synagogue arose without there being any centralist organization is ahistorical and fantastical.'³⁴⁴ Miller states, in other words, that there is no ground in Israel's history for Yoder's perspective on free church ecclesial organization.

Daniel Boyarin came to a similar conclusion but from another angle. As previously noted, Boyarin researched the role of 'heresy' in the parting of the ways, and described the trans-local leadership structures with-

341 A. James Reimer, 'Theological Orthodoxy and Jewish Christianity,' in *Wisdom*, ed. Hauerwas, 444-445. See also Chapman, 'The Old Testament,' 166-167.

342 Reimer, 'Theological Orthodoxy,' 444.

343 He writes that he finds Yoder's 'pejorative brushing aside of the whole second temple period as portrayed in Ezra and Nehemiah' to be 'mind-boggling' (Reimer, 'Theological Orthodoxy,' 444-445, where he quotes from a letter from John W. Miller to Herbert C. Klassen, March 3, 1998).

344 Reimer, 'Theological Orthodoxy,' 445, quote from the same letter.

in early Judaism, which appeared to be there.³⁴⁵ Historical research does appear to question Yoder's free church reading of the organization of faith communities within diaspora Judaism.

But also from a theological point of view, there are more options than Yoder suggests. From an Israel-like view of the church, and the conviction that historical conditions and theological convictions are of direct impact on the shape of the practices of the church – in other words, taking the same theological method as Yoder – one still might reach different conclusions than Yoder. To give an example of this we again turn to the work of George A. Lindbeck.

As discussed in section 4.4.6.1 postliberal theologian George Lindbeck developed an account of the church that was in many ways similar to Yoder's. Lindbeck was convinced that renewal of the church depended on three interrelated issues: (1) 'the spread of proficiency in premodern yet postcritical Bible reading' (hermeneutical), (2) 'restructuring the churches into something like pre-Constantinian organizational patterns' (organizational), and (3) 'the development of an Israel-like understanding of the church' (ecclesial).³⁴⁶ Just as in Yoder's approach, for Lindbeck the grand narrative has very practical consequences for the organization of the church.³⁴⁷

What do these 'pre-Constantinian organizational patterns' look like according to Lindbeck? He works from the perspective that an Israel-like view of the church includes the whole of the Old Testament as the church's history. Because the Christendom era is passing and Christians are becoming a diaspora, Lindbeck thinks the time is right to take a people of God approach.³⁴⁸ He calls this perspective 'catholic,' because the people of God includes the whole of the church, all over the world.³⁴⁹

345 See section 4.3.1.

346 Lindbeck, *Church*, 7.

347 See on this also Chapman, 'Old Testament,' 174-175.

348 Lindbeck, *Church*, 155.

349 Lindbeck, *Church*, 160-165.

When Lindbeck reflects on leadership structures in the Bible he notices a functional approach: the leadership structures of God's people changed to fit new circumstances. 'Moses was followed by judges and kings and the rabbinate developed in exile and diaspora.'³⁵⁰ Israel's history shows that 'continuity and tradition are functionally important.' Moreover, he states that

long-surviving institutions, like long-surviving species, can incorporate in their genetic code a wealth of evolutionary wisdom unmatched by conscious calculation. Or, to make a somewhat similar point less metaphorically, the symbolic weight acquired by durable structures can be incomparable more powerful (for good as well as ill) than anything devised *de novo* to fit contemporary needs.³⁵¹

But the biblical stories about leadership are more than functional, argues Lindbeck, it is God who guides his people and orders their common life. 'God always supplied leaders or a single center for the whole people.'³⁵² In the biblical narrative, leadership is 'providentially recognized.' Lindbeck gives various examples to show this is the case, from the establishment of monarchy, to the diaspora, to Paul who goes to Jerusalem.³⁵³ He concludes that the leadership structures in the biblical narrative are treated as both *de iure divino* (divine law) and *ius humanum* (changeable human law).³⁵⁴

It is from this perspective that Lindbeck views the episcopate as the preferred leadership structure for the people of God in our time. He considers the episcopate to be one of the 'foundational features of the Church's origins' in the first centuries.³⁵⁵ Lindbeck describes how it emerged early

350 Lindbeck, *Church*, 160.

351 Lindbeck, *Church*, 160-161

352 Lindbeck adds 'except for the period of the divided kingdom' (Lindbeck, *Church*, 160). See also Waldemar Janzen, 'John Howard Yoder's Ecclesiology: As Seen by an Appreciative Critic' in *The Church Made Strange for the Nations. Essays in Ecclesiology and Political Theology*, ed. Paul G. Doerksen and Karl Koop, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 47.

353 Lindbeck, *Church*, 160-161.

354 Lindbeck, *Church*, 161.

355 Lindbeck, *Church*, 163.

and considerably contributed to the church's mission. And, 'it is to this episcopally unified church, furthermore, that all the major Christian traditions owe their creeds, their liturgies and, above all, their scriptural canon.'³⁵⁶ Church renewal by 'restructuring the churches into something like pre-Constantinian organizational patterns' means for Lindbeck, an episcopally organized people of God.

It is not necessary to make any decision here as to whether Yoder's or Lindbeck's perspective on church organization makes more sense, but it is important to note the way that Lindbeck's argument shows how the same method can lead to different ecclesiological outcomes. Yoder's methodology of reading the Bible, the early church and diaspora Judaism does not necessarily lead to his particular free church perspective on church organization. There are different lines to be drawn from the same sources, as Lindbeck's proposal demonstrates. This leads to two conclusions. First, on the shape and organization of faith communities, the line anabaptists -> early church -> Jesus -> Jeremiah is not as obvious or inevitable as Yoder argues. Second, even if we work from a Jeremiatic diaspora as mission approach, we still need to ask the question how to organize the faith communities in this time and place.

4.5.3.2 *On being present in society*

When Yoder draws analogies to Christian faithful presence following the Jeremiatic paradigm, he only draws them at the level of the synagogue and free church (1). Yoder does not draw analogies to the other two aspects of the paradigm, namely (2) serving the surrounding culture and (3) serving at the courts of the kings and emperors.

Yoder draws analogies between two social phenomena, free church and synagogue, but does not really engage Jeremiah 29 nor diaspora Judaism as a source for faithful presence in society. We might conclude that

³⁵⁶ Lindbeck, *Church*, 163.

Yoder reads this chapter primarily as an affirmation of an anabaptist ecclesiology that is already there.

Waldemar Janzen argues that affirming a pre-existing anabaptist ecclesiology is characteristic for Yoder's approach. Janzen describes how Yoder's reasoning from the perspective of Constantinianism leads to a dualist approach, which makes it difficult to find theological language for everyday life outside the church—state stalemate:

A no less troubling consequence of this dualism is the apparent absence of a theological valuation of the biological and social realms of life, such as the family, the land, and life-sustaining work, to name just a few.³⁵⁷

Elsewhere Janzen argues that this is a broader Mennonite problem caused by a too-selective reading of the Old Testament, something he also sees Yoder's theology as suffering from:

Areas of life given virtually no attention theologically due to a supersessionist approach include creation (land, place, nature, body, medicine), political society (government, law and justice, human rights and liberation), economic society (business, work, play), and family (unbaptized children, children outside the church). The result is that we do our thinking about these areas outside the church.³⁵⁸

Reflecting on Claus Westermann's *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (1978), Janzen points to the fact that Yoder received his theological education (and developed his basic theological approach) in a time when the emphasis on salvation history dominated biblical-theological thinking. This might explain why Yoder's ecclesiology contains plenty of language

³⁵⁷ Janzen, 'Appreciative,' 40-41.

³⁵⁸ Reimer, *Toward*, 11, working with Waldemar Janzen, 'A Canonical Rethinking of the Anabaptist-Mennonite New Testament Orientation,' in *The Church as Theological Community. Essays in Honour of David Schroeder*, ed. Harry Huebner (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1990), 99.

for ongoing confrontation and less language for blessing and ‘living in the land.’³⁵⁹

From his early publications onwards, Yoder argued that the church, as political entity, influenced wider society.³⁶⁰ It did so in particular by being church. Yoder called this the leavening effect.³⁶¹ Although Yoder sometimes mentions direct contributions to society,³⁶² most of his focus is on the church being the church. He has scarcely any language for a Christian presence in society outside of the church. It seems that for Yoder Christians are only present as church and not as individuals, families or, for example, as employees. Although John Nugent tries to describe how Yoder developed a theology of vocation, the elaboration is again primarily focused on the practices of the church, and barely on everyday living outside the church.³⁶³

Yoder’s reading of Jeremiah 29 is an Old Testament calling for a witnessing church that is present in a strange society. The problem is that the commandment of Jeremiah (build, plant, marry, increase, seek the peace and pray) is not obeyed sufficiently enough in the practices of the church.³⁶⁴ What does it mean for diaspora communities to build, to plant, to marry, to increase? According to Janzen, these commandments are precisely subject to the categories that Mennonites hardly reflect on theologically. And Yoder fails to do so as well. Yoder’s work suffers from the dichotomy of church (not being in charge) versus state (being in charge, and therefore violent). Yoder has been so busy confronting wrong ways

359 Janzen, ‘Appreciative,’ 48.

360 See his first article published in *Concern*, ‘The Anabaptist Dissent’ (1954), and CWS (1964).

361 RP, 163. See also Dorothea H. Bertschmann, *Bowing Before Christ – Nodding to the State? Reading Paul Politically with Oliver O’Donovan and John Howard Yoder*, Library of New Testament Studies (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 52-53.

362 CWS, 40-42; Park, *Missional Ecclesiologies*, 119-121.

363 John C. Nugent, ‘Kingdom Work: John Howard Yoder’s Free Church Contributions to an Ecumenical Theology of Vocation,’ in *Radical Ecumenicity*, ed. Nugent, 149-172. The same is visible in Parler’s chapter ‘The Spirit Pioneering Culture’ in Parler, *Things Hold*, 193-225, which elaborates mainly on the practices of the church.

364 BP, 5. Yoder describes in BP five ecclesial practices: binding and loosing, breaking bread together, baptism, the fullness of Christ, the rule of Paul.

of being present in society (Constantinianism), that he failed to develop a theology of Christian presence in society that was broader than his anabaptist ecclesiology. Giving more especial attention to Jeremiah 29 and its commandments to build, to plant, to marry, would have afforded him the possibility of overcoming this old anabaptist dilemma, and develop a theology of Christian presence within society from a position of 'not being in charge.' Christians are not exclusively part of the church, but also part of families, neighborhoods, companies and other social networks. Although we might discern hints in Yoder's work in how to develop a theology for that, it is problematic that he – particularly in working from a Jeremiah 29 diaspora paradigm – did not really do so.

Several scholars have noticed this void in Yoder's work, although giving slightly different reasons for it. Janzen locates the problem in Yoder's limited (Mennonite) reading of the Old Testament.³⁶⁵ O'Donovan (amongst others) recognizes sectarian tendencies in Yoder's work and sees that withdrawal takes away the necessity to theologically reflect upon society.³⁶⁶ Reimer characterizes Yoder's attitude as 'evangelical anarchy': a prevalent assumption that if only we were truly obedient to the lordship of Christ we would not need institutions.³⁶⁷ Reimer states, in other words, that Yoder fails to do justice to the importance of organized, institutional religious and political life.³⁶⁸ Park reads in Yoder's ecclesiology too much distinctiveness and too little solidarity.³⁶⁹ He notices that Yoder's 'rather negative and pessimistic perception of the world outside the believing community could discourage him from expectantly looking for the presence and the working of God in all human contexts beyond the church, and from creatively working with the civil community for social change.'³⁷⁰

365 Janzen, 'Appreciative,' 48.

366 For a critical approach to O'Donovan's reading of Yoder, see P. Travis Kroeker, *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics. Essays in Exile*. Theopolitical Visions (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), 109-129.

367 Reimer, *Toward*, 20-21.

368 Reimer, 'Mennonites,' CGR 16, 9.

369 Park, *Missional Ecclesiologies*, 119-120.

370 Park, *Missional Ecclesiologies*, 140-141.

It makes sense to read Jeremiah 29 from an ecclesiological perspective, but it cannot be limited to this, whatever the reasons might be. Jeremiah 29 has the potential to inspire a theology of faithful presence in society, even outside the church. It has the potential to inspire, for instance, a theology of work or a theology of culture. Duane Friesen's *Artists, Citizens, Philosophers. Seeking the Peace of the City. An Anabaptist Theology of Culture* (2000) is a good example of this.³⁷¹ His argument is derived from Jeremiah 29, but with limited reference to Yoder's work, because Friesen emphasizes precisely what Yoder ignores: what it means to be artists, citizens and philosophers from the perspective of the commandment of Jeremiah 29 to seek the peace of the city.

4.6 Diaspora as Mission Revisited

This chapter has provided a theoretical criticism of Yoder's diaspora as mission ecclesiology. Engaging Yoder's methodology and the criticism it generated, two major flaws in Yoder's approach have emerged. First, Yoder is too selective in his choice of sources. Second, Yoder is too biased in his reading of these sources. This leads to the situation that Yoder reads exclusive normativity in texts where the experts in these areas do not find it. This is the case for all the disciplines Yoder wrote about: Biblical studies, Judaism, history. Yoder's Jeremiatic reading of the Old and New Testament, of the parting of the ways, of diaspora Judaism and free church ecclesiology is inspiring, and offers new and creative ways to re-engage the questions at hand, as the experts in the fields showed in their discussions of Yoder's work. But Yoder's grand diaspora as mission narrative is not the only possible, faithful reading, nor the only normative reading for the generations to come.

Yoder's ecclesiology has proved to be in need of several revisions. The first revision is a more thorough reasoning from the perspective of election.

³⁷¹ Duane K. Friesen *Artists, Citizens, Philosophers. Seeking the Peace of the City. An Anabaptist Theology of Culture* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2000).

George Lindbeck's Israel-like view of the church offers a constructive revision in several respects. It encourages engagement with the whole of the Biblical narrative, it encourages the development of a self-critical peoplehood, and it helps a move beyond supersessionism.

The second revision is the development of a theology of (Christian presence within) culture. Yoder has the tendency to argue from what could be described as a church-state stalemate. This falls short at several levels. First, the church is not the only shape of Christian presence in society. What about family, work or other social networks? What does it mean to faithfully build, plant and marry? Second, the power of the state is no longer 'the most important competitor of the church.' It is capitalism and the market, in other words, liberal ideology. Stanley Hauerwas' approach is in that sense a helpful addition.

Regarding Yoder's Christology, the conclusion made is that a high Christology is indeed the source for his free church ecclesiology. This is both missionary relevant and ecumenically binding.³⁷²

In addition to the theoretical critique this chapter has generated, Chapter 5 provides a practical critique, by engaging three communities that are inspired, in some respect, by Yoder's diaspora as mission approach. The sixth and final chapter brings Yoder's revised diaspora as mission ecclesiology into conversation with the ecclesiological context and questions surrounding western society today and over the coming years.

³⁷² By committing to the ecumenical creeds (the Apostle's Creed, Nicaea, and Chalcedon), which safeguard a high Christology, diaspora ecclesial churches will find agreement with the majority of the Church.

5

A PRACTICAL CRITIQUE OF JOHN HOWARD YODER'S DIASPORA AS MISSION

5.1 Introduction

Thus far, Chapter 3 engaged Yoder's work to critically describe his 'diaspora as mission' approach. In Chapter 4 critical reception of Yoder's approach was used to sharpen the perspective. This concerned a theoretical critique. Chapter 5 seeks to find out whether practices that are inspired by Yoder's approach can deliver a practical critique. To do so this chapter will engage three post Yoderian thinkers and the communities related to them. They are Stuart Murray and Urban Expression, Shane Claiborne and the Simple Way community, and Mark Kinzer and the Messianic Jewish community Zera Avraham.

These thinkers were selected for this chapter because, first of all, they relate to Yoder's work and to Judaism in terms of their ecclesiology. Second, they have an ecclesiological and missionary approach which is put into practice. Third, they are part of convictional communities¹ that are inspired by their theology and which are, in turn, a major source for their own theological reflection. I will use their work to address the following questions in terms of themselves as theologians:

- 1 *How does the encounter with Judaism and Yoder shape their (missionary) ecclesiology?*

¹ With the term convictional communities, I refer to communities which embody their convictions in their everyday practice, or at least seek to. See McClendon, *Ethics*, 83-84.

2 *How do their approaches relate to Yoder's 'diaspora as mission'?*

And the following question regarding the related communities:

3 *How do the practices embody and/ or question Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach?*

What is the benefit of examining these communities and their practices? Nicholas Healy states in his introduction to *Church, World and the Christian Life* (2010) that to be adequate, ecclesiology has to engage in theological reflection upon the concrete shape of the church.² Several recent publications argue along the same lines, proposing that 'to understand the church, we should view it as being simultaneously theological and social/cultural'³ and consequently study ecclesiology both theologically and sociologically. Nicholas Healy, for example, calls his approach 'practical – prophetic ecclesiology'.⁴ Pete Ward talks about 'ecclesiological ethnography',⁵ and Charles Marsh uses the term 'lived theology'.⁶ Although slightly different in approach, they all try to find ways to move beyond reflection upon theological ideas by engaging concrete communities and their practices in their theological work. Ecclesiology therefore, could benefit from the tools of social and cultural inquiry, used from a theological perspective.⁷

This is the case for ecclesiological research in general, but even more so if it concerns John Howard Yoder's work. In Chapter 2, I proposed how to work with Yoder's theology in light of his abuse of women and his theological justification of this behavior. I suggested that to work responsibly with Yoder's ecclesiology is to work with the main question (besides the

2 Nicholas Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life. Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.

3 Pete Ward (ed.), *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 2.

4 Healy, *Church*, 154-185.

5 Ward, *Perspectives*, 2-3.

6 Charles Marsh (ed.), *Lived Theology. New Perspectives on Method, Style, and Pedagogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

7 This raises a whole set of questions about the nature of the church and the use of non-theological disciplines, such as history, sociology and ethnography in relation to theology. For discussion, see Ward, *Perspectives*, 17-20; Healy, *Church*, 168-176.

exegetical, historical and systematic theological questions): *How does this work out? Or how would this work out?* I argued that we need a hermeneutical process in which (1) Yoder's theory is embodied in concrete practices, (2) these practices are critically reflected upon and (3) the results are brought back to the theory. This chapter is intended to do just that.

To work with Yoder's theology is thus to ask how it is embodied within actual communities, discovering, interpreting how it works out, and criticizing these practices in light of 'all that we know,' and creatively transforming them into better ones if possible.⁸ The criteria for 'all that we know' are the common tools of the theologian: exegetical, historical and systematic theological questions. But as I argued in Chapter 2, Yoder's life and theology exposed some serious flaws, which I suggest should be addressed explicitly. These are the issues of violence, power dynamics and sources of the self.⁹ In view of the serious failings his theology displays, I argued that it can be used for good, but is in need of a practical critique. To constructively work with Yoder's ecclesiology, we need this source of theology: the practices of an actual community.

Here, it is useful to make some remarks on method. The first two formulated questions will be answered by engaging the relevant publications of the selected theologians. The second question in particular (*how would this approach relate to Yoder's 'diaspora as mission'?*) will use Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach as a lens to read their work. How did they engage, understand and implement Yoder's approach in their own ecclesiological reasoning? And if they make different choices, might this be helpful for our discourse?

8 With 'all that we know' I refer to the (ana)baptist theologian James McClendon who argued in his *Biography as Theology* (1974), 20: 'What is noteworthy, however, is that the realm of convictions is just the realm with which theology, too, is concerned. The best way to understand theology is to see it, not as the study about God (for there are godless theologies as well as godly ones), but as the investigation of the convictions of a convictional community, discovering its convictions, interpreting them, criticizing them in the light of all that we know, and creatively transforming them into better ones if possible.'

9 For a more detailed argument, see section 2.3.3.3

For the third question (*how do the practices embody and/or question Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach?*) the practices of selected communities need to be engaged. David Silverman distinguishes four main methods that are common to all kinds of qualitative research: (1) observation, (2) analyzing texts and documents, (3) interviewing, (4) the use of recordings and transcripts.¹⁰ This study chooses the second method to work with, for a number of reasons. Grace Davie and David Wyatt (2011) emphasize how documents 'provide insights into people's lives, thoughts, beliefs and practices.'¹¹ Personal documents as published on a website or published in books or articles 'are an excellent source of attitudes and social values'¹² and provide an insight into the self-understanding of these communities. Another advantage of this method is the wide presence and accessibility of the documents in question. Finally, there have been various observations and interviews within the selected communities, which are easily accessible as published texts in articles, books and websites.

I am aware that by doing so we will primarily engage 'espoused theology,' or the theology embedded within a group's articulation of its beliefs.¹³ Within the scope of a systematic theological research this will be sufficient to answer my research question. After writing the subchapter on their community, I sent Stuart Murray, Shane Claiborne and Mark Kinzer the text for feedback, especially on the issue of whether I gave a fair account of their community life. I received affirmative feedback from Mark

10 David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text, and Interaction* (London: Sage, 1993), 9; Ward, *Perspectives*, 8.

11 Grace Davie and David Wyatt 'Document Analysis,' in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London: Routledge, 2011), 151.

12 Davie and Wyatt, 'Document Analysis,' 151. See also 151-160.

13 Helen Cameron distinguishes four voices of theology: (1) Normative Theology (Scriptures, the Creeds, official church teaching, liturgies), (2) Formal Theology (the theology of academic theologians, dialogue with other disciplines), (3) Espoused Theology (the theology embedded within a group's articulation of its beliefs), and (4) Operant Theology (the theology embedded within the actual practices of a group). See Helen Cameron, Debora Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney, and Clare Watkins, *Talking about God in Practice. Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 53-56.

Kinzer and Stuart Murray.¹⁴ Where necessary I added their feedback or additional perspectives to the text and notes of this chapter.

The practices will be explored first by analyzing texts and documents which are published by the communities themselves, such as commitments, values and prayers, reports and reflective articles. Second, data collected by researchers, who engaged these communities for their ecclesiological research, will be taken into account. This includes publications such as academic and popular books and articles, research for undergraduate and master degrees, and others.

5.2 Stuart Murray and Urban Expression

5.2.1 *Stuart Murray*

Stuart Murray is one of the founders of Urban Expression, was lecturer at Spurgeon's College, London and a former chair of the Anabaptist Network.¹⁵ He worked for twelve years as a church planter in East London and this experience was formative for his theological development. In that time, he encountered the post-Christendom context in real life, discovered the need for planting churches and recovered Anabaptism as a resource for contemporary ecclesiology.

His publications focus on these three subjects: post-Christendom as context,¹⁶ planting churches as shape and Anabaptism as source for contemporary ecclesiological practice and thinking. Although throughout his work these themes interact, Murray has published specifically on the subjects. *Post-Christendom, Church and Mission in a Strange New World (2004)* and *Church after Christendom (2004)* were the first volumes in the 'After

¹⁴ Shane Claiborne did not respond to my request to give feedback on my description of the community life of the Simple Way.

¹⁵ The Anabaptist Network is 'a point of connection and dialogue for the growing interest in Anabaptism across the UK.' See <https://www.anabaptistnetwork.com/> (accessed March 2019).

¹⁶ In particular the urban context as the milieu in western societies where post-Christendom is most advanced.

Christendom' series.¹⁷ This series of books 'explor[es] the implications of the demise of Christendom and the challenges facing a church now living on the margins of Western society.'¹⁸ He has published several books on church planting and mission, such as *City Vision* (1990), *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* (1998), *Changing Mission* (2006), *Planting Churches* (2008), *Multi-voiced church* (2012) and *A vast Minority: Church and Mission in a Plural Culture* (2015).¹⁹ *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* (2000) explores Anabaptist hermeneutics from an historical perspective, whereas *The Naked Anabaptist, The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (2010) is an introduction at a popular level to the convictions of Anabaptists.²⁰

5.2.1.1 *How does the encounter with Judaism shape Murrays (missionary) ecclesiology?*

The first question we engage Stuart Murray's work with, is *how does the encounter with Judaism/Yoder shape his (missionary) ecclesiology?* To answer this, it is helpful to split the question and look first at how the encounter with Judaism shapes Stuart Murray's (missionary) ecclesiology.

Murray's encounter with Judaism is mainly focused on the Old and New Testaments. He is aware that Jews have been a diaspora people for over two thousand years, and that we in our post-Christendom setting might benefit from their experiences, but he does not really explore this²¹

17 Murray, *Post-Christendom*; Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004).

18 Murray, *Church after Christendom* (2004), Series Preface, xi.

19 Stuart Murray, *City Vision. A Biblical View* (London: Daybreak, 1990); Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1998/ 2001); Stuart Murray, *Changing Mission. Learning from the Newer Churches* (London: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 2006); Stuart Murray, *Planting Churches. A Framework for Practitioners* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008); Stuart & Sian Murray Williams, *Multi-voiced church* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012); and Stuart Murray, *A vast Minority: Church and Mission in a Plural Culture* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015).

20 Stuart Murray, *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2000). Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist, The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2010).

21 In *Post-Christendom*, for example, after explaining how we learn from dissident communities who struggled to be Christians without the Christendom framework, he

until more recently. In *A Vast Majority* (2015) Murray does address the question ‘what might we learn from the experiences of the Jewish community?’ following the proposal of rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who uses the term ‘creative minority’. In his 2013 Erasmus Lecture, Sacks reflected on Cardinal Ratzinger’s earlier use of the term, and traced it back to Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles in Babylon. In his lecture he suggested that Christian and Jewish communities might learn from the diaspora experience about how to live in post-Christendom Western Europe:²²

What Jeremiah was saying was that it was possible to survive in exile with your identity intact, your appetite for life undiminished, while contributing to the wider society and praying for God on its behalf. Jeremiah was introducing into history a highly consequential idea: the idea of a creative minority.²³

Murray finds the term ‘creative minority’ helpful in considering church and mission in a post-Christendom context. He reflects for example on ‘fresh expressions’ as the kind of initiatives Jeremiah ‘would have approved’ and encouraged.²⁴ Murray quotes Sacks affirmatively:

The time has come for a new meeting of Christian and Jews, based simply on the fact that a church that sees itself as a creative minority in the Jeremiah sense has made space for the existence of Jews and Judaism in a way that was not fully articulated before.²⁵

This publication aside, most of Murray’s reflection on ‘Jewish communities’ is actually reflection on Judaism in the Old and New Testaments. As

adds in a footnote, ‘And from Jewish communities as they struggled *not* to be Christian in Christendom and survived as non-conformists.’ (Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 290, italics Murray’s.) He does not however explore this any further. In *The Naked Anabaptist* he notes ‘Only the Jews remained as a dissident community,’ adding ‘The Holy Roman Empire (as it became known) was no more successful in assimilating them than the pagan empire had been, despite much more efficient persecution and persistent efforts to convert them’ (Murray, *Naked Anabaptist*, 74). Despite these affirmative words, he does not use diaspora Judaism as an inspiration for his post-Christendom ecclesiology, nor does he refer to the work of people who do, such as Yoder’s JCSR.

²² Murray, *A Vast Minority*, 107-108.

²³ Murray, *A Vast Minority*, 108.

²⁴ Murray, *A Vast Minority*, 114-119.

²⁵ Murray, *A Vast Minority*, 125.

a typical Anabaptist Bible reader, Murray places a strong emphasis on the difference between the Old and the New Testaments, especially when it comes to the Bible as a source for ethical reasoning. From their reading of the teachings of Jesus, the sixteenth-century Anabaptists questioned Christendom's use of the Old Testament to justify oaths, tithing and just war.²⁶ They did so by emphasizing the difference between the Testaments.²⁷ Murray has the tendency to follow this dualist hermeneutical approach, and hence be critical of the Old Testament as a source for ethical reasoning today. Sometimes he even falls prey to Lutheran tendencies, as he describes Judaism as typically Old Testament and legalistic.²⁸ He does so for example in his book on tithing, where Murray writes on tithing practices in Second Temple Judaism and the early church:

There were many such vestiges of Judaism in the early churches, for which there was no warrant in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, and which only slowly disappeared as the churches sifted through their Jewish heritage and discarded what was no longer appropriate.²⁹

Although Murray is very critical about the use of the Old Testament as a source of Christendom ethics, from his earliest publications onward he is inspired by the prophets and the experiences of the Jewish communities in exile³⁰ as a resource for being church in post-Christendom Western Europe. As a church planter in East London, Murray was troubled by the fact that most Christians moved away from the inner cities to the suburbs. He was also troubled by the lack of a theology of the city. In one of his first publications, *City Vision* (1990), Murray tries to describe the 'clear and

²⁶ Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 161-166, 140.

²⁷ Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 97-124; Lloyd Peterson, *Reading the Bible after Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011), 54-56.

²⁸ Martin Luther's strict distinction between law and grace in his theology of sola gratia led some to a negative view of Judaism as the religion of the law versus Christianity as the religion of grace. A reading of Judaism which describes it as legalistic is therefore regularly referred to as Lutheran.

²⁹ Stuart Murray, *Beyond Tithing* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2000), 59.

³⁰ As written down in the biblical narrative of the Old and New Testaments.

consistent' biblical vision of the city.³¹ Describing this vision from Genesis to Revelation, he concludes with a chapter called 'Putting it all together: Nehemiah and Jerusalem.' In this chapter he describes what happened around the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The elders 'cast lots to bring out of every ten to live in Jerusalem' (Nehemiah 11:1). Murray does not necessarily find this 'tithing of people' the best idea, but he adds 'any church that begins to catch a glimpse of God's purpose in the city will want to find some practical way of expressing its concern.'³²

A major source for Murray's ecclesiological reflection is Jeremiah 29. It is a central text in his theology of church and mission, but also a source for inspiration and strategy on the practical level. Jeremiah 29 returns throughout his work, from an early publication such as *City Vision* (1990), to *A Vast Minority* (2015).³³ Churches that 'settle down' in exile are churches that are sustainable,³⁴ according to Murray. Exile, for Murray, is connected with under-churched areas, with the inner cities:³⁵ this is the place where Jeremiah 29 is calling Christians and churches to be present.³⁶ Being present in the city is both the biblical vision and the practice of the early church, says Murray, referring to *the Letter to Diognetus* ('as the soul is to the body, so are the Christians to their city').³⁷

Christians in the city are no longer a moral majority, according to Murray, but a prophetic minority.³⁸ The 'biblical basis for this is to be found in these neglected prophecies to pagan nations.'³⁹ Christians should

31 Murray, *City Vision*, 9.

32 Murray, *City Vision*, 151.

33 Murray, *City Vision*, 79-89; Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 131-133, 224, 230; Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist*, 80; Murray, *A Vast Minority*, 43-45, 164-165.

34 Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 224.

35 For an explanation of the term under-churched, see Murray, *Planting Churches*, 25.

36 Murray, *Planting Churches*, 82-83; Murray, *City Vision*, 79-89; Murray, *A Vast Minority*, 166.

37 Murray, *City Vision*, 81.

38 Murray, *City Vision*, 94,95.

39 Murray, *City Vision*, 95.

however not behave like the Old Testament prophets, says Murray, in a way reminiscent of Yoder:

The day of the isolated prophet is over: ever since the incarnation made the word flesh the prophetic ministry has needed a community to speak out from, a community with a shape, ethos and lifestyle that gives integrity to the message of the prophets.⁴⁰

In conclusion, Murray mainly engages Judaism within the biblical canon to learn from their exile experiences, since he reads post-Christendom as a similar setting. His ecclesiological questions are, in that sense, comparable to theirs. This is where Murray's (missionary) ecclesiology is shaped, especially as he engages Jeremiah 29.

5.2.1.2 *How does the encounter with Yoder shape Murray's (missionary) ecclesiology?*

Stuart Murray was introduced into the Anabaptist tradition by Alan and Eleanor Kreider.⁴¹ The Kreider family came from the Goshen area, where Alan taught at Goshen College and where Eleanor followed classes at AMBS. This is where John Howard Yoder worked and lived, and the Kreiders were influenced and inspired by Yoder, not only through his publications but also by personal encounters.⁴² In the acknowledgements of *Worship and Mission after Christendom* (2009), they write:

Our friends and colleagues have taught us much. We never studied with John Howard Yoder, but he was a friend, and he influenced

⁴⁰ Murray, *City Vision*, 97. He speaks in a Yoderian way without referring to Yoder's work.

⁴¹ Murray dedicated *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* to the Kreider family with the words 'To Alan and Eleanor Kreider through whom I discovered the Anabaptist tradition.' Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 5.

⁴² On the personal level, Yoder was one of the pastors who ordained Alan Kreider for ministry in London, in 1975. Regarding Yoder's theology, the publications of Alan Kreider show a profound knowledge and awareness of Yoder's line of thinking. See for example, Alan Kreider, *Journey Towards Holiness. A Way of Living for God's Nation* (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1986); Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Eugene: Wipf&Stock, 1999); Alan Kreider, Eleanor Kreider, Paulus Widjaja, *A Culture of Peace. God's Vision for the Church* (Intercourse: Good Books, 2005); and Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church. The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

us in more ways than we realize. We often sense that he is looking over our shoulders, “watching” us!⁴³

Their version of Anabaptism, which Murray was introduced to, was a Yoderian shaped Anabaptism. This is visible in Murray’s interpretation of the Anabaptist tradition for church (planting) and mission. Murray is heavily influenced by Yoder’s line of thinking, as he regularly reasons in a similar vein, or uses typically Yoderian terminology. Murray, however, rarely directly cites Yoder’s work.

Yoder’s lines of thought, for example, are visible in Murray’s reading of Christendom. Murray uses the term Christendom, where Yoder uses the term Constantinianism, but Murray’s argumentation around the notion bears much similarity to Yoder’s thinking. Just like Yoder he sees the development of Christendom as a turn, or shift, away from the early church.⁴⁴ He reads Augustine as a ‘pioneer of Christendom.’⁴⁵ Murray associates Christendom with powerful leadership and the emergency of ‘professional church leaders,’⁴⁶ who exercise the practices of the church with clerical power.⁴⁷ Theological changes under Christendom are described by Murray as ‘realized eschatology’⁴⁸ and the tendency ‘to make history turn out right,’⁴⁹ both explicit Yoderian vocabulary. Like Yoder, he associates Christendom with persecution of the Jews.⁵⁰ Like Yoder, he sees God’s grace at work in the dispersion of his people, as is shown, for example, in the story of the ‘Babel building-project.’⁵¹ The significance of the exile for the development of Judaism as we know it, is something Murray describes in a

43 Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission after Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), xiv.

44 A major difference is that Yoder’s account of Constantinianism is multi-layered into neo-versions of the phenomenon. Murray’s account is more basic and schematic in approach.

45 Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 75-82.

46 Murray, *City Vision*, 132.

47 Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 184; Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 263.

48 Stuart Murray ‘Missio Dei. See God at Work,’ in *Forming Christian Habits in Post-Christendom. The Legacy of Alan and Eleanor Kreider*, ed. James R. Krabill and Stuart Murray (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2011), 39.

49 Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 21,200,242.

50 Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 130,131.

51 Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 184.

similar way to Yoder.⁵² But we also see Yoder's influence in Murray's theology of the powers,⁵³ and his description of victory in the New Testament as 'the ability to stand firm.'⁵⁴

It is fascinating that most of this reasoning along Yoderian lines goes without direct reference to Yoder's work.⁵⁵ If a work is quoted, it is most likely *Body Politics* (1992), and not only in Murray's own publications, but also in the rest of the After Christendom series.⁵⁶ Murray is convinced that the church is not a theological idea but a social reality, expressed in practices that are good news for the world. This is exactly what Yoder expresses in this small booklet.⁵⁷

How does the encounter with Yoder shape Murray's (missionary) ecclesiology? Murray is a Yoderian thinker, but since he does not always account for that in his notes, the connection with Yoder's work is not always as traceable as hoped for.⁵⁸ Some similarities in lines of ecclesiological reasoning are, however, obvious.

⁵² Murray, *A Vast Minority*, 49.

⁵³ Murray, *City Vision*, 71, 96. It is fascinating that Murray's description of the city is comparable to Yoder's theology of the powers. Yoder was introduced to this theology of Christ and the powers by Hendrik Berkhof, who published *Christus en de machten* in 1953. Yoder translated this book into English, as *Christ and the Powers*. In PJ Yoder dedicated a chapter to this theology of Christ and the powers.

⁵⁴ Murray, *City Vision*, 137.

⁵⁵ Murray does occasionally refer to Yoder directly, for example to PJ, PK, OR, CWS, and even to a specific article in *Concern* ('Binding and Loosing' in *Concern* 14 [February 1967]) when he discusses church discipline, in Stuart Murray, *Explaining Church Discipline* (Kent: Sovereign World, 1995), 36. So Murray is at home in Yoder's work, and I suspect so familiar that he sometimes is not consciously aware that he is reasoning along Yoderian lines.

⁵⁶ See for example Murray, *Church after Christendom*; Kreider & Kreider, *Worship and Mission after Christendom*; Andrew Francis, *Hospitality and Community after Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012). PJ is also regularly referred to, but more as an introduction to Yoder and/or Anabaptism, apart from in Murray, *Beyond Tithing*, 202, where André Trocmé's theology of Jubilee is referred to, as described in PJ.

⁵⁷ BP, with the clear subtitle 'Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World.'

⁵⁸ David McMillan of the International Baptist Theological Study Centre suggested that maybe the connections are not that explicit. Stuart Murray is to be seen as a British Baptist and Yoder's work was not that well known in the UK in the 1990s. Some similarities in lines of ecclesiological reasoning are however there, whether influenced by Yoder or developed separately.

Commenting on this chapter, Stuart Murray responded: 'I think David McMillan's comment in a footnote is correct. Yoder's writings were not widely known or read in the 1980s and 1990s in the UK. Although I have read a number of Yoder's books, I have rarely

First is the indication of 'Christendom' as shift and as the fall of the church. This gives a frame to embrace Christianity (as it should be) but disavow the abuse of power by church and Christian culture. This 'Christianity as it should be' was embodied by the early church and sixteenth-century Anabaptists, so they function as inspiration for ecclesiological reasoning and practice in our Western Post-Christendom setting.

Second, just like Yoder, Murray is convinced that the church is a social reality. The church is shaped by the practices that are embodied by the community. These practices are good news for the world.⁵⁹

Third, the centrality of Jeremiah 29 is comparable to Yoder's discourse. It is hard to trace whether Murray was inspired by Yoder's work on this subject, or that he engaged Jeremiah 29 like this due to biographical reasons. Maybe, as a church planter in East London, he appreciated how his team or church was a community of exiles in the big city.

Fourth, just like Yoder, Murray views diaspora not only as a given situation, but as something to embrace as a calling. For Murray, this embracing of diaspora has to do with staying in or moving to the inner city, as a place where God would want his people to live, prosper and seek the shalom of the city. Again, it is hard to trace whether and on which particular points Murray was inspired by Yoder's work, or whether his perspective arose directly out of his work as a church planter in East London.

5.2.1.3 *How would Murray's approach relate to Yoder's 'diaspora as mission'?*

As we have seen, there are many similarities between Yoder's approach and Stuart Murray's work. If we use Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach as a lens to read Murray's work, the major difference that emerges is the lack of a grand narrative – such as Yoder's diaspora as mission – in Stuart Mur-

quoted from or referred to him in my writings. This has not been deliberate and I accept your conclusion that his thinking has undoubtedly influenced me, but I don't think I have realized to what extent this was the case. I should probably have acknowledged this more often. It may be because his thinking was primarily mediated through conversations with the Kreiders and others, so I was unaware of how this had influenced my thinking.'

⁵⁹ On this point Murray refers regularly to BP.

ray's work. Yoder's grand narrative is that Jeremiah 29 is a turning point, from that moment on God calls his people to 'diaspora as mission', as was God's intention from the beginning. The people of God are called to live in exile communities that show an alternative way of living, and in that seek the peace of the city. And they did. Jesus and (in him) the early church embraced this perspective. The sixteenth-century Anabaptists caught a glimpse of this vision, and the church in the twenty-first century are called to as well.

Although it seems that two major themes in their work overlap, Yoder's grand narrative shows where and why they in fact differ. These two major themes are Christendom / Constantinianism, and Jeremiah 29.

Constantinianism as Yoder uses it, is a theological term, which means the practical and theological opposition of this grand narrative of God's plan with his people and the nations, as evidenced by embracing political power and giving up diaspora living. Cutting off the roots of the church from Judaism is another expression of the same attitude. Christendom, as Stuart Murray uses it, carries the connotation of a time frame, an era, from Emperor Constantine until the second half of the twentieth century. With this era bad habits were introduced into Christianity, which are still visible in our ways of being church. Murray calls them Christendom toxins, and churches need to get rid of them.⁶⁰ From the Christendom era we moved into post-Christendom, an era Murray compares to Israel's exile: strangers in a strange land.

And this is where Murray engages Jeremiah 29. Murray uses Jeremiah 29 as exemplary for his ecclesiology. Just as the Jewish people received 'a vision of what was possible in exile – and perhaps only in exile'⁶¹ by the words of Jeremiah, we need a vision for this post-Christendom era. 'The years spent in exile transformed the people of Israel, finally ridding them of tendencies and practices that had marred their community life and wit-

60 Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 169-172.

61 Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 133.

ness over many centuries.⁶² In the same way we might get rid of our Christendom toxins in this period of time. Murray has an exemplary and pragmatic use of Jeremiah 29,⁶³ where Yoder has a more ‘*Heilsgeschichtliche*’ (salvation historical) and normative approach. According to Yoder, Jeremiah 29 showed in a particular time and place how the people of God are called to live, a calling to ‘diaspora as mission’. The church is called to live similarly. Irrespective of particular time and age, whether Christendom or post-Christendom, in every time and place there have been communities who have embraced this calling.

Yoder’s grand narrative connects the church with the Jewish people because the church shares in Israel’s calling, and thus in Israel’s history. This is a major difference with Murray’s approach, as read from Yoder’s perspective. Murray does not really need the Jewish communities. He uses them in an exemplary way, and mainly the Jewish communities in exile, from the Old Testament period. The connection in calling and history, which Yoder’s narrative shows, is lacking in Murray’s approach.

From Yoder’s point of view, Murray’s approach would benefit from Yoder’s grand narrative. Yoder might call Murray’s approach pragmatic, where Yoder would like to reason more normatively from Jeremiah 29.

5.2.2 Practices: Urban Expression

The question with respect to the practices is *how do the practices embody and/or question Yoder’s ‘diaspora as mission’ approach?* The communities connected with Stuart Murray’s person and vision are those of Urban Expression. Urban Expression is ‘an urban mission agency that recruits, equips, deploys, and networks self-financing teams pioneering creative and relevant expressions of the Christian Church in under-churched urban neighbourhoods.’⁶⁴ It was launched in April 1997 through a partnership between

⁶² Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 133.

⁶³ In an email Stuart Murray explained that ‘the motif of exile owes much to my reading of Brueggemann (rather than Yoder).’ On Brueggemann’s exile ecclesiology, see section 4.2.2.3.

⁶⁴ www.urbanexpression.co.uk/home (accessed June 2017).

Spurgeon's College, London and Oasis Trust, under supervision of Stuart Murray. Urban Expression started with Jim and Juliet Kilpin, who became part of the first Urban Expression church planting team in Shadwell. Juliet Kilpin was also appointed as part-time coordinator of Urban Expression and worked with Murray to establish this new mission agency. In the early years Urban Expression focused on East London, later teams started planting churches in Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham, Stoke and Bristol. In 2007 Urban Expression Netherlands was formed and in 2009 Urban Expression North America, with plans to plant churches in various locations in the United States and Canada.⁶⁵ This research will focus on Urban Expression Netherlands. Because of the number of Urban Expression communities some selection is necessary, and bringing a local focus is in line with Urban Expression values. Since this research is carried out in the Netherlands, a focus on Urban Expression Netherlands seems appropriate.

In 2007 Matthijs Vlaardingenbroek, a church planter in The Hague, and Oeds Blok, a Baptist minister in Amersfoort, visited several Urban Expression teams in East London. They were inspired by the people and the practices of these communities, and by the values they worked from. In 2008 Urban Expression Netherlands was launched with teams in The Hague (team In de praktijk) and Rotterdam (team Thugz Church). In 2009 an Urban Expression team started in Amersfoort, Kruiskamp.⁶⁶ In 2012 Oeds Blok began to work as a coordinator and coach for new Urban Expression teams. At present (2017) there are church planting teams in Amersfoort, Arnhem, Enschede, Rotterdam, Zaanstad, Amsterdam. Villa Klarendal, Arnhem and In de praktijk, Den Haag became 'church teams', which means they are no longer 'plants', but full churches, with a senior role for the church planting teams.⁶⁷ The connection between Urban Ex-

⁶⁵ www.urbanexpression.co.uk/about-us/urban-expression-the-story/ (accessed June 2017).

⁶⁶ My family and I were part of this team, from 2009-2015. See also the Introduction for reflection on this.

⁶⁷ www.urbanexpression.nl, (accessed June 2017); Oeds Blok, 'Creatieve gemeentestichting in aandachtswijken van de stad. Theologie, praktijk en spiritualiteit van Urban Expression' in *Soteria*, 27e jaargang, nr 3 (2010): 16-18; Oeds Blok en Matthijs Vlaardin-

pression Netherlands and Stuart Murray is not only theological, but also relational. Teams from the Netherlands regularly visit teams in Great Britain, to get inspired, share stories and build relationships. Likewise, Stuart Murray regularly visits the Netherlands to speak, teach and coach.⁶⁸

As mentioned before, the practices will be explored by first analyzing texts and documents which are published by the communities themselves, such as commitments, values and prayers, reports and reflective articles. To do so, the Urban Expression Netherlands website is used as an entry into Urban Expression practices, with special focus on the commitments and values. From this we move to addressing the question *how do the practices embody and question Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach?*, engaging the available documents, including data collected by researchers, who examined these communities for their ecclesiological research. These include publications such as academic and popular books, articles, undergraduate and masters researches, and others.⁶⁹

genbroek, *Survivalgids Pionieren. Praktijkverhalen van creatieve gemeentestichting* (Urban Expression, 2016), 6-9; Matthijs Vlaardingenbroek, *Grensverleggend. Hoe de kerk opnieuw missionair kan zijn* (Heerenveen: Medema, 2011), 25-40.

⁶⁸ Oeds Blok (ed.), *Avontuur van geloof. Praktijkverhalen van gemeentestichting met reflectie voor heel de kerk*, Baptistica Reeks (Amsterdam: Unie van Baptistengemeenten, 2016), 8.

⁶⁹ I engage with the Urban Expression Netherlands documents through the website (accessed April 2017) as an entry point. The website provides introduction to the organization and to the different teams. A notable feature is the emphasis on sharing the stories and theological reflection on Urban Expression practices. The homepage offers direct links to two books, a lecture and a report of a celebratory meeting. There is also a specific tab 'publications and speakers'. The organization seems eager to share their reflections with the interested reader. The website offers various documents I will use for my research, such as values and commitments, prayers, newsletters, introduction to the teams, updates, etc. The website also shows various lectures, articles and links to publications. One of these, *Survivalgids Pionieren* (2016), offers an overview of Urban Expression Netherlands publications, in which Urban Expression practices are described and reflected upon, and BA and MA research materials (125-128). The content and publications I use are as follows: Juliet Kilpin and Stuart Murray, *Creatieve gemeentestichting in aandachtswijken van de stad. Het verhaal van Urban Expression* (Den Haag: Urban Expression, 2008); Urban Expression (ed.), *Onze waarden bidden. Dagelijkse liturgie Urban Expression* (Den Haag: Urban Expression, 2009); Blok and Vlaardingenbroek, *Survivalgids pionieren* (2016); Margriet Reinders, *Heilig vuur. Een pioniersreis voor beginners* (Amersfoort: VOF, 2016); Blok, 'Creatieve gemeentestichting in de stad' (2010); Rick Janse, 'Villa Klarendal: Van brug naar de kerk tot gemeentestichting,' *Soteria*, 27^{ste} jaargang, nr 3 (2010): 29-34; Daniël Drost, 'Samen een weg,' Oeds Blok (ed.), *Avontuur van geloof* (2016); Gerrit Noort, Stefan Paas, Henk de Roest and Sake Stoppels (eds.), *Als een kerk opnieuw begint. Handboek voor missionaire gemeenschapsvorming* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2008), 100-101, 124-135; René Erwich, *Veelkleurig ver-*

The website www.urbanexpression.nl offers an entry into Urban Expression's culture, which is inviting and motivational, as well as encouraging engagement with the vision of Urban Expression. This vision is to help people who live in, or want to move to deprived neighborhoods, become involved in planting churches in those very neighborhoods.⁷⁰ It also issues an invitation to share the dream of Urban Expression Netherlands, which is that there will be church plants in all of the designated 'Vogelaarwijken'.⁷¹ The site offers various ways to be involved: by introducing the various teams, by sharing the commitments and values, by engaging the stories and theological reflections, and by offering several ways to become practically involved.⁷² A first glance at the website shows some of the values: to follow God's mission in under-churched areas, to be creative and daring, to be committed, to be connected through relationship, and the enthusiasm to share stories and reflect upon them.⁷³

Of great importance to Urban Expression are their values and commitments. They are clearly visible in the website, and in that sense presented as a key element of the movement to anybody who might be inter-

langen. Wegen van missionair gemeente-zijn (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2008), 99-107; Vlaardingenbroek, *Grensverleggend* (2011); Daniel de Wolf, *Jezus in de Millinx. Woorden en daden in een Rotterdamse achterstandswijk* (Kampen: Kok, 2006); Daniel de Wolf, *De ontdekking van het koninkrijk. Verslag van een persoonlijke zoektocht* (Vaassen: Telos, 2009).

BA and MA research: Wouter Bont and Edward Idema, 'Zelfstandig en afhankelijk. Het overdragen van het leiderschap van een gemeente in een aandachtswijk' (CHE, 2010); DJ Riphagen, 'Urban Expression – een evaluerend onderzoek naar haar theologische uitgangspunten' (TUK, 2011); Pauline Bremer, 'Waardevast wonen. Onderzoek naar wonen in een aandachtswijk vanuit de waarden van Urban Expression' (Hogeschool Windesheim, 2012); Jaap den Hartogh, 'Wie zijn wij? Een kwalitatief onderzoek naar de rol van gemeentestichtende teams op de identiteitsformatie van gemeenschappen aangesloten bij Urban Expression Nederland' (ETF 2013); Sibbele Meindertsma, 'Veilig of heilig? Een onderzoek naar de ecclesiologie van Urban Expression in het licht van de gemeentevisie van Jannes Reiling' (Bapt Sem 2014); Juliette Pol, 'Come walk with us, the journey is long. Exploration of the embodiment of values in Urban Expression churches' (CHE 2015).

⁷⁰ See urbanexpression.nl/home, urbanexpression.nl/raak-betrokken; urbanexpression.nl/investeer-mee-in-onze-droom (accessed June 2017).

⁷¹ In 2007, Dutch minister Ella Vogelaar designated forty neighborhoods in the Netherlands that needed special attention, because of social, physical and economic problems. These neighborhoods are referred to as 'Vogelaarwijken', or 'special needs neighborhoods.'

⁷² urbanexpression.nl/teams; urbanexpression.nl/warden; urbanexpression.nl/raak-betrokken (accessed June 2017).

⁷³ urbanexpression.nl/home (accessed June 2017).

ested in Urban Expression.⁷⁴ For Urban Expression teams, the values and commitments are the source and framework from which to operate. Team leaders and members commit to them, the values and commitments are regularly reflected upon and a liturgy is created to pray the values. In stories, lectures and articles church planters and team members often refer to the values.⁷⁵ They are, in other words, central to the practices of Urban Expression communities. These commitments and values are differentiated into seven commitments and three times seven values that relate to the areas of humility, relationships and creativity.

What these values and commitments show is the intention to embrace an 'exile' type of living as expressed in Jeremiah 29 and explained by Murray, by physically being placed in neighborhoods that are deemed to be marginalized, under-churched or 'in need'. Although there are still 'Christian' neighborhoods where you can escape diaspora (for example the suburbs, where many middle-class Christians live, or the so called 'Bible belt'), Urban Expression values the embrace of diaspora by staying in or moving to these under-churched areas, especially the 'Vogelaarwijken'. This is visible in the commitment to live in diaspora, 'following God on the margins and in the gaps,'⁷⁶ the value to work together for the greater

⁷⁴ urbanexpression.nl/waarden (accessed June 2017).

⁷⁵ Blok, *Survivalgids pionieren*, is for example written around the values and commitments. See also Vlaardingenbroek, *Grensverleggend*, 28; Blok, 'Creatieve gemeentestichting in de stad', 16; Blok, *Survivalgids Pionieren*, 6.

⁷⁶ See *Commitment* (1) We are committed to following God on the margins and in the gaps, expecting to discover God at work among powerless people and in places of weakness, and (3) We are committed to seeking God's kingdom in the inner city, both by planting churches and by working in partnership with others in mission; *Value Relationship* (4) We focus on under-churched areas and neglected people, trying to find ways of communicating Jesus appropriately to those most frequently marginalised, condemned and abused by society, and (5) We challenge the trend of some Christians moving out of the cities and encourage Christians to relocate to the inner cities; *Value Creativity* (6) We are excited that God can be discovered in the heart of the city and commit ourselves to explore various forms of prayer and worship that are appropriate here.

good of the city,⁷⁷ and a commitment to the local community.⁷⁸ How this reflects and embodies the diaspora ecclesiology set out by Yoder is the subject of the following section.

5.2.2.1 *How do the practices embody Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach?*

In his courses on theology of mission, taught at AMBS between 1964 and 1983, later published as *Theology of Mission* (2014), Yoder developed the concept of voluntary diaspora, diaspora on purpose,⁷⁹ or migration evangelism.⁸⁰ For Yoder missiology is ecclesiology, because he was convinced that mission is a ministry of the church, not of missionary agencies. Reflecting on the New Testament and the history of mission, in particular of the Anabaptists, Yoder describes what this migration evangelism might look like:⁸¹

- It is important to work with a team/ community, because only a community can embody the gospel.⁸² As Yoder states: 'Go as a congregation. Let that be the base, so there is never a time of proclamation or witness before the community is present.'⁸³
- The team/ community is able to support itself financially.⁸⁴

77 See *Commitment* (4) We are committed to a vision of justice, peace and human flourishing for the city and all its inhabitants; *Value Humility* (3) We respect others working alongside us in the inner city and are grateful for the foundations laid by the many who have gone before us, and (7) We know we are not indispensable and what we attempt to do is part of a much bigger picture, so will try to keep ourselves in perspective.

78 See *Commitment* (5) rooted in local culture; *Value Relationship* (1) We believe that, in Jesus, God is revealed locally, and that we should be committed to our local community or relational network and active members of it; *Value Creativity* (5) We believe in discouraging dependency and developing indigenous leadership within maturing churches that will have the capacity to sustain and reproduce themselves.

79 TM, 113.

80 Yoder described this most extensively in the pamphlet *As You Go: The Old Mission in a New Day* (1961), also published in TM, 399-421.

81 Yoder did not only refer to migration in the sense of moving to other countries, but also in the sense of moving into different neighborhoods within your own country (TM, 419).

82 Yoder argues against mission agencies who send a missionary: a single person cannot embody the good news, because this is embodied communally, in the people of God, the church.

83 TM, 113.

84 For this Yoder reflects on the New Testament practice, which is also discernable through history. On supported ministers he notes, 'They would be served by supported

- They are there to stay long term, they are open for integration but at the same time embody the Christian witness.⁸⁵
- If they do so, the community can contribute culturally and economically to the surrounding society.⁸⁶

Yoder's perspective on voluntary diaspora is important to answer the question how the practices of Urban Expression embody Yoder's diaspora as mission ecclesiology.

First of all, Urban Expression communities embrace diaspora by moving to, or staying in the so called 'Vogelaarwijken', neighborhoods which are under-churched. The stories of the communities show that in many cases the absence of churches, or Christian communities, is a reason to plant a church in the specific place.⁸⁷

Second, this missionary presence is embodied by 'seeking the welfare of the city'. Several church planters recounted that this was the way the teams started: getting involved in the neighborhood by contributing to whatever needs and projects that were going on.⁸⁸ Not as a means to an end, but as an essential part of what the gospel and the community was all about.⁸⁹

Connected with this idea of welfare is, third, the focus on the holistic character of the gospel. The word *shalom* is often used to describe this. The gospel is not some spiritual truth about spiritual lives, but is about the whole person and their context.⁹⁰ This is visible in the different levels in which good news is offered to persons who engage or are engaged by

religious personnel only if they were able to call and support such persons from their own resources' (TM, 408).

85 Here the size of the community is important. Yoder argues that migration evangelism works with teams, so they can embody the gospel in their practices, 'which makes it more believable,' (TM, 415) 'yet not in sufficient numbers to create a cultural island of their own' (TM, 408).

86 TM, 409-413.

87 Vlaardingebroek, *Grensverleggend*, 25-40; Rick Janse 'Villa Klarendal', 29-34.

88 See for example Erwich, *Veelkleurig verlangen*, 99; Blok, *Avontuur van geloof*, 27-29, 50-56; Rick Janse 'Villa Klarendal', 30.

89 Erwich, *Veelkleurig verlangen*, 103.

90 Blok, 'Creatieve gemeentestichting', 23, and *Avontuur van geloof*, 51. See also BP, vi-xi.

the Urban Expression communities: from help in cleaning or fixing the house, the gift of a bag of groceries, filling in legal/official forms, to becoming part of a community and eating together, hearing bible stories or receiving prayer. Presence in the neighborhood is also embodied in these various ways.⁹¹

Fourth, inspired by the theological concept of *missio Dei*, most teams have a strong sense of being part of God's mission. This is the reason to be a part of an Urban Expression team in the first place, but also a strong value to work from in the neighborhood. In other words, Urban Expression teams are mission focused.⁹²

Fifth, mission is connected with living. Urban Expression teams do not work with revival campaigns, moving in and out of these deprived areas, spreading the message of the gospel with forceful words. Mission is connected with living in these particular neighborhoods and rooting there, embracing the place as home. Urban Expression requires therefor long-term commitment, at least five to seven years.⁹³ Teams try to find ways to be engaged in local communities,⁹⁴ but also to recognize and train indigenous leadership within and for the church that is developing.⁹⁵

Sixth, connected with this is the Urban Expression approach to working in teams. It is not a single missionary that moves to and works in the neighborhood, but a team. Although Urban Expression might have other pragmatic reasons for this, it also reflects Yoder's perspective that it takes a team to embody the gospel in practices, before the proclamation or witness makes sense.⁹⁶

91 See for example Erwich, *Veelkleurig verlangen*, 99; Blok, *Avontuur van geloof*, 27-29, 50-56; Rick Janse 'Villa Klarendal', 30.

92 Urbanexpression.nl/home (accessed June 2017).

93 Urbanexpression.nl/raak-betrokken-als-pionier-en-leider (accessed June 2017).

94 See for example the commitment to be rooted in local communities, and different ways to approach this in Erwich, *Veelkleurig verlangen*, 99; Blok, *Avontuur van geloof*, 27-29, 50-56; Rick Janse 'Villa Klarendal', 30.

95 Den Hartog, 'Wie zijn wij?'

96 TM, 113. See also, TM, 414-415.

Seventh, Urban Expression works with self-supporting teams.⁹⁷ Team members have a job to finance their living and working in the neighborhood.⁹⁸ Sometimes initial funding is raised.⁹⁹ This is in line with Yoder's migration evangelism approach.

Eighth, the teams try to find ways to involve everybody as much as possible in the services, and try to stay away from 'religious specialist' leadership. They do so by finding ways of being multi-voiced communities, that are good news to the neighborhood and really fit with the specific context.¹⁰⁰ These attempts to be multi-voiced communities resemble the practices Yoder describes in *Body Politics* (1992), especially the breaking of the bread, the rule of Paul and the fullness of Christ.¹⁰¹

Ninth, connected with the holistic/ shalom approach of the gospel, Urban Expression communities focus on practices. They do so as they work from values and commitments, but also engage the neighborhood and the lives of the people there with their practices, and vice versa, when they invite people from the neighborhood into the practices of the communities. Just like Yoder's approach in *Body Politics*, Urban Expression approaches church as practices. The church is first of all a social reality. There are however regular conversations about when an Urban Expression church plant has become a church. What is needed for that, what are the conditions, and so on. Although these are ecclesiological conversations about the very nature of the church, it is never questioned that the church (plant) is shaped by practices.¹⁰²

97 www.urbanexpression.nl (accessed June 2017), vision: 5. Urban Expression werkt door zichzelf financierende teams. Wij werven teams en werken met teams, maar we leveren geen financiële ondersteuning voor deze teams. Elk team is verantwoordelijk voor haar eigen ondersteuning (Urban Expression works with self-supporting teams. We recruit teams and work with them, but do not financially support these teams. Every team is responsible for their own support.)

98 See for example Blok, *Survival Gids*, 30-32, 99.

99 See for example Blok, *Survival Gids*, 99, 107-108.

100 See for example Blok, *Avontuur van geloof*, 63,71.

101 BP, 14-27, 61-70, 47-60.

102 Teun van der Leer's MA thesis on the question of ecclesiological minimum (what does it take for church to be church?) is regularly used in discussions about church plant and church. See Teun van der Leer (2006) https://baptisten.nl/images/seminarium/publicaties/team/TL_060701_De%20kerk%20op%20haar%20smalst_MAtesis.pdf (ac-

Finally, Urban Expression embraces the calling aspect of diaspora as calling. Calling to the Urban Expression lifestyle and to the specific neighborhood is a major point in the recruitment of church planters and team members, but also a point to return to in supervision and feedback sessions. This calling is sometimes approached in an adventurous way, for example in a text that circulated when Urban Expression Netherlands was launched:

WANTED

People who feel like going against the grain
 And want to plant churches in special need neighborhoods
 No housing
 No salary
 No expense allowance
 No prospects
 It's probably not going to work out
 Come and join us...¹⁰³

However, the calling part is emphasized above the adventure, both from the point of view of God (*missio Dei*: God is at work in these neighborhoods) and also from the church planter/ team member's point of view (what is the commitment you work from?).¹⁰⁴ On these ten points Urban Expression embodies John Howard Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach.

5.2.2.2 How do the practices question Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach?
 Urban Expression practices do raise some questions in regarding to Yoder's approach.

cessed December 2018). At the moment Urban Expression distinguishes between church planting teams and church teams, who function as senior teams for the church planting teams. See urbanexpression.nl/teams (accessed June 2017).

¹⁰³ Blok, 'Creatieve gemeentestichting,' 26.

¹⁰⁴ Blok, *Survivalgids pionieren*, 22-32, 33-39.

First, Urban Expression is a church planting agency, and although they consider themselves to be part of the body of Christ, they do not consider themselves as a church. They are planting churches, but not from one denominational perspective. The church plant has the freedom to develop as necessary in the particular context. If the church is planted, the church is stimulated to find a denomination or network to join. The church plants are started most of the time because the neighborhood is under-churched and the churches in the area do not feel called to or capable of engaging the neighborhood. Most of the time the initiative is not taken by a local church,¹⁰⁵ but by Urban Expression, local Christians who cannot motivate their church to engage, or by a national denomination. In other words, Urban Expression is planting churches because local churches are lacking or failing. *Is the church lacking or failing by delegating responsibility for these neighborhoods to a church planting agency? Or is the problem solved if we talk about Urban Expression as part of the body of Christ? Is Urban Expression just another ministry of that one body?*

Second, Urban Expression is inspired by Anabaptist ecclesiology. This ecclesiology is determined by a strong distinction between church and world. The church is a community of believing disciples, who follow Jesus as their Lord. This is visible in the commitment and values every church planter or team member subscribes to. In Urban Expression church plants, one of the regularly posed questions is 'who are the church?' Is 'the church' only the (committed) team? Does it include the people who visit the meetings? And if so, when and how?¹⁰⁶ Confronted with the post-Christendom context Murray worked in, he proposed an inclusive way of being church. For this he affirms Paul Hiebert's 'centered-set' model: belonging, and then believing and behaving.¹⁰⁷ Although Murray distances this approach from the open set 'Christendom model', which is very inclusive

105 An exception is the church planting team in Amersfoort, Kruiskamp, which was initiated by the local Baptist church.

106 See for example Blok, *Avontuur van geloof*, 70,71.

107 Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 26-31 working from Paul Hiebert, *Missions and the Renewal of the Church* (Pasadena: Fuller, 1983).

but undisciplined, it also differs from Anabaptist approaches, such as those of Yoder and others. Following the Baptist ecclesiology of Jannes Reiling, Sibbele Meindersma notes the theological tension between a safe and a holy church (*veilig* and *heilig*), as he compares the approach of Reiling approach with that of Urban Expression.¹⁰⁸ Dirk-Jan Riphagen reaches the same conclusions as he compares Urban Expression's ecclesiology with that of (ana)Baptist scholar James McClendon.¹⁰⁹ Stuart Murray and Urban Expression teams approach faith as a way and the church as a family.¹¹⁰ Meindersma, reflecting on this, notes that Murray and Urban Expression hardly mention baptism. For (Ana)baptists, baptism was central as the entry into the body of Christ, the church.¹¹¹ Yoder describes it as one of the five practices that define the church.¹¹² To use the definitions of Meindersma, there is a strong distinction between the safe church of Urban Expression and the holy church of Anabaptist theologians such as Yoder. From Urban Expression's point of view the question would be: *is this Anabaptist approach of being church not something that would only work in a Christendom setting, in which the common paradigm is Christian, the biblical stories are well known and the ethical consequences obvious?*¹¹³ *Does our post-Christendom setting not require something else, namely a centered-set approach?*

Third, the Urban Expression approach to mission, which includes long-term living in deprived neighborhoods, has been very demanding on the missionaries.¹¹⁴ One of the main issues within teams is how can we survive? How do we deal with the pain and problems we are surrounded with every day? How do we raise our children in a neighborhood like this? How do we deal with financial stress (as Urban Expression teams are main-

108 Meindersma, 'Veilig of heilig,' 17-27.

109 DJ Riphagen, 'Urban Expression,' 24-26.

110 Den Hartogh, 'Wie zijn wij?', 136.

111 Meindersma, 'Veilig of heilig,' 23-24.

112 BP, 28-46.

113 See for example Stefan Paas, who reads Anabaptism as a movement that needs Christendom as a counterpart to flourish (Stefan Paas, *Vreemdelingen en Priesters. Christelijke missie in een postchristelijke omgeving* [Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2015], 74-79).

114 Bremer, 'Waardevast wonen', 48; Blok, *Survivalgids pionieren*, 6-7.

ly self-supporting)? For this reason, Urban Expression Netherlands published a book about these issues, called *A Survival Guide for Pioneers*.¹¹⁵ In this book Daniel de Wolf, one of the pioneers of Urban Expression Netherlands, writes:

Sometimes I feel sorry about the way I encouraged people to move to a 'special needs neighborhood'. I still encourage people to move there, but with more caution. I think living in a 'special needs neighborhood' is not for everyone, nor do I think it is a Christian obligation (a summit of Christian discipleship), but I came to see it more as a specific calling.¹¹⁶

This is the reason that Urban Expression recruits people who have a specific calling for these kinds of neighborhoods: pioneering, creative people. Almost like an order, to which the values and commitments contribute. Yoder sees the calling to 'diaspora as mission' as a calling of the church. Differentiated ethics, one for the monks (who are committed) and one for every day church people (who are not), is something Yoder sees as typically Constantinian. He qualifies this as letting the practices *of the church* be executed by *religious specialists*, the monks. The question arising from Urban Expression practices is, however: *can 'diaspora as mission' actually be a practice of the whole church? Or is this too demanding?*

Fourth, Urban Expression church plants are shaped by practices. One of the questions that is regularly debated is how do these practices relate to words? When and how do we use words to witness to what we believe?¹¹⁷ More theologically framed: *what is the relation between presence or diakonia and kerygma?* Or, *what is the place of kerygma in 'seeking the peace of the city'?*

115 Blok, *Survivalgids pionieren* (2016).

116 Blok, *Survivalgids pionieren*, 23, my translation.

117 Blok, *Avontuur van geloof*, 24-26.

5.3 Shane Claiborne and the Simple Way Community

5.3.1 *Shane Claiborne*

‘Shane Claiborne is an activist, a coauthor of *Jesus for President* and *Common Prayer*, and a founder of The Simple Way, a community in inner-city Philadelphia that has helped birth and connect radical faith communities around the world. He is married to Katie Jo, and has a variety of circus skills, including fire-breathing.’ This is the way Claiborne describes himself on the back of the tenth anniversary edition of *The Irresistible Revolution* (2016).¹¹⁸ Claiborne is part of a community, the Simple Way, centered around 3234 Potterstreet in North-Philadelphia. He is also an author, and his publications are reflections on what it means to be a people who follow Jesus, especially in a supposedly Christian culture as the United States. In his books he describes an alternative lifestyle, in confronting nationalism with pledging allegiance to the Kingdom of God,¹¹⁹ the American dream with an economy of love,¹²⁰ and the myth of redemptive violence¹²¹ with a creative nonviolent lifestyle and peace witness.¹²² Claiborne’s work consists mostly of reflection on practices. The practices he reflects on are both from biblical narratives and more recent narratives, such as stories from

118 Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2016).

119 Claiborne *The Irresistible Revolution*, 181-214; Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus for President. Politics for Ordinary Radicals* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 139-224.

120 Claiborne *The Irresistible Revolution*, 81-100; Shane Claiborne, *Economy of Love* (Oakland: Relational Tithing Inc., 2010) is dedicated to this subject.

121 A phrase coined by Walter Wink to describe the conviction that violence of the bad guys can be solved by even more violence, but this time by the good guys. He sees this as the major narrative in American culture. See for example Wink, *The Powers that Be*.

122 Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*; Claiborne *The Irresistible Revolution*; Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo *Red Letter Revolution. What If Jesus Really Meant What He Said?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012); Shane Claiborne *Executing Grace. How the Death Penalty Killed Jesus and Why It’s Killing Us* (New York: Harper One, 2016); Shane Claiborne, Ben Cohen and Friends, *Jesus, Bombs and Ice Cream. Building a More Peaceful World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

the Simple Way community. This reflection is done through the lens of the teaching of Jesus Christ.¹²³

Most of Claiborne's books are written with co-authors. One of the authors he is closely related to is Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. They worked together on *Common Prayer: A liturgy for Ordinary Radicals* (2010), *Becoming the Answer to Our Prayers* (2008)¹²⁴ and several other projects. Both can be considered spokesmen and theologians of the New Monasticism movement,¹²⁵ and their work is strongly connected and intertwined. That is why in this research we will use Wilson-Hartgrove's work to explicate Claiborne's work.

5.3.1.1 *How does the encounter with Judaism shape Claiborne's (missionary) ecclesiology?*

The first question we engage Shane Claiborne's work with, is *how does the encounter with Judaism/Yoder shape his (missionary) ecclesiology?* To address this question it is helpful to split the question and look first at how encounter with Judaism shapes Claiborne's (missionary) ecclesiology. Most of Claiborne's engagement with Judaism consists of engagement with the narratives and practices as they are described in the Hebrew Bible. Claiborne engages them from the perspective of his nonviolent and anarchistic convictions. Therefore, he is critical of the development of royalty, following the prophetic line,¹²⁶ but embraces practices and narratives that are in

123 This is visible throughout his work, but recently expressed in particular through the Red Letter Christians movement, that was initiated by Claiborne. This is a reference to the bible translations that print the words of Jesus in red, and works from the perspective that the red letters should form the basic convictions of Christians. See Shane Claiborne *Red Letter Revolution* (2012) and <https://www.redletterchristians.org/> (accessed June 2017).

124 Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Enuma Okoro *Common Prayer. A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); Shane Claiborne and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove *Becoming the Answer to Our Prayers. Prayer for Ordinary Radicals* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008).

125 For an introduction into the new monasticism movement, see The Rutba House (ed.), *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2005).

126 Shane Claiborne *Jesus for President*, 39-44. Claiborne writes: 'for every king there is a prophet.'

line with his convictions, and he finds ways to put them to practice. One of these practices is for example Jubilee.¹²⁷ Besides reflection on Jubilee in the Bible and, from that, reflection on American society and economics, Claiborne's community tries to find ways to enact it. This leads to Jubilee celebrations and a Jubilee fund, which is used for projects that stimulate redistribution.¹²⁸ In line with Yoder's work, Claiborne reads the Old Testament holy wars as a commission to be nonviolent: the Lord shall fight for you, and you shall keep your peace (Exodus 14:14).¹²⁹ Claiborne uses the Hebrew Bible as a source book for holy mischief: the stories of Moses' midwives, of Rizpah,¹³⁰ of Daniel and his friends, but also those of John the Baptist, Jesus and the early church, are read as stories that show creative forms of civil disobedience.¹³¹

Claiborne considers the situation Christians live in as 'exile', and emphasizes this is not something new, but that exile is a familiar theme in the biblical narrative.¹³² Claiborne states that 'it is from this time of exile that we today can draw some of our greatest lessons.'¹³³ Jeremiah's letter to the captives (Jeremiah 29), following Yoder's reading, is seen by Claiborne as equally a calling for the church in post-Christendom American culture as it was for the people of Israel.¹³⁴ He does not feel the need to read the calling of the church as a metaphor or analogy of Israel's calling, but straightforwardly explains:

They were aliens and strangers as they made themselves at home as they were spread throughout the earth by violent chaos, and yet they made themselves at home with the Creator, who walked with them everywhere. The whole point of their calling as a set apart

127 See Leviticus 25.

128 See for example <http://www.thesimpleway.org/neighborhood-celebrations/>, <http://www.thesimpleway.org/jubilee-fund/> (accessed June 2017).

129 Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 171, working with OR and PJ.

130 Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 45.

131 Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution*, 385-390.

132 Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 236.

133 Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 236.

134 Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 236-237.

people became clearer. They would be sprinkled like salt throughout the earth, blessing its various places of residence with their homes, gardens, children, and peace. They would seek the peace of wherever they landed. This is the point of the last section of the book: the peculiarity of the church is not for its own sake but for the sake of the whole creation, for its cities and neighborhoods in which we find ourselves.¹³⁵

Claiborne reads the letter of Jeremiah as an imperative for the church here and now, as a calling to live an alternative vision for society. In Claiborne's reading the church shares in Israel's history and calling, but is never replacing it. In other words, Claiborne does not have a supersessionist reading of the history of Israel. He reads Jesus' life and teaching not as something completely new, but as a culmination of a story that started with Abraham.¹³⁶

Claiborne uses the work of contemporary Jewish thinkers incidentally. For example, that of Abraham Heschel to clarify his picture of the prophets,¹³⁷ and Martin Buber's *Ich und Du* (1923) to explain how the church can learn to no longer look at people, but really see them.¹³⁸ Claiborne, however, never really engages postbiblical Jewish diaspora experiences as an example or inspiration for the calling and practices of the church.

In conclusion, we see that Claiborne's missionary ecclesiology is enriched by Judaism in that he reads the biblical stories as his own, directly engaging them from his own context. He considers the Old Testament as a sourcebook of holy mischief and the letter of Jeremiah as a calling for the church. He does not, however, really engage with post-biblical (rabbinic) Jewish practices or texts to reflect on his own ecclesiological discourse.

135 Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 237.

136 Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 21.

137 Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 40, where Claiborne works with Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, 5th ed. (Peabody: Prince Press, 1962/ 2003).

138 Claiborne *Irresistible Revolution*, 255.

5.3.1.2 *How does the encounter with Yoder's work shape Shane Claiborne's (missionary) ecclesiology?*

Claiborne is influenced by Yoder's work with respect to two major, related themes: first, the calling of the church to live as peaceful communities in a violent world, and second, a particular way to do so, by 'revolutionary subordination'. One of Claiborne's central convictions is that Christian communities are called to the everyday practice of nonviolence. Throughout his work Claiborne is referring to the work of John Howard Yoder to explicate his perspective. Although Claiborne's handling of Yoder's work shows considerable familiarity with the general course of Yoder's theological thought,¹³⁹ he cites mostly from two particular books, *The Original Revolution* (1971) and *The Politics of Jesus* (1972), to describe the need for a nonviolent witness of the church. At several instances Claiborne names Yoder as one of his 'peace heroes' and recommends his work.¹⁴⁰

Claiborne embraced the practice of 'revolutionary subordination' as a way to be nonviolent while showing that another way is possible. 'Revolutionary subordination' is a term coined by Yoder, but used by Claiborne to reflect on why they— as the Simple Way community — do what they do. In several of his publications Claiborne refers to the theory of revolutionary subordination in the work of Yoder.¹⁴¹ In an appendix to *Jesus for President*, called 'Subordination and Revolution: what about Romans 13?' Claiborne writes:

It would be hard to cite all of the places where John Yoder has influenced these short observations. His remarks in *The Politics of Jesus* (especially the chapter 'Let Every Soul Be Subject') have thoroughly influenced our understanding. Readers would do well to go

¹³⁹ Claiborne is quoting from a variety of Yoder's publications, for example OR, PJ, WWYD, RP, JCSR.

¹⁴⁰ See for example Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 210; Claiborne and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Common Prayer*, 382; Claiborne et. al., *Jesus, Bombs and Ice Cream*, 7,19; *Conspire Magazine*, Vol. 4, no. 3, Summer 2012, 43.

¹⁴¹ Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution*, 206; Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 160-161, 294-295; Claiborne and Campolo, *Red Letter Revolution*, 154; Claiborne *Executing Grace*, 75.

beyond our sketch and read his work and the works from which he draws.¹⁴²

In most occasions when Claiborne is quoting Yoder on revolutionary subordination, Claiborne is describing situations from the life of the Simple Way community or the lives of people and communities he feels connected with, employing Yoder to theologically reflect on what they are doing.¹⁴³ Yoder's theology, in other words, provides Claiborne with the theological vocabulary to explain the practices of the Simple Way community.

On the level of narrative, we see that Claiborne uses Yoder's reading of Jeremiah 29 to describe the calling of the Jewish people (back then) and of the church (right now) to live in diaspora, as a way through which God blesses the world. Claiborne refers to *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003), Yoder's main book on the subject,¹⁴⁴ and just like Yoder, Claiborne uses the fall motive of Constantinianism¹⁴⁵ in a very similar way to Yoder:

The roots of the fall are earlier and deeper than in just one emperor and one edict. The compromise began years earlier in the church's inability to reconcile Jew and Gentile. After several decades, the difficulty of holding these two groups in one body became too great. The church that began largely as Jews, welcoming in the Gentile converts, turned into a mainly Gentile affair. But then the greater political story we have illuminated in this book was lost: the church is that minority group, the alien people, the exodus tribes, unlike "the other nations." After these roots withered, it was not difficult to uproot the tree and plant it squarely in the state. It is difficult to see how those wounds can be healed. The process might begin by acknowledging that the very essence and identity of church are bound up in these ancient, anti-imperial desert tribes. One might

142 Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 340.

143 Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution*, 201-206; Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 173, 294-295; Claiborne and Campolo, *Red Letter Revolution*, 153-154; *Conspire Magazine*, vol. 4, no. 3, summer 2012, 43.

144 Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 236-237, using JCSR.

145 Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 162-167.

argue that the Reformation didn't make a radical enough critique: it didn't go far enough back. What needed treatment were not just the papacy, its hierarchical structures and mutated rituals but also the very assumptions of power in the Constantinian shift and in its split with Judaism.¹⁴⁶

This is the line of reasoning Yoder uses in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003): Constantinianism is not an era but a theological term, which describes the connection between Christian faith and the power of the state. This is caused by a loss of the diaspora vision of the church, which is caused by the loss of the Jewishness of the church.¹⁴⁷

To summarize, we clearly see that Claiborne's missionary ecclesiology is enriched by Yoder's work. Yoder's work gives Claiborne the necessary framework for his theological reflection on two levels. First at the level of practices, as Claiborne is using Yoder's work to explain why the church is called to live as nonviolent communities that embody the notion that another world is possible. This is especially visible in the use of 'revolutionary subordination,' a term coined by Yoder and adopted by Claiborne to describe the acts of civil disobedience with which the Simple Way gets involved. The second level is that of narrative. Claiborne uses Yoder's reading of Jeremiah 29 to describe the calling of the church. He also uses Yoder's perspective on Constantinianism to describe the cause of the current state of the church and the direction for renewal.

5.3.1.3 *How would Claiborne's approach relate to John Howard Yoder's 'diaspora as mission'?*

First of all, Yoder's reading of the story of exile and Jeremiah's letter to the captives, particularly in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003), is a key reference work for Claiborne in understanding the calling and practic-

¹⁴⁶ Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 162n14.

¹⁴⁷ Claiborne does not quote Yoder specifically here, but since he quotes JCSR elsewhere in this work, it is clear that he has read the book and incorporated it into his line of reasoning.

es of the church. Claiborne therefore sees diaspora as mercy, as calling, as good news. Mercy for the church because it helps the church to be church, and good news for the world. For Claiborne, diaspora is a calling in the normative ecclesiological sense of the word: the church is called to live as a diaspora people. Diaspora is not just a phase to which the church must adapt to survive, it is a shape she is called to.

A difference with Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' is the place of Judaism in Claiborne's approach. Both biblical and rabbinic Judaism play a major part in Yoder's discourse. This is not so much the case for Claiborne. He does relate extensively to biblical Judaism, its history, practices and narratives, but Claiborne does not reflect on whether rabbinic Judaism is called to diaspora and how this relates to the calling of the church. Claiborne thinks the loss of Judaism was the beginning of the heresy of Constantinianism, but he does not reflect on how reconnection with Judaism might be a means for renewal of the church.¹⁴⁸

In terms of semantics, Claiborne does not use the word diaspora very often, but uses the term 'relocation to abandoned places of empire.' This term shows both intentionality and locality. Intentionality because the church is called to be there; locality as it shows how the church should interpret diaspora: diaspora means being at the margins. That is where the church is called to live, work and pray. This conviction became the first mark of the New Monasticism movement: 'Relocation to Abandoned Places of Empire.'¹⁴⁹

In comparison to Yoder's work, we see that within the New Monasticism movement diaspora theology is developed further, and becomes at some points more articulated than Yoder's initial discourse. This development can be seen in a more detailed connection of the calling to diaspora to the grand biblical narrative. Some examples are discussed below.

148 Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 162.

149 <http://www.thesimpleway.org/12-marks> (accessed January 2018); The Rutba House (ed.), *School(s) for Conversion*.

First, the idea that God lives in the abandoned places. This is why ‘relocation’ is an important word. Because God lives in the abandoned places, the church has to move there. As Wilson-Hartgrove writes:

When we flee to the abandoned places, we learn that God is there, with people we thought unimportant. But more, we learn who we are – a people dependent on God, in exile from our true home.¹⁵⁰

The New Monasticism movement learned that relocation is a hermeneutical category, because ‘where we locate ourselves does not only change our perspective. It can also change the thing we see and our capacity to reimagine it.’¹⁵¹ This is a development from ‘if we go into exile, we know God is there’ to ‘we know God is there, so we have to relocate there, if we want to see and do things his way.’ This demonstrates an intentional approach and this is why the idea has become one of the marks of New Monasticism.

Second, a connection of diaspora living with Israel’s ‘holy wars.’ At several places Wilson-Hartgrove connects the promise of Exodus 14, ‘The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still,’ with ‘standing’ or ‘stability’, terms used to describe an intentional commitment to ‘an abandoned’ place.¹⁵² Because God is there, the community can be at peace.

Third, a connection of diaspora living with the incarnation. In *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals* (2010) every month of the liturgical year starts with a description of one of the marks of New Monasticism. December, the start of the liturgical year, begins with mark number one: ‘Locating Our Lives in the Abandoned Places of Empire.’ This text describes how Jesus’ birth and life was a life at the abandoned places. ‘With

¹⁵⁰ Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Inhabiting the church* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2007), 53.

¹⁵¹ Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism: What It Has to Say to Today's Church* (Grand Rapids, Brazos Press, 2008), 76.

¹⁵² Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Wisdom of Stability. Rooting Faith in a Mobile Culture* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2010), 136, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Awakening of Hope. Why We Practice a Common Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 102, 103. Wilson-Hartgrove seems to follow a Yoderian line of reasoning. Yoder connects the holy wars (‘you only have to keep still’) to the pacifism of Jesus (if God fights for us, we can be nonviolent, as Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount). See for example OR, 85-104.

his coming we learn that the most dangerous place for Christians to be is in comfort and safety, detached from the suffering of others.¹⁵³ Elsewhere Wilson-Hartgrove writes about incarnation as the confession 'that Jesus took on flesh and moved into the neighborhoods.'¹⁵⁴ The calling to live as a diaspora people is now connected not only to Jeremiah's letter and Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God, but to the very incarnation itself.

In comparison to Yoder's work, we see within the Simple Way and the New Monasticism movement the development of a more pronounced 'theology of place.' Some central thoughts are, first of all, that place is seen as an hermeneutical category. The place you are is essential to the question of whether you can or cannot read or see things clearly.¹⁵⁵ This is not only the case for things outside the community but also internally: place can be a central factor in rediscovering who you are and what you – as a community are – called to.¹⁵⁶

Second, Jeremiah 29 is used as a central text in the development of this theology of place. This is visible in Claiborne's work, and explicated further in Wilson-Hartgrove's work. Claiborne uses Jeremiah 29 to read the peculiarity of the church 'not for its own sake but for the sake of the whole creation, for the cities and neighborhoods in which we find ourselves.'¹⁵⁷ The particular place where the church is present is source for the particular way the church 'practices resurrection.'¹⁵⁸ Wilson-Hartgrove sketches various lines from Jeremiah 29 that relate to this theology of place. He asserts that Jeremiah 29 does not sever Israel's connection to place, but it radically redefines it. 'Place matters, but Israel learns in Bab-

153 Claiborne and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Common Prayer*, 48.

154 Wilson-Hartgrove, *Awakening*, 101.

155 Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism*, 76-77.

156 Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism*, 77.

157 Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 237.

158 A term frequently used by Claiborne to describe a way of life that renews the community and the neighborhood that community is placed in. In *Jesus for President* he uses the term to describe the practice of 'making ugly things beautiful' for example in teaching inner-city kids the beauty of nature and gardening. Claiborne quotes a conversation: 'Oh yes; that, my dear, is a tomato. They aren't made in factories. They are God's miracles.' (Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 249-250.)

ylon that God can hallow any ground.’ According to Wilson-Hartgrove, place is central in our understanding of who the church is, as a people of God. The church is not used to being a placed people, but she should, because commitment to a place roots the church in a local community. ‘A placeless culture threatens to hold us captive in the cyberspace of endless desire.’ Wilson-Hartgrove goes on to argue that Jeremiah 29 shows the church a faithful practice in an ever-changing world. Commitment to a certain place according to Jeremiah 29, which Wilson-Hartgrove calls ‘stability,’ is a subversive practice. ‘Rather than admit defeat, daydream of lost stability, or rise up in rebellion, Jeremiah exhorts God’s people to embrace a practice of revolutionary stability in the place where they are.’¹⁵⁹ Wilson-Hartgrove also reads Jeremiah 29,4-7 in light of Jeremiah 29,11¹⁶⁰ and sees exile as a means that God uses to remind his people of who he had called them to be.¹⁶¹ Thus, exile was God’s mercy. ‘Because they had been relocated, a new future was possible.’¹⁶² This strange combination of exile and call to stability, then, is what God uses ‘so that his way of living might take root.’¹⁶³ Jeremiah 29 is read as a letter that shows how God uses stability in exile to let his people rediscover their calling, help them root and live a peaceful life, which blesses the place where they live. Just like Claiborne, Wilson-Hartgrove reads the church within this narrative and sees in Jeremiah 29 a message for the church right here and now.

Third, Wilson-Hartgrove specifies a theology of place as a theology working from the particular perspective of Israel. Working with Michael Wyschogrod’s *The Body of Faith* (1983),¹⁶⁴ Wilson-Hartgrove explains how God works from the particularity of Israel to the blessing of the world.¹⁶⁵

159 Wilson-Hartgrove, *Stability*, 137.

160 Jeremiah 29,11 ‘For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope’ (NKJV).

161 Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism*, 79.

162 Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism*, 80.

163 Wilson-Hartgrove, *Stability*, 137-139; Wilson-Hartgrove, *Awakening*, 94; Wilson-Hartgrove, *Inhabiting*, 110.

164 Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith. God in the People of Israel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).

165 Wilson-Hartgrove *Awakening*, 91-98.

'In other words: We are not a franchise with billions served. We are a body rooted in Israel, called to hallow every place.'¹⁶⁶ This particular theology of place also functions as an antidote against heresies, according to Wilson-Hartgrove, as 'many of the early heresies of the church – Gnosticism, Docetism, Arianism – were attempts to make Jesus a little more spiritual and a little less bound up in the messiness of matter and the particularity of Israel.'¹⁶⁷

We see, in short, two developments within Claiborne's and Wilson-Hartgrove's work beyond Yoder's diaspora as mission approach. First is a stronger connection of the calling to diaspora with the biblical narrative and second, working from Jeremiah 29, a more developed theology of place.

5.3.2 Practices: The Simple Way community

The question we engage the practices with is *how do the practices embody and/or question Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach?* Shane Claiborne is part of the Simple Way community. This community started in 1998 when a group of students bought 3234 Potter Street in North-Philadelphia. The group had met each other earlier in a common cause involving a couple of homeless families who had found shelter in an abandoned church building, but were in risk of being thrown out.¹⁶⁸ 3234 Potter Street used to be an old shoe repair store, located in a deprived neighborhood. This became the students' home and the beginning of the Simple Way. Inspired by the early church as described in Acts, they formed an intentional community. Soon they grew into other abandoned houses on the block. The Simple Way turned from a house into a little village, 'committed to building a neighborhood we are proud of.'¹⁶⁹ This practice, their stories and their reflection inspired like-minded people all over the world to get involved in

166 Wilson-Hartgrove *Awakening*, 94.

167 Wilson-Hartgrove *Awakening*, 95.

168 Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution*, 51-61.

169 <http://www.thesimpleway.org/about/> (accessed June 2017).

similar initiatives. The movement that emerged framed itself as ‘New Monasticism’. Communities and authors connected with New Monasticism formulated twelve marks, and produced much inspirational and reflective literature.¹⁷⁰

The Simple Way’s practices will be explored by analyzing texts and documents which are published by the community themselves, such as stories, newsletters, prayer requests, magazines and books,¹⁷¹ and other available documents, including data collected by researchers, who have engaged these communities for their ecclesiological research.¹⁷²

5.3.2.1 How do the practices embody Yoder’s ‘diaspora as mission’ approach?

In their everyday practice the Simple Way embodies Yoder’s diaspora as mission approach in several ways.

First is their embrace of the concept of voluntary diaspora. Yoder called this migration evangelism. The Simple Way, as part of the New Monastic movement, calls this relocation to abandoned places. In *The Irresistible Revolution* (2006) Claiborne describes how this concept was planted in his mind by Mother Theresa, who used to say ‘Calcutta’s are everywhere

170 See for example The Rutba House (ed.), *School(s) of Conversion*.

171 I access the Simple Way documents through the website, the Simple Way newsletters (June 2017 - June 2018), Shane Claiborne’s publications and other relevant publications on the Simple Way’s community life, such as *Conspire Magazine* (published by the Simple Way), The Simple Way’s Facebook, Twitter feed and website, Shane Claiborne’s Facebook, and films, interviews and lectures on Youtube. The Simple Way’s website (<http://www.thesimpleway.org/> (accessed June 2017) introduces the community (staff and community core), tells the story of the community, describes the various practices (such as food distribution, emergency services, neighborhood celebrations, a Simple Way scholarship fund, a Jubilee fund and the book store), links to the publications of Shane Claiborne and others and offers ways to get involved. The tab ‘who we are’ tells the history of the Simple Way, provides a statement of faith and a link to the 12 marks of New Monasticism. The list of publications I used, contain the following titles: Claiborne, *Executing Grace* (2016); Claiborne and Campolo, *Red Letter Revolution* (2012); Claiborne and Cohen, *Jesus, Bombs and Ice Cream* (2012); Claiborne and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Common Prayer* (2010); Claiborne, *Economy of Love* (2010); Shane Claiborne and John M. Perkins, *Follow Me To Freedom. Leading and Following as an Ordinary Radical* (Ventura: Gospel Light, 2009); Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President* (2008); Claiborne and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Becoming the Answer* (2008); Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution* (2006, reprinted 2016); The Rutba House (ed.), *School(s) of Conversion* (2005).

172 As quoted throughout this paragraph.

if only we have eyes to see. Find your Calcutta.¹⁷³ Within the New Monasticism movement this developed into a conviction, formulated as their first mark.¹⁷⁴

Second, in Yoder's diaspora as mission approach, the nature and the shape of mission is connected with both the place of exile and the embodied faith of the communities themselves. This is also the case for Claiborne and the Simple Way. They seek the peace of the neighborhood they live in, in various creative ways. They call this 'practicing resurrection,' and this involves various practices that are good news for the neighborhood.¹⁷⁵ Most of these practices are not done on behalf of the neighborhood, but as part of and together with the neighborhood. To mention some activities: the community plants gardens for food and educational purposes,¹⁷⁶ they rebuilt ('resurrected') a burned down housing block,¹⁷⁷ give minor scholarships or equipment to the schoolkids at the start of every schoolyear,¹⁷⁸ throw parties in the streets.¹⁷⁹ As a community The Simple Way have cre-

173 Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution*, 78-80.

174 The Rutba House (ed.), *School(s) of Conversion*, 10-25.

175 See for example, Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution*, 113, 139, 141, 174; *Conspire Magazine*, Vol 2, no. 1, Spring 2010; 'Path and Place,' 48, where as examples of practicing resurrection the rebuilding an Iraqi hospital and creating a lovely park are mentioned.

176 Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution*, 108, 113; *Conspire Magazine*; see also for example post June 1, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/theSimpleWay/>. As mentioned before, in Claiborne and Haw, *Jesus for President*, 249-250, Claiborne quotes a conversation with a kid from the neighborhood: 'Oh yes; that, my dear, is a tomato. They aren't made in factories. They are God's miracles.'

177 Newsletter 21-6-2017: 'Ten years ago on June 20, 2007, a seven-alarm fire broke out on the 3200 block of H Street. Its source was one of Philadelphia's 700 abandoned factories. A hundred families were affected. Dozens of homes were evacuated, and many houses burned to the ground, including the community center here at The Simple Way. Cars exploded before people could move them. But no one was hurt. The neighborhood pulled together. Volunteers in the emergency response shelter came by to share how beautiful it was to see our neighborhood take care of each other... not a single person ended up staying in the shelter. Our neighbors opened their homes up to each other. We are proud to call Kensington home. In the decade since the fire, we have resurrected the entire block that burned down. We were able to stabilize families, build our greenhouse and aquaponics system, and plant fruit trees that are in full bloom right now. Now we call the block Phoenix Park because it rose from the ashes.'

178 Newsletter 25-7-2017, 31-7-2018.

179 See for example, post September 4, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/theSimpleWay/>.

ated rhythms that sustain community living, and these rhythms also have a positive impact in the neighborhood:

At The Simple Way, community rhythms have become an important way we offer God our everyday, ordinary life. They also deepen our maturity, helping us live fully into the space where God has led us. Every week, these rhythms take the form of a community meal with our core (team), an evening prayer gathering, food distribution, Reading Club, and office hours for emergency services. Beyond our weekly practices, our community rhythms include annual celebrations like Mother's Day tea and our Christmas toy store.

In our fast-paced world – where we're quick to text a change of plans – rhythms keep us grounded and connected to our community and to our neighbors. They provide gentle accountability to help us to show up. And this long-term presence develops our integrity and helps to build trust with those in our community.

And the relationships that are built through these rhythms help to share the burden of frenzied lives. Weekly dinners become places to discuss neighborhood and world events. Prayer circles offer space to lift each other up in challenging times. Regular service keeps our feet on the ground and a communal perspective front and center. And celebrations allow us to experience God's pleasure together and enjoy this life we receive as a gift.¹⁸⁰

The Simple Way is also missional in the sense that they hope for people to become Christian and to become part of a church community. As Shane Claiborne writes:

After all, I am not just trying to get someone to sign a doctrinal statement, but to come to know love, grace, and peace in the incarnation of Jesus, and now in the incarnation of the body, Christ's church. So if someone asked me to introduce them to Jesus, I

180 From the newsletter 12-9-2017 'Community Rhythms.'

would say, “come and see. Let me show you Jesus with skin on.”¹⁸¹

The missional presence of the Simple Way shows various levels or ways the community seeks the peace of the city. It does so by (1) ‘practicing resurrection’ in the neighborhood, (2) offering community rhythms that have a positive impact on neighborhood living, (3) by being a community in the neighborhood, (4) by introducing people into church communities.

Third, the Simple Way is part of a network that shares stories, reflects together, prays and supports each other.¹⁸² One way to connect people to the local community is by giving out newsletters and offering the possibility to donate money. By doing so people are invited to participate in building up this particular neighborhood, albeit from a distance.¹⁸³ Another way this connection has been made is through the magazine *Conspire*. They published this so until the Fall of 2014. Reflecting on the years the Simple Way published the magazine Shane Claiborne writes:

In some ways, *Conspire* was a way of going beyond newsletter updates – it has been about connecting the dots, harmonizing our voices, unifying a movement.¹⁸⁴

Rein Brouwer points to the fact that although the Simple Way is a small, local community, ‘by its presence on the internet, Claiborne’s books, and the publicity he generates, it has become a global example of new monasticism.’¹⁸⁵ In various ways, Shane Claiborne and the Simple Way created and became part of a network that grew to be a movement. This reflects Yoder’s reading of the rise of synagogues in response to Jeremiah’s letter to the ex-

181 Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution*, 114-115.

182 One of the ways of supporting each other is their alternative insurance system, called ‘relational tithes.’ See Claiborne, *Economy of Love* (2010).

183 See for example the newsletter 27-11-2018 with the title ‘Will you give to the Simple Way this # GivingTuesday?’ It says: ‘We are deeply grateful for the support you provide year-round to make our work at The Simple Way happen each and every day. Your donations support our Food Choice Pantry, feeding a hundred families every week. Your gifts fund our community celebrations at Easter, Mother’s Day, Christmas, and more, providing opportunities to connect with and serve our neighbors. And your contributions support our staff, making it possible for neighbors to work at The Simple Way and continue to find ways to be present and transformative on our streets. Thank you!’

184 *Conspire Magazine*, Vol. 6, No 2, Fall 2014 ‘Body & Soul,’ 6.

185 Rein Brouwer, ‘The Simple Way’ A practical theology of new monasticism,’ in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek* 28 (2012), 167.

iles, and reflects in that sense how, according to Yoder's ideal, super-local ecclesial relations should function.

The Simple Way, in short, embodies Yoder's diaspora as mission approach by voluntarily embracing diaspora, by seeking the peace of the city through 'resurrection' practices and by its synagogue-like, supra-local organizational structure.

5.3.2.2 *How do the practices question Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach?*

The practices of the Simple Way do raise some questions concerning Yoder's approach.

First, the Simple Way community practices literally what Jeremiah writes in his letter. They build houses and plant gardens. But they do so outside of the church, in and together with the neighborhood. The Simple Way has a direct approach in seeking the peace of the city. The 'resurrection practices' are lived out in the neighborhood, where Yoder proposes a less direct approach, namely through a leavening process. The church is called to be church and the very presence of the church will be good news for the world, according to Yoder. The Simple Way's approach of practicing resurrection and direct involvement in the neighborhood raises the question as to *whether Yoder's approach is sufficient or whether a more explicit theology and practice of Christian presence in society (besides the church) is necessary?* Or, in other words, *should Yoder's concept of diaspora as mission be more thoroughly connected to a theology of presence and space, to avoid a docetic idea of mission?*¹⁸⁶

Second, the Simple Way community in particular and the new monasticism movement in general choose 'the abandoned places of empire' to build and plant. These places are deprived neighborhoods. For centers of power the Simple Way uses the vocabulary of 'empire.' Empire is not

186 Docetism is a term that refers to the believe that Jesus was not really human and did not really suffer. This follows from a gnostic perspective that the material world is lower than the spiritual world. An ecclesiology that avoids engaging the concrete space and context of a church community, i.e. the neighborhood, can in that sense be accused of docetic tendencies. If the focus of the church on the spiritual is at the cost of the material context.

connected with the words to build and plant, but with the word challenge. 'Challenging the empire' is a regularly used formulation to describe how the community protests against globalization, market economy, and instigated fear of terrorism and violence.¹⁸⁷ Claiborne's *Irresistible Revolution* (2006) is full of stories of how they, as a community, try to 'challenge empire.' In 1998, for example, Claiborne and a friend got into the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia. When George W. Bush took the stage to speak, Claiborne and his friend stood up and started loudly quoting from Scripture: 'woe to you who are rich...but blessed are the poor!'¹⁸⁸ Another example is a Jubilee celebration at Wall Street, with bubbles, sidewalk chalk and the redistribution (throwing around) of money.¹⁸⁹

Yoder does not apply 'the Joseph Paradigm' to the church or Christian presence in society. Although Yoder discerns God's providential care in Jewish presence at the imperial courts, he cannot see this in Christian presence at the imperial courts, neither in the early church, nor in the sixteenth century nor the twentieth. Apparently Claiborne and the Simple Way do not either. The government is not a place to work, according to Claiborne's conviction, but a place to protest against. This raises some questions about Yoder's grand narrative: *If the Joseph Paradigm was a faithful way of living according to the command from Jeremiah 29, why is there not a Christian way of faithful presence at the imperial courts? And, are many of the problems that the Simple Way and similar communities encounter in deprived North American neighborhoods not a result of poor government policy? Would not a 'Joseph' at the courts be a much more helpful and constructive approach, or at least an alternative?*

187 Brouwer, 'The Simple Way,' 158.

188 Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution*, 294, 297.

189 Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution*, 177-180. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ETBMhEzYKU> (accessed September 2018) for a video of the event. Brouwer, 'The Simple Way,' 161.

Third, for Yoder diaspora as mission describes a way of being church. The Simple Way community does not however consider themselves a church. Claiborne explains:

We have chosen not to start a church but rather join the church in our neighborhood. We saw that what most inner cities need is not more churches but a unified, revitalized church. Rather than do our own worship services, we join congregations in our area. That may mean going to the storefront Pentecostal service or heading to Mass with the Catholics down the street.¹⁹⁰

Claiborne emphasizes that Christians need to be part of a church. The Simple Way community however view themselves to be a para-ecclesial community, or a monastery movement within the larger church. They want to be an example or inspiration for the larger church. Their diaspora, or their ‘relocation to abandoned places’ can play a major role in this process of awareness.

Sometimes we have evangelicals (usually from the suburbs) who pretentiously ask how we “evangelize people.” I usually tell them that we bring folks like them from here to learn the kingdom of God from the poor and then send them out to tell the rich and the powerful there is another way of life being born in the margins.¹⁹¹

For Claiborne and the Simple Way exile and good news are connected in the sense that the church in diaspora can rediscover her calling.¹⁹² In exile the church can also discover that God was already there, at work.¹⁹³ On this Claiborne and the Simple Way consider themselves missionaries to the Church.¹⁹⁴ Out of the above, we may derive the conclusion that the church does apparently not live up to its calling to be at the abandoned places. This raises some questions for Yoder’s ecclesiology: *Is the church lacking or failing by delegating responsibility for these neighborhoods to para-ecclesial*

190 Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution*, 346.

191 Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution*, 115.

192 Wilson-Hartgrove, *Inhabiting*, 52.

193 Wilson-Hartgrove, *Stability*, 138-139.

194 Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution*, 133-136.

communities such as the Simple Way? Can (a voluntary) 'diaspora as mission' actually be the shape of the whole church or is Yoder's ecclesiology simply too idealistic?

Connected to this is, fourthly, the radical character of the approach of Claiborne and the Simple Way. This attracts young, radical people. A highly idealistic group dynamic, however, comes with a price. The price of being driven by guilt (am I radical enough?)¹⁹⁵ or by competition (who is the most radical?),¹⁹⁶ followed by other unhealthy tendencies, such as dropping out or burning out. It is mentioned at several places that the lifestyle is tough. 'It stretches you,' writes someone in the newsletter.¹⁹⁷ Or more directly: 'For me, 2018 marks ten years in Kensington, and I've been reflecting with gratitude. It hasn't been easy, to say the least.'¹⁹⁸

But the topic of how to engage the hardships of this way of community living is not addressed explicitly or structurally in the Simple Way's publications. Only when confronted directly on the issue does Claiborne respond to it.¹⁹⁹ Just like Yoder, Claiborne seems to find it difficult to address the issues of what it takes to sustain community life in the context of violence, or to address power imbalances within the communities. Claiborne's description of community living is therefore at risk of utopian tendencies. Utopian tendencies in community life are in turn at risk of leading to violence towards its members, because the hard questions (*What*

195 See for example D.L. Mayfield, 'Tales of a Claiborne Again Christian. How to Live Like a Radical after the Fires of Conversion Have Dwindled,' *CT*, March 2016, 41-44.

196 See for example the interview with Shane Claiborne with *Plough Quarterly*, 'My wife is more radical than me.' Although Claiborne would deny that radicalness is a competition, the admiring way he describes how his wife is more radical than he is, shows some competitive features. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPz2VBeErcs> (accessed October 2018).

197 Newsletter 8-5-2018.

198 Newsletter 14-8-2018.

199 See for example, the interview that is added in the 10th anniversary edition of *The Irresistible Revolution* (2016), which opens with the question 'how do you sustain yourself and not burn out?' Claiborne then explains how the community keeps going: keep falling in love with Jesus, live in community, rest and play, live an integrated life and surround yourself with beauty. (Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution*, 341-343). See also <https://onbeing.org/programs/shane-claiborne-monastic-revolution/> (accessed January 2018) where the question is also posed, but Claiborne somehow avoids to really engage it.

does the individual in the community need to participate in the communally embodied convictions of the community? What does it take to recover from violence, what does it take to forgive, to reconcile? Is this available? What are the spiritual sources for the individual and for the community?) are not explicitly or systematically addressed. The Simple Way embodies Yoder's diaspora as mission ecclesiology in many ways, but at the same time questions it by revealing the same blind spot: a utopian tendency and a difficulty in systematically addressing the questions that might make community life more sustainable.

Fifth, one of the problems with a voluntary diaspora as mission approach is the issue of power imbalances, which especially comes to the surface in relation to gentrification.²⁰⁰

Although gentrification does not seem to be a problem in the particular neighborhood of the Simple Way, it is an issue in the context of church planting by migration: in particular moving into the inner cities, or other deprived neighborhoods. It is therefore helpful to discuss the topic here. Yoder described a voluntary intentional approach to diaspora as mission, something he called 'migration evangelism.'²⁰¹ In the context of the gentrification of neighborhoods, however, it becomes clear that power dy-

200 For a definition see Berg, Jaap Jan, Tahl Kaminer, Marc Schoonderbeek, and Joost Zonneveld (ed.), *Houses of Transformation. Interventions in European Gentrification* (Rotterdam: Nai 010 Publications, 2009), 8: 'Gentrification, to put it bluntly and simply, involves both the exploitation of the economic value of real estate and the treatment of local residents as objects rather than the subject of upgrading. Even though population movement is a common feature of cities, gentrification is specifically the replacement of a less affluent group by a wealthier social group—a definition which relates gentrification to class. Whether a result of city council policies or real estate pressures, gentrification stands in contrast to earlier attempts to improve deprived neighborhoods by addressing the built environment, the central objective of urban renewal up until the 1970s. More recently, the betterment of deprived neighborhoods has taken a completely different form as the improvement of living conditions is no longer considered the task of the state ('to enlighten the masses'), but rather a side effect of the development and emancipation of the higher and middle classes. The state seems to have acknowledged its inability to influence the welfare of its residents directly and has left that task to the workings of the supposedly objective agency of the market. Gentrification has become a means of solving social malaise, not by providing solutions to unemployment, poverty, or broken homes, but by transferring the problems elsewhere, out of sight, and consequently also geographically marginalizing the urban poor and ensuring their economic location and political irrelevance.'

201 See section 4.2.

namics play a major role within this way of doing mission. D.L. Mayfield has written several articles on the topic.²⁰² She states:

As Cole Brown says, Jeremiah 29:4-7 was written originally to people in exile, to the displaced, not people of power who are moving into a space of their own volition. This seems more suited to be God's message of love and care for those brutalized and uprooted by gentrification, not a theological command to go out and conquer new space.²⁰³

Prominent pastors such as Tim Keller and John Piper inspire young, idealistic people to move into the city to 'seek her peace.'²⁰⁴ But Mayfield describes how neighborhoods become attractive to such church planters only when these neighborhoods are already in the process of becoming more 'hip' and more white. The church planters are in danger, as part of this movement, of not seeking the peace of the city, but of bringing a negative disruption (gentrification) that causes people to be forced out of their houses because they become unaffordable.²⁰⁵ These dynamics reveal some underlying theological problems with 'migration evangelism' in relation to gentrification.

First, there is a lack of a theology of the city as informed by sociological dynamics. Mayfield states that 'these theologies talk a lot about moving in and contributing to the flourishing of a city, but say little on

202 Mayfield is especially concerned with young, highly educated, white, hip church planters, inspired by Tim Keller, John Piper and the like. See D.L. Mayfield 'Church Planting and the Gospel of Gentrification. Are we seeking the "welfare of the city," or just our own?' (July 2017) (accessed December 2018), <https://sojo.net/magazine/july-2017/church-planting-and-gospel-gentrification>; '3 Ways Christians Can Address Gentrification. Tips for congregations wrestling with the mass displacement crisis,' (May 2018) (accessed December 2018), <https://sojo.net/magazine/may-2018/3-ways-christians-can-address-gentrification>; 'How Churches Are Confronting Gentrification. Loving our neighbors means doing something when they're forced out,' (May 2018) (accessed December 2018), <https://sojo.net/magazine/may-2018/how-churches-are-confronting-gentrification>.

203 Mayfield, 'Church Planting.'

204 See for example Tim Keller, *Center Church. Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*

Center Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), and John Piper's website <https://www.desiringgod.org/> (accessed December 2018).

205 Mayfield, 'Church Planting.'

the negative disruption that these moves can make in the existing communities.²⁰⁶ There is a certain blindness to the power dynamics that are involved, and it might result in church planters unwillingly acting like conquering Babylonians instead of exiles who are called to seek the peace of the city.²⁰⁷

Second, Mayfield notices an unspoken assumption that God's work starts in the city the moment the church planters move in.²⁰⁸ This is for example visible in 'the lack of emphasis on the importance of learning from those Christians already at work in the churches in the neighborhood.' There are several ways to read this 'unspoken assumption' theologically, but it shows at least a one-sided view of a theology of the kingdom of God, of what incarnation means,²⁰⁹ or of what it means to be the people of God.²¹⁰ Mayfield urges therefore that attention needs to be paid to the sociological dynamics, the power dynamics at play, and to engaging with what is already there. This requires an attitude of listening and theological reflection. 'Until we see ourselves as the Babylonians, we will continue to conquer and displace the people who are beloved by God.'²¹¹

In terms of Yoder's voluntary diaspora as mission approach, it makes it clear that self-identifying oneself as marginal, or as in diaspora, does not necessarily mean that this is the case in reality. Church planters and evangelists inspired by the commandment 'to seek the peace of the city,' need

206 Mayfield, 'Church Planting.'

207 Mayfield, 'Church Planting.'

208 She refers to an unspoken assumption that comes to the fore in 'books, sermons, and conferences targeting missional minded evangelicals.' Mayfield, 'Church Planting.'

209 Mayfield, 'How Churches': 'Christopher B. James, author of *Church Planting in Post-Christian Soil*, looked at how church plants operate in Seattle. Based off his studies, James says that "many church planters feel the same allure to gentrifying neighborhoods that real estate developers do—they see a place where their investment is likely to yield a good result." He doesn't see the issue being that churches are causing gentrification (although he does liken their impact to that of a hip new coffee shop), but rather that it is primarily a theological problem: Christians not understanding the incarnation, resulting in "a failure to grasp what it looks like to join God in the renewal of all things from a position of ultimate solidarity with your God-given neighbors."

210 In Mayfield, 'How Churches' and Mayfield, '3 Ways' Mayfield describes and proposes how churches could confront gentrification.

211 Mayfield, 'Church Planting.'

to ask the necessary questions: *What is going on geographically? What can we learn from those churches and Christians already at work here, now and in the past? (what is going on historically?)* Connected to this: *How is God already at work in the neighborhood?* And: *Are we behaving as exiles or as Babylonians?*

In short, the Simple Way's practices question Yoder's approach in five respects. The first two concern a more explicit theology of Christian presence within society, both in the abandoned places and in the centers of power. Issues three and four concern the radical character of Yoder's ecclesiology and whether this is not too idealistic, both for the church and the individual within such a radical community. The final issue touched on power balances: how do church planters avoid working from a position of power and avoid bringing harm to the neighborhood's dynamic?

5.4 Mark Kinzer and Zera Avraham

The third theologian and community we turn to are Mark Kinzer and Zera Avraham. This scholar and his community differ from the previous two, in the sense that they do not strive to embody voluntary diaspora as mission practices, as Yoder proposes. They are however inspired by John Howard Yoder's revisionist grand narrative of the parting of the ways. The way Mark Kinzer and Zera Avraham try to work from this narrative in their community practices, especially as a Jewish community, makes them interesting to engage with in respect of the specific question of this research, of whether their community's theology and life can deliver a practical critique to Yoder's ecclesiology.

5.4.1 Mark Kinzer

Mark Kinzer is considered to be one of the leading voices of the messianic Jewish community. He is Rabbi Emeritus of the Congregation Zera Avraham in Ann Harbor, and President Emeritus of the Messianic Jewish Theological Institute. He served the congregation from 1993-2018. Al-

though Kinzer has written several books,²¹² his main publication is *Post-missionary Messianic Judaism* (2005).²¹³ In this book, which is the result of years of thinking, living and reflecting as part of the messianic Jewish movement between ‘church’ and ‘synagogue’, he describes his proposal for a bilateral ecclesiology. The problematic history of church and synagogue is colored on the church’s side by supersessionist theology and its often suppressing and violent cultural consequences. The biblical story, on the other hand, describes according to Kinzer how ‘Christian communal identity is founded on two convictions: (1) the mediation of Yeshua in all of God’s creative, revelatory, reconciling and redemptive activity and (2) the church’s participation through Yeshua in Israel’s covenantal privileges.’²¹⁴ This history and this theology seem hard to reconcile, but that is what Kinzer’s proposal is all about. He calls this approach postmissionary. He summarizes his position as follows:

In summary, the form of messianic Judaism required for an integrated, faithful, non-supersessionist ecclesiology is postmissionary in three senses: (1) it treats Jewish observance as a matter of covenant fidelity rather than missionary expediency; (2) it is at home in the Jewish world, and its inner mission consists of bearing witness to Yeshua’s continued presence among his people; (3) its outer mission consists of linking the church of the nations to Israel and its messianically renewed covenantal relationship with God. The third aspect of its postmissionary character is dependent upon the first two. Messianic Judaism can perform its necessary ecclesiological role only if its messianic Jewish partner is deeply rooted in Jewish soil.²¹⁵

²¹² See for example Mark S. Kinzer, *The Nature of Messianic Judaism. Judaism as Genus, Messianic as Species* (West Hartford: Hashivenu Archives, 2000); Kinzer, *Israel’s Messiah*, Kinzer, *Searching*.

²¹³ Kinzer, *Postmissionary*.

²¹⁴ With regard to terminology, Kinzer prefers to speak of Yeshua the Messiah, to emphasize the fact that Jesus was a first century Jew. He also prefers to talk about *ekklesia* instead of church, because church has a very Gentile association to it. See Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, 21-23.

²¹⁵ Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, 16.

Kinzer calls this a bilateral ecclesiology. This ecclesiology is based upon Kinzer's reading of the New Testament, which sees first of all, a continuing obligation of observance of the law for Jewish Christians,²¹⁶ and second, a continuing validity of God's covenant with the Jewish people.²¹⁷ Kinzer concludes that the *ekklesia* is meant to consist of believers from the Jews and from the Gentiles.²¹⁸ The believers from the Jews are connected with the Jewish people, because of their observance of the law, in other words, because of their covenant fidelity.²¹⁹ They are also connected with believers from the Gentiles and in that, a blessing to the nations. The connections Kinzer makes are expressed in the diagram below.

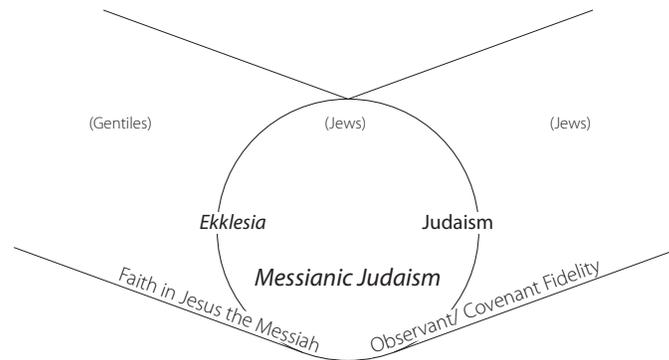


Fig. 3 Diagram of Kinzer's bilateral ecclesiology

This ecclesiology requires an observant messianic Judaism,²²⁰ and this is where the core of the dispute around *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* (2005) lies, not least among messianic Jewish theologians. Kinzer's reading

216 Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, 49-96.

217 Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, 97-150.

218 By 'believers' I mean in particular believing in Jesus Christ as Messiah of Israel and Son of God.

219 Messianic Judaism is connected with the Jewish people in the first place because of a shared peoplehood. Kinzer argues that this peoplehood would be better recognized by the rest of the Jewish people if Messianic Judaism showed an observant lifestyle as an expression of this very peoplehood.

220 Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, 151-180.

challenges, for example, a Lutheran (and evangelical) reading of law and grace.²²¹

5.4.1.1 *How does the encounter with Judaism/ Yoder shape Kinzer's (missionary) ecclesiology?*

The first question we engage Kinzer's work with is 'how does the encounter with Judaism/ Yoder shape Kinzer's (missionary) ecclesiology?' First of all, this is a confusing question to answer, since Mark Kinzer's work and his community are a form of Judaism. Kinzer calls messianic Judaism 'Judaism as genus and messianic as species.'²²² Messianic Jews have approached their Jewishness and their relation to the wider Jewish community in very different ways.²²³ Kinzer's approach is inspired by and in line with Yoder's approach, in particular as formulated in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003). Kinzer works with the main narrative or framework of Yoder's book. He does so in three interconnected ways.

First is Yoder's reading of the New Testament, especially of Paul. Kinzer follows Yoder's reading of Paul as Paul being respectful towards Jewish observance, also in relation to Gentile believers in the Messiah.²²⁴

Second, Kinzer works within Yoder's reading of the parting of the ways, which Yoder calls a schism. By doing so Yoder emphasizes that it is not a separation between religions, but within one faith community. Yoder also emphasizes there was no theological necessity for the schism. Yoder's 'it did not have to be' is of major importance for Kinzer's reading of (church) history.²²⁵

221 See for example Richard Harvey, 'Shaping the Aims and Aspirations of Jewish Believers' in *Mishkan* 48 (2006): 22-27.

222 This is the subtitle of Kinzer's 2000 publication *The Nature of Messianic Judaism*.

223 For an introduction and overview, see Richard Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology. A Constructive Approach. Studies in Messianic Jewish Theology* (Milton Keys: Paternoster, 2000).

224 See for example Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, 72, where Kinzer refers to Yoder as one who reads Paul as respectful towards Jewish observance, or Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, 166, where Kinzer works with Yoder's translation of Ephesians 2:15 in JCSR, 26.

225 Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, 307.

Connected with this is, thirdly, Yoder's reading of rabbinic diaspora Judaism. Kinzer works with Yoder's reading of the Jewish 'no' to the Christian missionary claims. Yoder argues that in the Constantinian context this 'no' was not a 'no' to Jesus the Messiah, but to the Hellenized Christ, and thus, a 'no' to covenant breach and infidelity.²²⁶ Kinzer also affirmatively quotes Yoder's reading of diaspora Judaism as the closest thing to the ethic of Jesus.²²⁷ At various places Kinzer refers to Yoder's 'Judaism as a non-Christian religion' as constructive terminology.²²⁸

In conclusion, Kinzer is very much influenced by Yoder's grand narrative in theologically justifying his own reading of the bible, the schism, rabbinic Judaism, and thus in shaping his perspective on messianic Judaism.

Within Yoder's frame Kinzer develops the notion of the continuing presence of Jesus in his people Israel:

Yeshua maintains his relationship with the Jewish people and continues to live among them – though in a hidden, obscure fashion. At the same time, the Jewish people live on in the risen Yeshua, and through his ongoing Jewish identity as one-man Israel he mediates Israel's presence to the church – albeit in a hidden, obscure fashion. The (apparent) Jewish no to Yeshua has not expelled his Messianic presence from Israel, and the (actual) Christian no to the Jewish people and Judaism has not expelled Israel's presence from the church's inner sanctum.²²⁹

This gives Kinzer the freedom to fully engage the practices and reasoning of (rabbinic) Judaism to shape messianic Jewish practice and reasoning. This is visible in three areas relevant for this research.

First is the focus on practices: being a faithful Jew is living an observant life. Although Kinzer writes much on theology, his main argument

226 See Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, 213, 215, where Kinzer refers to Yoder's argument on the Jewish no to Jesus (see JCSR, 6, 51-61, 76-77).

227 Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, 259.

228 See for example Kinzer, *Israel's Messiah*, 163, and Kinzer, *Searching*, 46.

229 Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, 233.

is a justification of the obligation for (messianic) Jews to live an observant life.²³⁰

Second, because Jesus is present within rabbinic Judaism, he is also present within (1) rabbinic halachic reasoning, (2) rabbinic exegesis and (3) rabbinic 'theological' reasoning.²³¹ The rabbinic literature, such as Mishnah and Talmud, are therefore helpful, even authoritative sources of ethical reasoning. The Messianic Jewish Rabbinic Council (MJRC), of which Kinzer is also a member, is in the process of developing halacha for messianic Judaism. Although the MJRC does so on the basis of the Bible and rabbinic tradition, instead of using the mainstream rabbinic tradition as written in the Mishna, Talmud and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch for example, they feel a necessity to develop a specific messianic halacha. The MJRC takes the rabbinic tradition as authoritative, but states:

Nevertheless, if the teaching and example of Messiah Yeshua and the Apostolic Writings warrant a departure from certain traditional rulings, we are responsible to strike out in new directions.²³²

This means the MJRC has to put the rabbinic tradition to a Christological or Christian test. On their website the halachic process is described as follows:

The rabbis and associate members of the MJRC are convinced that Messianic Judaism, if it is to be taken seriously by both the Jewish and Christian communities in the decades ahead, must seek to develop basic standards of practice which give shape to maturing Messianic Judaism.

Four intersecting criteria help us form judgments as to how life

²³⁰ This is the main argument of Kinzer in, *Postmissionary* and in *Israel's Messiah*, and of many of his articles.

²³¹ It is an ongoing matter of dispute whether rabbinic Judaism does have 'a theology.' See for example Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (Norwood: Norwood Press, 1909), in which Schechter engages this question in his introduction.

²³² <http://ourrabbis.org/main/halakhah-mainmenu-26/introduction-mainmenu-27/halakhic-approach>, (accessed November 2018).

should be lived in our communities:

- The biblical teaching on a given issue
- The teaching and example of Yeshua
- The voice of Jewish tradition as it impacts the matter at hand
- The necessities and realities of modern life

By allowing these four criteria to inform our deep thinking, bathed in prayer, MJRC standards are intended to give life to our members and their children who deserve clear answers to the question: "what exactly is the Messianic Jewish life all about?"²³³

Although slightly Protestant in approach (based on our reading of the Scriptures we discern which tradition can pass the test and which cannot), the MJRC's method shows that rabbinic tradition is accepted as authoritative, and that 'to depart from such traditions, ... we must be able to provide some reason – theological, exegetical, or practical.'²³⁴ The rabbinic tradition is read as normative for observant messianic Jewish life.

Kinzer is inspired by the rabbinic hermeneutical process of 'lernen' and refers on several occasions to this ongoing conversation, as for example made visible in *Miqra'ot Gedolot* (the famous rabbinic commentary). Kinzer is convinced that messianic Judaism has to be part of this ongoing interpretation of Scripture, just as it has to work with Christian exegetical traditions.²³⁵ In his hermeneutical reflections, Kinzer emphasizes the primacy of scripture over tradition. He calls this a 'very rabbinic notion.'²³⁶ It is of course also a very Protestant or evangelical notion.

²³³ http://ourrabbis.org/main/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23:mjrc-mission-statement&catid=1:latest (accessed November, 2018).

²³⁴ <http://ourrabbis.org/main/halakhah-mainmenu-26/introduction-mainmenu-27/halakhic-approach> (accessed November, 2018).

²³⁵ Mark S. Kinzer, 'Scripture and tradition,' in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, ed. Dan Cohn-Sherbok (Baltimore: Lederer, 2001), 29-37; Mark S. Kinzer 'Scripture as Inspired, Canonical Tradition,' lecture delivered at the Third Hashivenu Forum, February 5, 2001, in Pasadena, CA.

²³⁶ Kinzer, 'Scripture and tradition,' see also <http://ourrabbis.org/main/halakhah-mainmenu-26/introduction-mainmenu-27/halakhic-approach> (accessed November, 2018).

On the level of theological reasoning Kinzer also works freely with the rabbinic tradition. To give an example, in a lecture Kinzer emphasizes the enduring sacramental character of Jewish life in the Messiah.²³⁷ Kinzer describes Judaism's five sacramental signs,²³⁸ which embody its sacramental presence in the world. These are (1) holy people: flesh and blood Israel as sacrament, (2) holy time: the Sabbath as sacrament, (3) holy place: the land of promise and the city of the great King, (4) holy word: the Torah, and (5) holy deeds: the *mitzwoth*. Kinzer describes how all five of these realities exist independently of the temple, and their status in Jewish life was unchanged by the temple's destruction. They will find their realization in and through Jesus (eschatologically) and in the meantime there is an enduring efficacy in and through Jesus, states Kinzer. We see in this line of reasoning, not only here but throughout his work, that Kinzer uses Jewish rabbinic sources and theology to describe the gospel for and through the people of Israel.

The third area in which messianic Judaism draws on the wider Jewish tradition is in the practice of mission. Because messianic Judaism sees their major mission as reaching the Jewish people,²³⁹ American evangelical methods are like a jacket that does not fit.²⁴⁰ Therefore they turn to the Jewish tradition, Chabad in particular, for inspiration.

Chabad (also called Lubavitch, after the little town in Russia where the movement originated) is a Chasidic movement well known for their outreach activities. Chabad is focused on bringing Jewish people back to

237 Mark S. Kinzer 'The Enduring Sacramental Character of Jewish Life in the Messiah. A Messianic Jewish Perspective.' Presented at the Roman Catholic–Messianic Jewish Dialogue Group on August 27, 2013.

238 'Sacrament' and 'Judaism' seems to refer to two separated worlds, but Kinzer argues in this lecture that the reality to which the word sacrament points is an integral feature of Jewish life.

239 See for example Kinzer's lecture 'Yeshua Glory of God Glory of Israel. Motives for Postmissionary Messianic Outreach,' (2007) (accessed November, 2018) <http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/888630/12377471/1306283375987/KinzerUM-JC07+48+kbps.mp3?token=XHSstgzKVNExVGt79B%2FcP7uDtM%3D>

240 Stuart Dauermann, 'Postmissionary Messianic Outreach,' (accessed November 2018) http://www.kesherjournal.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=40&Itemid=428

an observant life style, and they do so mainly by investing in education and outreach. Their outreach consists of organizing *mitzvah* campaigns in which non-observant or assimilated Jews are encouraged to start practicing the commandments. For this they used for example, a 'mitzvah tank', which is a motorhome/mobile synagogue. Chabad sends thousands of missionaries all over the world to places where there are Jewish communities (no matter how small) to educate them in Judaism and what it means to live an observant life. These missionaries are called *shluchim*. Chabad is also well known for their campus outreaches and work with teenagers. Chabad has a strong eschatological motivation: it is believed that teaching Jews to live an observant life will hasten the return of the Messiah.²⁴¹

This concept of outreach towards Jewish people is embraced by Kinzer and his community, on both theological and practical levels. Kinzer is convinced that the calling for messianic Judaism is to reach out to fellow Jews and invite them to a faithful, observant life in the Messiah. Stuart Dauermann, a colleague of Kinzer, reflects extensively on mission practices of messianic Judaism.²⁴² He explains messianic Judaism works from the Jewish concept of *kiruv rechokim*, that is the bringing back of secularized Jews to Judaism.²⁴³ Both Kinzer and Dauermann articulate the eschatological aspect of outreach: when the people of Israel respond together, Zion will be restored and the Messiah will return.²⁴⁴ In the *Policy Manual* of Zera Avraham (August 2016) in the section 'Outreach & Initiations' outreach is described as 'à la Chabad.'²⁴⁵ In the manual it is made clear that along with the concept (*kiruv rechokim*) and the motivation (eschatological) for outreach, in their context Messianic Judaism also has the focus and

241 <https://www.chabad.org/> (accessed November, 2018).

242 See for example Dauermann, *Converging Destinies*.

243 Stuart Dauermann, 'Messianic Jewish Outreach,' in *Introduction*, ed. Rudolph and Willitts, 94-96.

244 See for example Kinzer, 'Yeshua Glory' and Dauermann, 'Messianic Jewish,' 92-93.

245 *Policy Manual* of Zera Avraham (August 2016).

method of outreach in common with Chabad: it is aimed at assimilated Jews, for example on campuses.²⁴⁶

In answering the question ‘how does the encounter with Judaism/Yoder shape Kinzer’s (missionary) ecclesiology?’ we conclude that Kinzer is influenced in particular by Yoder’s revisionist grand narrative of the schism, the church and diaspora Judaism. This provides Kinzer the theological and historical justification as a messianic Jew to take rabbinic tradition as authoritative, albeit in a critical mode. This is visible in the emphasis on practices, and in the use of rabbinic tradition as authoritative for matters of halacha, exegesis and theological reasoning. Finally, the messianic Jewish approach toward mission is inspired by the Jewish concept of *kiruv rechokim*, in particular as practiced by Chabad.

5.4.1.2 *How would Kinzer’s approach relate to Yoder’s ‘diaspora as mission?’*

To address this question, it is helpful to take a closer look at three specific subjects: ecclesiology, practices and mission.

Ecclesiology. Yoder demonstrates in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003) that the Anabaptist diaspora approach is in fact Jewish, more specific, Jeremian in character. He therefore talks about the Jewishness of the free church vision. Kinzer works in his bilateral ecclesiology primarily from the perspective of messianic Jewish communities. Although Kinzer does not work from a diaspora as mission approach, because of the Jewishness of his ecclesiology we notice certain interfaces.

For Yoder, Jewishness primarily describes the social shape of the community, namely a diaspora minority position. For Kinzer Jewishness primarily refers to the concrete presence of Jewish people.

Because of the messianic Jewish focus of Kinzer’s ecclesiology, the organization of the community has a synagogue-like structure. This is also recognizable in Yoder’s approach, but again, for different reasons. Kinzer

²⁴⁶ Policy Manuel of Zera Avraham (August 2016), 11.0 ‘Outreach & Initiations’.

does not work with a synagogue-like structure because of a diaspora context, but because of the presence of a majority of Jewish believers.

Finally, in Yoder's grand narrative, the loss of Jewishness of the church is a loss of faithfulness, as the church takes her first steps away from diaspora towards building an empire. Kinzer's bilateral ecclesiology can be considered from that perspective, by seeing the recreation of a Jewish presence within the church as a restoration, revival or return to faithfulness of the church. Albeit as a different form of 'Jewishness' than Yoder had in mind. These ecclesiological issues will be discussed more extensively when we examine the practices of Zera Avraham.

Practices. As mentioned before, Kinzer and the messianic Judaism he is part of do not explicitly work with diaspora as mission practices, but they are inspired by Yoder's revisionist grand narrative: it did not have to be. As for the Jewish community, practices are also central for messianic Judaism, but not from Yoder's diaspora as mission approach.

This difference has first of all to do with the diaspora or exile concept Kinzer works with. Kinzer works with the classic Jewish concept of exile or diaspora, where diaspora means 'not in the land of Israel.'²⁴⁷ Exile means the dispersion of the people from the land of Israel into Babylon and the rest of the world, because of the sins of the people of Israel.²⁴⁸ Kinzer struggles therefore with the question of why Israel lives in exile despite 'Yeshua's atoning martyrdom.' Kinzer turns to Rashi²⁴⁹ to explain how this is possible: 'Yet, as Rashi recognized, exile from the land does not mean inevitable exile from Hashem or from the Torah.'²⁵⁰ Messianic Judaism supports, working from this perspective of exile, the return of Jewish

247 Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, 78, 94, 95, 113, 157, 163, 164, 184, 227.

248 Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, 37, 38, 107, 157, 221, 251.

249 Rashi is the acronym of Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105), a medieval French rabbi and author of one of the most well-known commentaries to the Tanakh.

250 Mark Kinzer, 'Prayer in Yeshua, Prayer in Israel: The Shema in Messianic Perspective,' Lecture presented at the Hashivenu Forum #10, January 2008, 13.

people to the land of Israel as an eschatological act. As Dauermann states:

It [the Post Missionary Messianic Jewish Outreach paradigm] provides an enduring theological framework for vigorously supporting and participating in Aliyah for others and ourselves. We would see Aliyah, and support of our people in the land, as hastening the end through accommodating ourselves to the foreordained shape of the consummation.²⁵¹

Yoder would be very critical of this. Yoder would perceive seeing the state of Israel as a place that foreshadows the consummation as a form of Constantinianism and misplaced eschatology.

Kinzer does not work with the notion of a calling to diaspora because, for Kinzer, diaspora means primarily living outside the land of Israel. Kinzer does not relate it to a desirable ecclesiology in the way Yoder perceives it. Lev Gillet, in his *Communion in the Messiah* (1942), also works with the concept of a calling of Israel in diaspora. He argues that the people of Israel ‘belong to sacred history and achieve a redeeming work in diaspora.’ Kinzer reflects on Gillet’s work and quotes this phrase in *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* (2005), but he does not elaborate on this calling aspect of diaspora. Just as he does not explicitly refer to Yoder’s reading of (a calling to) diaspora. We may conclude that Kinzer simply does not read diaspora in this way.

Second, the difference in approach to do with what the practices of the church are and whom they concern. Kinzer’s approach does emphasize practices and approaches mission as embodied witness, but in a different way to Yoder.²⁵² Yoder describes the practices of the church as good news ‘before the watching world.’²⁵³ These practices embody the good news.

²⁵¹ Dauermann, ‘Postmissionary Messianic Jewish Outreach.’

²⁵² In his review of *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, Douglas Harink is surprised that Kinzer does not elaborate on Yoder’s reading of Paul in *The Politics of Jesus*, as this would contribute to his argument. Yoder’s line of reasoning is however slightly different than Kinzer’s. (http://www.kesherjournal.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19&Itemid, accessed November, 2018)

²⁵³ The subtitle of BP is ‘Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World.’

Kinzer argues that the Jewish part of the church, messianic Judaism, is called to live an observant life. Kinzer's hope is that if messianic Judaism lives an observant life, according to Torah and rabbinic tradition, in Jesus and through the Spirit, this will be recognized by Jews as good news. Although not the main reason for this observant lifestyle (the main reason is covenant fidelity), it is missional.²⁵⁴ Both Kinzer and Yoder argue that it takes the community to embody practices, what the practices entail and for which audience they are intended is where Kinzer and Yoder differ.

Mission. Both Yoder's and Kinzer's approaches are missional in nature, despite Kinzer's 'post-missionary' vocabulary. 'Missionary' in 'post-missionary' refers to the time and activities of the Gentile church which tried to convert the Jewish people to the church, thereby demanding them to give up their covenant fidelity. Kinzer is convinced that the Jewish people should be reached by the Jewish part of the *ekklesia*, and that is what his proposal is all about. It is very missionary in nature. Two differences with Yoder's approach emerge.

First, the reason for mission. Because of the Jewish context Kinzer works from, his missionary motivation does not derive from the calling of Abraham (Genesis 12) or the letter of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29), but is Christologically driven. Genesis 12 and Jeremiah 29 are part of the discourse of Israel's calling towards the nations, whereas Kinzer works from the perspective of the calling of the Jewish *ekklesia* towards the rest of the Jewish people.

The second difference is, as we have seen before, the object of mission. In Yoder's diaspora as mission approach this is the Gentile world. In Kinzer's postmissionary messianic Judaism approach this is the Jewish people. Yoder wants to move away from stalled discussions on the soteriological status of the Jewish people. He does so by choosing an ecclesiological approach, instead of a soteriological one: Jews and Christians share the same calling, the Jeremian mandate to seek the peace of the city. Yoder

²⁵⁴ Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, 16.

avoids the soteriological question, but Kinzer engages the question by stating that the calling of messianic Jewish communities is to preach the gospel to the Jewish people. Although Jesus is present within Judaism in a hidden fashion, the Jewish people are called to draw near to their Messiah.²⁵⁵

5.4.2 Practices: Zera Avraham

The question we engage the practices with, is *how do the practices embody and/or question Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach?* The community connected with Mark Kinzer is Messianic congregation Zera Avraham. During the 1970s and 1980s a group of Messianic Jews in Washtenaw County met periodically to celebrate the Sabbath and the annual Jewish Holidays. In 1993 this group formally established congregation Zera Avraham. In 1996 Congregation Zera Avraham became a member of the UMJC (Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations), the oldest association of congregations in the messianic Jewish movement. Because of the conviction that messianic Judaism should live a Torah observant lifestyle, and the fact that there was hardly any tradition of messianic halakhic reasoning, questions of how to do so came to the surface. In 1997, Mark Kinzer, the rabbi of Congregation Zera Avraham, joined with several other messianic Jewish leaders to form Hashivenu, an organization aimed at helping the Messianic Jewish Movement mature as an authentic expression of Jewish communal life.²⁵⁶ Since 1997 Congregation Zera Avraham has supported the vision of Hashivenu, and sought to embody that vision in its daily life. In 2001, Rabbi Kinzer began working with other members of the Hashivenu group on establishing a common set of halakhic standards for themselves and their congregations. In May of 2006, this group formally established the MJRC (the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council). The MJRC consists of rabbis and associates who promote a life of faithfulness to God's covenant among Jewish followers of Messiah Yeshua by providing realistic and

255 Kinzer, 'Yeshua Glory.'

256 See <http://www.hashivenu.org/> (accessed November, 2018).

practical guidelines for messianic Jewish observance.²⁵⁷ Zera Avraham is a local congregation, but because of Mark Kinzer, also a congregation with a commitment to the wider messianic Jewish community.

Zera Avraham is dedicated to stimulating an observant lifestyle as community. The *halakha* the community follows is in line with reform or conservative practice. This is visible for example in the practice regarding women: the community celebrates *simchat bat brit* and *bat mitsvah*,²⁵⁸ women are ordained as rabbi²⁵⁹ and 'the basic practices in the area of prayer apply to both men and women.'²⁶⁰ In Zera Avraham therefore, women, like the men, pray with kippa and tallit.²⁶¹ It is also visible in the halakhic reasoning of the community. This reasoning is based upon the Torah and Talmud, and for practical application there are references to a wide variety of rabbinic tradition, such as Rambam and *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*.²⁶² Most of the time however there is reference to conservative or reform practice and thinking,²⁶³ and reference to conservative or reform scholars such as Isaac Klein²⁶⁴ and Samuel H. Dresner.²⁶⁵ The explicit attention to context

257 See <http://ourrabbis.org/main/> (accessed November, 2018).

258 *Simchat bat brit* is a welcoming party for Jewish daughters, a female alternative to circumcision, which happens to boys on the eighth day. Bat mitsvah means 'daughter of the commandments' and is the female version of bar mitsvah, the Torah reading ceremony at the age of 12. Both are celebrated in conservative and reform Jewish communities, but scarcely in the orthodox, and not at all in Chasidic communities. (See Policy Manual August 2016, 8.0, and MJRC Standards, 19.)

259 See MJRC Standards, 12.

260 MJRC Standards, 46.

261 See the pictures on <https://www.czaa2.org/> (accessed November, 2018).

262 Rambam is the acronym of Maimonides (1138-1204), one of the most well-known philosophers and Torah scholars of the post-Talmudic period. *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* is the short version of the *Shulchan Aruch* ("Set Table"), the famous Sephardic halakhic commentary.

263 In the MJRC Standards, there is reference for example, to reform practice on the ordination of female rabbis (13), on Jewish status (15-16), on the holidays (36). There is reference to conservative practice for example on the role of the rabbi (11), on the ordination of female rabbis (13), on Jewish status (15), extensively on kashrut (dietary laws) (22), on Shabbat (27), and on holidays (36). Reference to the tradition does not mean that the reform or conservative line is always followed.

264 Isaac Klein is followed at several occasions to explain the mitzvoth for Shabbat, but incidentally also on kashrut. See MJRC Standards, 23, 30-38. See Klein's *A Guide to Religious Jewish Practice* (1979).

265 For the standards of kashrut, follow Dresner's book *Keeping Kosher: a Diet for the Soul* (2000) in several places. See MJRC Standards, 22-25.

as a factor in halakhic reasoning also shows a reform or conservative approach, as opposed to an orthodox approach.²⁶⁶ The community works with ‘basic practices,’ these are the most lenient customs, and with ‘extended practices,’ which are not obligated but optional. These differentiations in basic and extended practice seems to be an arrangement designed to provide the opportunity for the community to gradually become accustomed to halakhic thinking and living.²⁶⁷ Although the halakhic reasoning of Zera Avraham and MJRC is also based on following the example of Jesus,²⁶⁸ the outside Jewish community would – looking at the level of observant lifestyle – view Zera Avraham as a reform or conservative synagogue.

Zera Avraham’s practices are explored by analyzing texts and documents which are published by the community themselves, such as websites, by laws (regulations), policy manuals, published interviews, stories, newsletters, prayer requests, YouTube videos, magazines, books, and other available documents.²⁶⁹

266 http://ourrabbis.org/main/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23:mjrc-mission-statement&catid=1:latest (accessed November, 2018).

267 See MJRC Standards, 36 ‘Nevertheless, it must be recalled that we are a community in the process

of returning to the Torah; our definition of “basic practice” should not function as a communal goal but instead as a starting point for continued growth.’

268 See for example MJRC Standards, II, 6, 7, 12, etc.

269 I engage the practices of Zera Avraham through (1) publications by members of the community. For example, the books of Mark Kinzer, *Postmissionary, Israel’s Messiah, Searching*, and a variety of articles and lectures. (2) I also use publications on messianic Judaism and Kinzer’s ecclesiology, for example the work of Stuart Dauermann, *Converging*, and several articles, Rudolph & Willitts (ed.) *Introduction*, Jennifer M. Rosner, *Healing the Schism. Barth, Rosenzweig, and the New Jewish-Christian Encounter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), articles from messianic Jewish magazines such as *Kesher* and *Mishkan*. (3) From Mark Kinzer I received the following Zera Avraham documents: *By Laws*, January 2015; *CZA Policy Manual* – August 10, 2016; *Siddur Kehillat Zera Avraham* (the Zera Avraham prayer book); *HaZikkaron As Shabbat Meal* (the Zera Avraham holy communion liturgy); *CZA STATEMENT OF FAITH*. (4) The following websites are of use: <https://www.czaa2.org/> (the Zera Avraham website, accessed November 2018), <http://ourrabbis.org> (the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council website, accessed November 2018), <http://www.hashivenu.org/> (the Hashivenu website, accessed November 2018). (5) Various published or recorded interviews.

5.4.2.1 *How do the practices embody Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach?*

First of all, Zera Avraham, being a Jewish community, focuses on practices as the embodiment of good news. In Yoder's approach these practices are seen by the watching world. Zera Avraham's hope is that the practices of their community are seen as good news by the wider Jewish community. Or, in other words, as covenant fidelity. The community does however embody more than rabbinic halakhic life. She worships Jesus as Messiah, and therefore follows his example. This is visible in halakhic reasoning but also in specific Christian commandments. In Zera Avraham they are called *mitzvoth mashiach*, the commandments of the Messiah. Examples are *tevilat meschiach* (baptism) and *zichron hamashiach* (holy communion).²⁷⁰ Obeying or celebrating these messianic commandments is embodying the good news.

Second, Zera Avraham focuses on the communal aspect of the practices for mission. The observant lifestyle is the lifestyle of the whole of the community and this creates a social environment with a distinctive communal character. The first reason behind such a lifestyle is covenant fidelity, but a theology has developed that these faithful communities are missionary by nature. Dauermann argues in his article 'Postmissionary Messianic Jewish Outreach' that messianic mission should distance itself from a 'western market mentality.' He argues that 'the Messianic Jewish remnant is supposed to serve as a sign that God has a continuing purpose for the Jewish people,' that 'the Messianic Jewish remnant is supposed to be a demonstration of that purpose – a sort of 'preview of coming attractions,' and that 'the Messianic Jewish remnant is supposed to be a catalyst assisting greater Israel toward that divine purpose.'²⁷¹ What does this communal approach mean for the practice of messianic Jewish outreach? Dauermann argues among other things, that subsequently postmissionary messianic Jewish outreach will no longer be adversarial and confrontational, but 'we

270 See the Policy Manual August 2016, 15.0.

271 Dauermann, 'Postmissionary Messianic Jewish Outreach.'

ourselves will form communities committed to this kind of Torah-based covenant faithfulness.’ In doing so, ‘we would be returning to a communal concept of outreach rather than an individualistic one. Our communities, living in covenant faithfulness, would be missional magnets.’²⁷² In line with an evangelical paradigm, or a Chabad approach, Zera Avraham is used to the concept of outreach. Dauermann reflects that this outreach should not be individualistic or only verbal, but argues that the very presence of faithful, Torah-observant, messianic communities is good news for the wider Jewish community. This is in line with Yoder’s approach that the presence of faithful communities in diaspora is good news for the world.

This communal aspect of the community and its particular culture is also reflected upon in the MJRC Standards:

This means that the Messianic *ekklesia* consists not only of individual Jews and Gentiles, but also of Jewish and Gentile social environments. For a social environment to be Jewish, it must operate according to patterns and principles that express the Jewish communal experience around the world and through the centuries. Among such patterns is a clear definition of those practices that express the distinctive character of Jewish identity, and which are only appropriately undertaken by those who are Jewish. For a social environment to be Jewish, it must also consist largely of Jewish members who bear responsibility for determining its distinctive communal character²⁷³

To function as a messianic Jewish remnant, it is necessary that the move is made beyond individuals into concepts such as social environment, and to engage the question as to what it takes to embody and maintain a particular social environment. In finding ways to do this Zera Avraham embodies Yoder’s approach of diaspora communities, who as communities, show their distinct social environment as good news to ‘the watching world.’

272 Dauermann, ‘Postmissionary Messianic Jewish Outreach.’

273 MJRC Standards, 17,18.

Third, Zera Avraham is very serious about her missionary calling, even to the level that 'outreach and initiations' is a separate, extensive, section in the Policy Manual. It relates to questions such as how to meet and invite people, and if they come, how to integrate them into community life.²⁷⁴ There is also a fair amount of theological reflection on mission within Zera Avraham and connected communities, in particular by Mark Kinzer and Stuart Dauermann.²⁷⁵ We might conclude that Zera Avraham embodies the mission aspect of Yoder's approach, albeit with a particular focus: the Jewish people, instead of the Gentiles. Zera Avraham works with Yoder's 'Judaism as a non-non-Christian religion' approach, and by doing so avoids both of the extremes Yoder describes. The first is a philo-Judaism that sees no need for mission to the Jews. The second is a supersessionism that sees no particular status for the people of Israel, so they are just one of the nations Christians are called to evangelize.

Fourth, Zera Avraham calls itself a synagogue and is organized as a synagogue. The rabbi is called a spiritual leader, has primarily a teaching authority and is connected to the community. 'A rabbi is defined first and foremost by his or her relationship to our sacred tradition and our community.'²⁷⁶ Yoder describes the synagogue-like structure as originating from the Babylonian exile, in response to the Jeremian mandate. This created lightly organized, locally autonomous communities. Yoder describes the synagogues as analogous to free churches, in his perspective also an expression of the Jeremian mandate. Zera Avraham embodies at various levels the sociological analogies that Yoder draws between free church and synagogue.²⁷⁷ Yoder maintains that both display (1) a trust in God that he is working in history. Zera Avraham, with the wider postmissionary messianic Judaism movement, considers herself as part of God's acting in his-

274 Policy Manual of Zera Avraham (August 2016), 11.0 'Outreach & Initiations.'

275 See for example Kinzer, 'Yeshua Glory,' and Dauermann, *Converging*, 'Postmissionary Messianic Jewish Outreach,' 'Messianic Jewish Outreach.'

276 MJRC Standards, 9.

277 JCSR, 108-111.

tory.²⁷⁸ They are (2) unembarrassed about particularity. Misunderstood by other Jews and other Christians they persist in their calling to embody an observant Jewish part of the *ekklesia*.²⁷⁹ Each (3) 'derive its ongoing social identity, including its capacity to change, from the presence in its midst of a *book*.'²⁸⁰ Zera Avraham is a learning community and her identity is shaped by a book, the Bible, read through the lenses of the early church and rabbinic literature. They are both (4) serious about a distinctive moral commitment. This is the main focus of the community: to embody a Christian halakha, so to speak. Faithful to God's covenant with Israel and Jesus' teaching to the church.

Fifth, to elaborate a point mentioned earlier: Zera Avraham lives at the margins of the Jewish community and at the margins of the church. This is felt within the community, but also theologically reflected upon, by for example, Russ Resnik, executive director of UMJC, who reflects on messianic Jewish ethics as 'the ethics of the margins.'²⁸¹

Sixth, in Yoder's grand narrative the loss of Jewishness of the church was the beginning of Constantinianism, or in other words, the beginning of the fall of the church. Zera Avraham's bilateral ecclesiology seeks to re-embody the Jewish part of the church. This Jewish part is, just like in New Testament times, living a Torah observant life, and in that sense is recognizable as Jewish, within the wider (Gentile) church. By recreating a Jewish presence within the church Zera Avraham embodies the return to faithfulness of the church, to a pre- or post-Constantinian situation, according to Yoder's grand narrative. Although Zera Avraham is a messianic Jewish synagogue, which distances itself in that respect from otherwise or-

278 Jeroen Bol, 'Een bilaterale kerk van christenen uit de joden en uit de heidenen. Interview met Mark Kinzer,' *Soteria*, Themanummer: een nieuw canoniek verhaal, 32^e jaargang, no. 2, (2015): 38-39.

279 This outlook is visible throughout Kinzer's work. Russ Resnik, the executive director of UMJC, addresses the issue explicitly in his article 'Messianic Jewish Ethics,' in *Introduction*, ed. Rudolph and Willitts, 82-89, as he talks about living in the margins of the wider Jewish community.

280 JCSR, 109.

281 Resnik, 'Messianic,' 82-89.

ganized (Gentile) churches, Zera Avraham has found several ways of connecting the community with the wider church, especially at a local level. In an interview Kinzer explains that they do so by sharing communion with Christians from local churches, by offering education on Jesus and Judaism that is accessible for the other local churches, by inviting the local pastors to regularly preach in each-other's churches, and by working together as local churches within the city of Ann Arbor.²⁸²

Two remarks might be made with regard to the Jewish presence of Zera Avraham within the wider church. First, Zera Avraham embodies Jewishness in a different way than Yoder imagined, which I will return to later. Second, a difference with the early church is that from the second century onward the Jewish parts of the church (for example Nazarenes, Ebionites and Elkasaites) were accused of a lack of a high Christology. Mark Kinzer and Zera Avraham explicitly work from a trinitarian, high Christology.²⁸³ The Christological controversies are therefore no longer there, although the controversy on Torah observance is still very much present.

In addressing the question, it has been noted that Congregation Zera Avraham embodies Yoder's approach in their focus on practices, in their communal approach of these practices, in their focus on mission, in their synagogal organization, in their marginal place, and finally in their recreating a Jewish presence within the church.

5.4.2.2 *How do the practices question Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach?*

The concrete and everyday practices of Zera Avraham do raise some significant questions concerning Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach.

First, *the practices of Zera Avraham question Yoder's definition of Jewishness*. In Yoder's definition Judaism should be a Jeremian diaspora kind of Judaism. But here we have a form of Christian Judaism, working from

282 Bol, 'Interview,' 39-40.

283 See for example Mark Kinzer's lecture 'Yeshua Glory.'

Yoder's grand narrative but embracing Zionism and living in the land as an eschatological foretaste. Furthermore, the community of Zera Avraham does not identify her Jewishness with a diaspora lifestyle, but first of all with election and a Torah observant life as a sign of covenant faithfulness.

Second, in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003) Yoder shows a disapproving attitude towards observant messianic Judaism. He writes:

This special vision of the place of Judaism correlates with the personal and social values of the small number of Jewish individuals who have been converted in response to such a message. These individuals tend to prefer to maintain some Jewish identity rather than be swallowed up in ordinary predominantly Gentile western churches. Therefore special mission to the Jews, or 'Hebrew Christian' fellowship are more satisfactory to them. They feel at home in a messianic Jewish fellowship in which modern Gentiles, while not excluded, would hardly be expected, thus bringing into being again 'from the other side' the kind of separation which was the object of Paul's explicit criticism in Galatians 2.²⁸⁴

At one level, Yoder's social description could be said to be very apt in characterising both Kinzer's bilateral ecclesiology and the congregation's ecclesial practice. Yoder sees such a situation arising from a dispensationalist eschatology, and although this is not applicable to Zera Avraham, nevertheless the social shape of the congregation could be said to bring about the separation Paul objected to.

The practices of Zera Avraham do however question Yoder's reading of the situation. Yoder mourns the loss of the Jewishness of the church in the first centuries of its emergence. But how do you prevent it from happening again in this time and place? Yoder does not really address the issue, where Zera Avraham explicitly does: the loss of the Jewishness of the church is only preventable if you secure a messianic Jewish environment. This is not an ideal situation, but a necessary in-between-step. In light of

²⁸⁴ JCSR, 149.

Zera Avraham's practical engagement with the issue, two questions can be asked of Yoder's ecclesiology: *is Yoder too idealistic in striving for the ideal church practice; who is paying the price for such an ideal? And what then is the relationship between a form of Jewishness and the presence of actual Jewish believers within the church?* To the first question, Kinzer and Zera Avraham would appear to reply that it is the Jewish minority in a primarily Gentile church who will pay the price. They will be absorbed, just as in the first centuries, into the Gentile majority.

The second question reveals a difficult tension in Yoder's ecclesiology, where to avoid major supersessionist tendencies, his view that the Jewishness of the church is primarily visible in a diaspora as mission ecclesiology must also somehow have to do with the actual presence of believers from the Jews within the church. This tension appears not to be adequately addressed or engaged and the question shows again the limitation of Yoder's definition of Jewishness.

Following from this, thirdly, Yoder argued from a position of a shared calling of Jews and Christians, but how did Yoder relate to messianic Judaism? *Is there a specific role for messianic Jews in Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' approach?*²⁸⁵

Fourth, Mark Kinzer's bilateral ecclesiology, which has an in-between character, as expressed in the practices of Zera Avraham, *questions the theological adequacy of a normative ecclesiology for every time and place.* For Yoder there is only one possible ecclesiology for every time and place: his Anabaptist Jeremian diaspora as mission approach. All deviations from this ideal are to be seen as a fall, or at least as a lack of faithfulness to the gospel, according to Yoder. Kinzer's ecclesiology, faithfully trying to address the actual problem of a loss of Jewish presence within the church by

285 The question as to a specific role for messianic Jews also raises the further question of whether the Jeremiac paradigm differs from what you might call 'the Acts paradigm'? The Jeremiac paradigm is that Jews are seeking the peace of the Gentile city. The Acts paradigm is that Messianic Jews preach the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth. In doing so, preaching the gospel to Jew and Gentile, but to the Jew first. Is there a difference in paradigm? And if so, how? Or is it not possible to talk about different paradigms?

working with an in-between approach, questions the timeless and context-free idealism of Yoder's approach. An ecclesiology that does not engage the concrete situation of time and place is at risk of docetic tendencies,²⁸⁶ which, in light of Kinzer's more grounded approach, Yoder's is revealed to be.

In conclusion, Zera Avraham's practices question Yoder's diaspora as mission approach on several keypoints. They question Yoder's definition of Jewishness, Yoder's lack of concreteness in restoring the Jewishness of the church, and the lack of a specific place for messianic Judaism within his ecclesiology. Finally, the in-between character of Kinzer's ecclesiology questions Yoder's idealistic approach and indicates a vulnerability to docetic tendencies.

5.5 A Practical Critique of John Howard Yoder's Diaspora as Mission

5.5.1 *The benefits of a diaspora ecclesiology*

The three communities we engaged in this chapter are all – to a certain extent – influenced by Yoder's diaspora as mission ecclesiology.

Inspired mainly by Anabaptism and to a lesser part by Yoder's work, Stuart Murray and Urban Expression have developed an ecclesiological practice that at many levels can be seen as an embodiment of diaspora as mission. Living, praying and working in particular neighborhoods, the Urban Expression teams from the 1990s to the present have developed a practice and theology that are similar to Yoder's ecclesiology from the 1970s–1990s. Both the embodiment of Yoder's approach and the critical

286 Docetism is a term that refers to the believe that Jesus was not really human and did not really suffer. This follows from a gnostic perspective that the material world is lower than the spiritual world. Henk Bakker, in his Hughey Lectures, applies the term docetic to churches who do not recognize their Jewish roots. These churches have the tendency to move away from history into the spiritual realm. Bakker calls this ecclesiological Docetism. Henk Bakker 'Tangible Church. Challenging the Apparitions of Docetism (I): The Ghost of Christmas Past'; 'Tangible Church. Challenging the Apparitions of Docetism (II): The Ghost of Christmas Present'; 'Tangible Church. Challenging the Apparitions of Docetism (III): The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come', in *Baptistic Theologies* 5/2 (2013) 1-17, 18-35, 36-58.

questions these practices generate, affirm the necessity of this 'diaspora as mission' ecclesiology in this time and age.

The practices of the Simple Way are inspired by Yoder's nonviolent ecclesiology. Yoder's theology provides them with words and inspiration for their everyday community life. The way Yoder's ecclesiology is embodied in the community life of the Simple Way shows that diaspora as mission is a helpful approach for committed communities who want to take discipleship seriously within the twenty-first-century North American context.

The ecclesiology of Zera Avraham and its practical implications are in debt to Yoder's grand 'it did not have to be' narrative, especially because of his reading of the Bible, history and rabbinic Judaism in diaspora. Yoder's theology has proved to be helpful for the young postmissionary Messianic Judaism Movement in the United States.

5.5.2 A practical critique

All three of the engaged communities embody certain parts of Yoder's diaspora as mission ecclesiology. However, the practices of these communities also raise some structural questions about Yoder's ecclesiology and offer a valuable practical critique. They do so primarily in three areas.

First is the idealistic character of Yoder's perspective. We see at several levels that either the ideal is not reachable, or that the attempts to do so lead to constant pressure, feelings of failure, and so forth. At the level of ecclesiology, for example, Yoder describes diaspora as mission as a calling of the church. In reality the researched diaspora as mission communities are para-church organizations. Mostly because the existing churches have not found ways to engage the neighborhoods and embrace the diaspora aspect of church life. Is the church lacking or failing? Or is Yoder's ecclesiology too idealistic, and as such, suffering from docetic tendencies?

The same goes for the level of the individual in the community. Being part of Urban Expression or the Simple Way is demanding for the

members. They are often young, idealistic people, who are in risk of burning out. Yoder's diaspora as mission ecclesiology failed to address questions such as the following: What does the individual in the community need to participate in the communally embodied convictions of the community? What does it take to recover from violence, what does it take to forgive, to reconcile? What about failures, conflicts and violence within the community? Is there vocabulary to address this? Which are the spiritual sources for the individual and for the community?

This idealistic nature of Yoder's ecclesiology is again revealed in the engagement with a messianic Jewish community that works with Yoder's grand narrative. There is no space for intermediary phases in ecclesiology. Only the ideal is good enough. In this context it was also observed that any reaching for this ideal would probably be at the cost of the Jewish minority within the church, just as in the first centuries of the church.

In sum, the practices reveal the idealistic character of Yoder's ecclesiology. On the one hand ideals are very inspiring, but on the other hand, because of their inaccessibility they are in danger of violent or exhausting tendencies.

Second, with respect to church and mission the practices raised the question of whether Yoder's Anabaptist approach of being church would only work in a Christendom setting, in which the common paradigm is Christian, the biblical stories are well known and the ethical consequences obvious.

In regard to mission: will a post-Christendom society understand practices just by seeing them? To what sense can they be good news, if people do not understand or even know the narrative they come from? To rephrase it more theologically: what is the relation between presence or *diakonia* and *kerygma*? Or, what is the place of *kerygma* in 'seeking the peace of the city'?

The engaged practices also showed that a primary focus on a community of committed believers makes more sense within a Christian soci-

ety: people know the content of Christian faith, so the question is to what level they want to commit themselves. If the content of Christian faith is unknown, there needs to be a space where people can first engage this content. Somewhere between 'church' and 'society.' Does our post-Christendom setting not require a different ecclesiology than the Anabaptist 'believer's church,' namely a centered-set approach?

The third area is a theology of Christian presence within society. The practices raised the question as to whether Yoder's approach is sufficient (the church – world dichotomy) or whether a more explicit theology and practice of Christian presence in society (besides the church) is necessary. Or, in other words, should Yoder's concept of diaspora as mission not be more thoroughly connected to a theology of presence and space, to avoid a docetic idea of mission? If this connection could be made, this would create space for a more ecclesiological reflection on questions such as, 'What is going on geographically?' 'What can we learn from those churches and Christians already at work here, now and in the past?' 'How is God already at work in the neighborhood?' And, 'Are we behaving as exiles or as Babylonians?'

From a Western European perspective, the practices of the Simple Way raised the question of whether the many problems the Simple Way and similar communities encounter in deprived North-American neighborhoods, are actually primarily the result of poor government policy. Thus, would a 'Joseph' at the courts not be a much more helpful and constructive approach? If the 'Joseph Paradigm' was a faithful way of living according to the command of Jeremiah 29, should there not be a Christian way of faithful presence at the imperial courts?

In summary, this chapter discovered that the practices of three communities delivered a genuine practical critique to Yoder's ecclesiology, especially in the areas of (1) the idealistic character of Yoder's ecclesiology, (2) church and mission, and (3) Christian presence in society.

Chapter 6 brings the combined results of this study to the table for discussion as it aims to answer the question as to what extent Yoder's diaspora as mission ecclesiology is coherent and helpful for engaging contemporary (post-Christendom Western) ecclesiological questions.

6

DIASPORA AS MISSION AND BEING CHURCH IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WESTERN CONTEXT

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the results of the research so far are brought to the table in order to answer the main question of this study: to what extent is John Howard Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' ecclesiology coherent (section 6.2) and helpful for engaging contemporary ecclesiological questions of the Western church (section 6.3)? To address the second part of the question the proposal for a diaspora as mission ecclesiology is brought into engagement with the three questions raised in the introduction: What does it mean to be church? (section 6.3.1), how does the church search the well-being of society? (section 6.3.2) and how does the church relate to Judaism? (section 6.3.3). The final section (6.4) concludes this study.

6.2 John Howard Yoder's Revised Diaspora as Mission Ecclesiology

To what extent is Yoder's approach theologically coherent? John Howard Yoder set out an Anabaptist ecclesiology that is not just grounded in the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement, nor in early church practice, or in the words of Jesus. Yoder reaches back to the words of Jeremiah, to his letter to the captives in Babylon:

“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.

Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” (Jeremiah 29:5-7, NIV)

These words contain for Yoder a turning point within the biblical narrative. Yoder calls this ‘the Jeremiatic turn.’ From that moment on the people of God are no longer called to a life in the land, but to a life in diaspora. This social shape of God’s people, dispersed over the world, is what God uses to reach the nations with His good news.

Within Yoder’s grand narrative, both church and synagogue suffered a fall from this calling. Yoder labeled this calling ‘diaspora as mission.’ According to Yoder, the church abandoned its calling when it gave up its diaspora shape by aligning with the power of the state. Yoder calls this Constantinianism. Rabbinic Judaism likewise abandoned its calling by giving up its mission character, according to Yoder. Second Temple Judaism was a missionary religion, but in response to Christian missionary zeal, Rabbinic Judaism abandoned this missionary focus. Both church and synagogue are part of this calling to *Galuth* (dispersion). The partings of the ways, which Yoder calls a schism, in his view, did, therefore, not have to be.

The church is called to be dispersed, and this diaspora is the social shape that God uses to reach the world. The church is called to embody the good news by her practices, by her community life. This ecclesiology is helpful for a church in post-Christendom times. Losing power and influence is not something to mourn. According to Yoder the church was never called to exercise political power or influence. Post-Christendom times are therefore times in which the church can learn to be church again: dispersed in society, seeking the peace of the city.

In chapter 4 the many responses Yoder’s proposal generated, from the disciplines of (church) history, Old and New Testament studies, Judaism, ecclesiology, and so on, were examined. From this analysis, two major flaws in Yoder’s approach emerged. First, Yoder is too selective in his choice of sources. Second, Yoder is too biased in his reading of these sources. This

leads to the situation that Yoder reads exclusive normativity in texts where the experts in the fields do not find it. This is the case for all the disciplines Yoder wrote about: Biblical studies, Judaism, history. At the same time, Yoder's Jeremiatic reading of the Old and New Testaments, of the parting of the ways, of diaspora Judaism and free church ecclesiology is inspiring, and offers new and creative ways to re-engage the questions at hand, as the experts in the fields also showed in their discussions of Yoder's work. But Yoder's grand diaspora as mission narrative is not the only possible, faithful reading, nor the only normative reading for successive generations. In other words, Yoder's proposal leads to many helpful and creative insights, but he cannot justify the exclusive normativity in which he clothes this ecclesiology. This was the main conclusion the scholars in the above-mentioned disciplines drew from reading Yoder's work.¹

Yoder's work was found to be in need of revision in two particular respects. The first was the requirement for a more thorough consideration of the election of Israel. George A. Lindbeck's Israel-like view of the church provided insightful critique of Yoder's approach from an election point of view. Encompassing rigorous thinking on election, we discovered, encourages engagement with the whole of the Biblical narrative, it encourages the development a self-critical peoplehood, and it helps to move beyond supersessionism.²

The second point of revision concerned Yoder's lack of a theology of Christian presence within society, a presence outside the church and the state. Yoder's reasoning was limited to a church–state stalemate. Christian presence is either 'not in charge,' namely the church, or 'in charge,' namely part of the state. Yoder spent his whole theological career protesting and arguing against the latter, and for good reasons. But because of his crusade against Constantinianism, he could not find words to describe a Christian presence in society that was 'not in charge,' outside of the church. The

1 See section 4.6.

2 See section 4.4.6.

problem is that Jeremiah 29 seems to particularly point to this very type of societal presence: build, plant, marry, seek the peace of the city.

Chapter 2 discussed Yoder's alarming abuse of women and the theological justification he gave for his behavior as an eschatological ecclesial 'experiment.' Reading his theological justification exposed some structural idealistic tendencies, that carried the danger of working out violently. These idealistic tendencies are not limited to his work on 'affirmative affection' but are discernable throughout his ecclesiological work. I suggested that in light of the difficult issue of legacy and in view of these potentially risky idealistic tendencies, to work responsibly with Yoder's ecclesiology is to work with the main question (besides the exegetical, historical and systematic theological questions): what are the practical implications of this (theoretical) proposal?

Several churches and missionary communities have been directly inspired by Yoder's work, and try to put it into practice, or have discovered in the process that Yoder wrote about the kinds of communities they were trying to plant. This study engaged three of these communities with the intention of bringing a practical critique to Yoder's proposal of diaspora as mission and test the practical implications of it. This was the subject of Chapter 5.

From this discussion, one of the major issues at stake appeared to be the idealistic character of Yoder's ecclesiology. This is inspiring and gets (in particular young) people involved, but it also has destructive, even violent, tendencies. Team members burn out, feel a constant pressure to be more 'radical,' and do not always find the resources necessary to live this 'radical' lifestyle.

Connected with this, the actual practices of the communities also raised ecclesiological questions about Yoder's thinking, at several levels. (1) For Yoder diaspora as mission is the calling of the church. In reality, many of these diaspora-like communities are para-church organizations. Why is this the case? Is Yoder's diaspora ecclesiology too idealistic for 'regular'

churches? (2) One point of discussion is the believers' church ecclesiology, which seems to work within a Christendom context, but is more problematic in post-Christendom times. Without the Christian story present in society, people need more time to grow into faith and into church communities. People appear to grow more quickly into the community itself than into a Christian faith and worldview. New members are in need of a longer entry process, in which they are already part of the community, but have the possibility and time to grow into baptism and a committed Christian life. What does this mean for a diaspora ecclesiology? (3) Another question concerns Yoder's conviction that the practices of the community are good news. They are 'seen by the watching world,' and recognized as good news, according to Yoder. This is in post-Christendom times no longer the case. Churches need to tell the narratives, need to explain or preach (*kerygma*), in order for people to recognize the practices as good news. (4) Finally, in a similar way to the theoretical responses, the practices of the communities that were engaged also demonstrated a need for an explicit theology of Christian presence in society, a presence outside of the church and outside of the state.

Taking the theoretical and practical critique into account, we may conclude that a diaspora as mission ecclesiology, which is revised to embrace an understanding of election and the development of a theology of Christian presence in society, is theologically coherent. This ecclesiology is not beyond discussion and continues to raise questions, especially from those who take Yoder most seriously, namely the communities who try to put his ecclesiology into practice.

6.3 Engaging the Three Questions

The main question of this study is to what extent is John Howard Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' ecclesiology coherent and helpful for engaging contemporary (post-Christendom Western) ecclesiological questions? To answer this last question we engage our proposal for a diaspora as mission

ecclesiology with the three questions raised in the Introduction: what does it mean to be church? (section 6.3.1), how does the church search the well-being of society? (section 6.3.2), and how does the church relate to Judaism? (section 6.3.3).

6.3.1 What does it mean to be church?

In this section I bring Yoder's revised diaspora as mission ecclesiology into the contemporary ecclesiological discussion and context, to describe to what extent it is helpful for our understanding of what it means to be church. I do so by formulating three major ecclesial notions from the diaspora as mission ecclesiology.

6.3.1.1 The church is a community that follows the Lamb

'The development of a high Christology is the natural cultural ricochet of a missionary ecclesiology.'³ This is the case when we read the New Testament, but the same pattern is discernable when we study the sixteenth-century missionary, persecuted Anabaptists. For the Anabaptists, dispersed over sixteenth-century Europe, a high Christology became an essential element of their theology. The vision from Revelation 5 was a central notion: the Lamb that was slain, was worthy to receive the scroll of history, and unroll it. Anabaptists read this vision as a statement that the Lamb is in control of history.⁴ If Christ is in charge, the church does not have to be in charge. If Christ is in control of history, the church does not have to be. This high Christological image is central to Yoder's diaspora as mission ecclesiology, and equally relevant for a dispersed minority church in the Western context. The church in post-Christendom times suffers from feelings of loss and inferiority as the power and influence that was once theirs crumbles. Over the last decades churches in the West have shown a variety of reactions to the post-Christendom process from denying the situation,

³ Yoder, 'Household,' 6.

⁴ See for example the credo from the Moravian brothers 'Vicit agnus noster, eum sequamur.'

embracing Church Growth models, planting churches or initiating fresh expressions, to praying for revival or following whatever trend a 'successful' church has set.⁵ All of these attempts are in danger of preserving or restoring the power and influence the church once had, maintaining the conditions that once were. A church that worships the Lamb can let go of this tendency.

A high Christology is a prerequisite for the renewal of a dispersed church.⁶ This renewal takes place by the shaping of the community's social identity, and its capacity to change, around the Bible. The community that engages the biblical narrative, that reads it, prays it, sings it, thinks about it, is shaping its social identity in the process of doing so. This is an organic, ongoing hermeneutical process, which gives the biblical narrative the opportunity to shape and reshape the church's identity. Within the ecclesial turn, and in particular within postliberal circles, this way of engaging the scriptures is considered to be a vital process for theology and for faith communities.⁷ In a diaspora context a small community cannot control society and its changes. The community is therefore called to engage the biblical narrative communally, again and again.⁸

This shaping of the social identity of the church requires an unembarrassed particularity. Part of the above-mentioned ecclesial turn was the discovery and embrace of the particularity of the church. This particularity concerns the church's own sources and practices, and the epistemological and hermeneutical conditions the church works from.⁹ Coming from a Christian culture, Christians in Western Europe and the United States can sometimes be reluctant to embrace this particularity. They try to stay rele-

5 See section 1.2.1. on post-Christendom.

6 Paraphrasing Yoder's well-known statement 'A high Christology is a prerequisite for the renewal of a believers' church,' (Yoder, 'Household,' 7).

7 See section 1.3.1.

8 This practice is in contradiction with Yoder's own ecclesiology; Yoder describes only one possible, normative ecclesiology for every time and place. When the communal engagement of the biblical narrative shapes the church's ongoing social identity, this can then vary or change over time.

9 See section 1.3.1 on the particularity of the church as part of the ecclesial turn.

vant, to seek common ground, or use political power to influence society concerning 'Christian issues.' But due to the post-Christendom context they do so in ways that are increasingly strange to the gospel. Being a diaspora as mission church means being unembarrassed about particularity, and expecting to be outvoted or to be seen as peculiar. As a minority community the church is called to know the Christian story and live from it, and be able to discern where this story clashes with other stories in society.

This particularity of the church needs a seriousness about a distinctive moral commitment. Undertaking this is a task minority communities have to specifically invest in. It takes time and effort to sustain a minority culture within a strange society, where other narratives seem more dominant and present. The church celebrates in her liturgy the reality that Jesus is Lord, and this creates a particular community. Not in only the spiritual realm, but also empirically, within the surrounding society. To sustain this community the church must develop a strong culture embedded within her communal life. It takes training and learning to become Christ-like. Ecclesial turn theologians therefore emphasize the centrality of liturgy and its shaping character.¹⁰

In conclusion, a church that is following the Lamb is being dispersed, being shaped and reshaped round the Bible, and because of her particularity and moral commitment, feels itself to be foreign in a strange culture.

6.3.1.2 The church is called to diaspora as mission

Central to the proposed diaspora ecclesiology is the theological notion that God himself calls his people into diaspora. God subsequently uses the social shape of the communities to reach the nations, the city, society, with His good news.

This ecclesiology has the potential to discern God's intention for the shape of the church for the coming years, within the Western context: to

¹⁰ See section 1.3.3.

be a dispersed people, seeking the peace of the city 'to which I have carried you into exile' (Jeremiah 29,7 NIV). To be effective, this diaspora as mission ecclesiology requires something from churches in the West.

It requires first of all an embrace of the dispersion God created. Churches in the West have the tendency to back away from dispersion. Churches like to cling together and create megachurches in the few Bible-belt areas that still remain. Or, they prefer to send church planting teams from church areas into secularized parts of the country. Often it means that suburban churches send missionaries to the old city centers, or other deprived neighborhoods. Just like mission from Europe in the past had colonizing tendencies, these church plants can have gentrification-like consequences.¹¹ Churches are also at risk of letting small missionary groups embrace dispersion, while the sending church avoids this very diaspora. This might be the reason that the community life of Urban Expression and the Simple Way can be so demanding.¹² They symbolically embody the practices the church is called to, while the majority of the church shies away from this calling. The church is, however, not called to send missionaries from centers of power and influence, but is called to embrace diaspora, and let God disperse the church.

A diaspora as mission ecclesiology also requires an embrace of the mission aspect of the dispersion. Small dispersed communities can become inward focused, like enclaves, stores of ancient culture. The central notion of a diaspora as mission ecclesiology is that God calls his people to be witnesses and seek the peace of the very locations where God has placed them. This ecclesiology is in line with the concept of *missio Dei*. It is God the Father who sends the Son, the Father and Son send the Spirit, and the Triune God sends the church. God is ever moving towards the world, and He uses the social shape of the dispersed church to reach the world with the gospel of peace.¹³

11 See section 5.3.2.2.

12 See section 5.2.2.2 and section 5.3.2.2.

13 See section 1.4.2 on *missio Dei*.

The church as practices and words. For a diaspora ecclesiology it is constructive to describe the community in terms of practices. This shows a turn towards concreteness: what does it actually mean to be church? It is an attempt to keep believed and lived ecclesiology together.¹⁴ The practices of the community do however need theological reflection. First of all, a diaspora context requires a theology that is not dependent on epistemological and hermeneutical categories that are alien to the convictions of the church. Several recent theological movements, like Radical Orthodoxy and postliberal theology, tried to formulate particular Christian categories by denouncing Enlightenment or liberal conditions and trying to find a way to move beyond (or back before) that. Second, a diaspora context also needs a way of doing theology that is communal. Such a theological approach needs to engage the concrete practices, convictions and spirituality of the community and reflect on it. This theological reflection is part of the ongoing process of identity shaping in the context of Bible and liturgy.¹⁵

Yoder's story of his structural abuse of women¹⁶ showed a lack of theological language for critically engaging the practices, and questioning whether they are the good news they are promised to be. The same deficiency was visible in the practices we engaged in Chapter 5: it was hard to find words for evaluating the practices.¹⁷ It is helpful to approach ecclesiology in dispersed times from a practices point of view, but only if the community finds language to critically evaluate these practices. Working from practices is often working from 'best practices,' or idealized practices. This research has shown that idealized ecclesiology, without the critical attitude of questioning what is really going on, is in danger of exhausting or sup-

14 Both Reformation and Radical Reformation movements in the sixteenth century started to describe the church no longer exclusively in terms of notae, characteristics, but in terms of evaluable practices. For example (true) preaching, (right) administering of sacraments and church discipline. Yoder follows Anabaptist tradition as he describes the church in terms of practices. See also Enns, *Peace Church*, for the tension between 'believed' and 'experienced' church, 1-8.

15 See section 1.3.

16 See section 2.3.

17 See sections 5.2.2.2 and 5.3.2.2.

pressing others, or at risk of violent tendencies. We also discovered that if the practices are deemed to be the embodiment of the good news, or even good news itself, it makes it difficult to question them. If these practices fail, what will there be left of the church?

Yoder wrote his theology in a Christendom context, in which the biblical stories and symbols were well known. Practices could be understood because they could be related to these narratives and symbols. Zygmunt Bauman's work, for example, shows that in post-Christendom times this is different.¹⁸ From a missional perspective, it will not be enough to live the practices 'before the watching world.' It will take explanation, contextualization, telling the biblical stories, initiation and 'mystagogy'.¹⁹ This relates to an old missiological discussion over the dilemma between *diakonia* and *kerygma*, or between social work and evangelism. Does mission flow primarily out of works that express the Kingdom of God (*diakonia*) or primarily out of words that express the Kingdom of God (*kerygma*)?²⁰ Without repeating the discussion, from a missional perspective, diaspora communities will need words to explain the practices of the community. Because of the minority stance, these words will be less apologetic in nature (which suggests a common epistemological ground), and more from a witness perspective.

Welcoming strangers. Being church in diaspora is being church in a society that is a stranger to the Christian stories and symbols. A diaspora church needs to build a strong culture, that can survive as a minority culture between diasporas. This takes commitment, and Anabaptists knew this. To create strong communities, they guarded the borders with bap-

18 See section 1.4.3.

19 Mystagogy is a phrase from the early church, meaning the process of initiating people into the 'mysteries' of the Christian faith. 'In early Christian mystagogy, the personal development went hand in hand with the grafting into the community and the taking on of a new identity' (Paul van Geest, 'Studying the Mystagogy of the Fathers: an Introduction,' in *Seeing Through the Eyes of Faith. New Approaches to the Mystagogy of the Church Fathers*, ed. Paul van Geest, LAHR 11 [Leuven: Peeters, 2016], 6).

20 See Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 193-223.

tism and church discipline. Anabaptist ecclesiology was therefore a believers' church ecclesiology.²¹ In post-Christendom times however, as set out above, it will take much more than this. In other words, it will take time. Time to grow into understanding the biblical worldview and a commitment to Jesus as Lord, and to the church as new family. Diaspora as mission communities therefore need to create a long process of entry, in which strangers can be welcomed and can grow into commitment. One option, as Stuart Murray suggests, is working with a 'centered-set' model of ecclesiology: belonging, and then believing and behaving.²²

6.3.1.3 *The church is an elected community*

The third central ecclesial notion is election. God chooses a people through whom he will bless the nations of the earth (Genesis 12,3). Following this prominent theological notion through the biblical narrative, from Genesis, to Jeremiah to the New Testament, we observed that the church is an elected community, sharing in Israel's calling. In calling the church an elected community, 'election' is used as a communal, missional category, not to be confused with election in the Calvinist tradition, where it functions as an individual, soteriological category.²³ Being an elected community means, in other words, being elected for the world, for the city, for society.

A diaspora as mission community that worships and lives from the concept of election, is invited into a critical freedom, because the existence of the community is not grounded in the realized ethical standards of the community but in God's election.²⁴

21 This did not always work out as constructively as hoped for. The Anabaptists were especially notorious for their severe applying of church discipline and 'the ban'. This led to a host of schisms. See Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 599.

22 See section 5.2. Murray, *Church after Christendom*, 26-31 working from Paul Hiebert, *Missions*.

23 For an example of a Calvinist reading, see J. Douma, *Algemene Genade. Uiteenzetting, vergelijking en beoordeling van de opvattingen van A. Kuyper, K. Schilder en Job. Calvijn over 'algemene genade.'* 3^{de} druk (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1976), in particular 289-306.

24 See section 4.4.6.2.

This gives, first of all, space to critically question the practices of the community. The practices of the community are the expression of the gospel, but if the practices fail, this does not deny the truth of the gospel nor the identity of the church. An elected community could therefore be a self-critical community. Its identity does not lie in realized ethical standards, but in God's acting. The biblical narrative, the sourcebook for Israel and the church, is full of stories that show this self-critical attitude: the people of God fail time after time to keep covenant fidelity, prophets run away, and God's chosen kings fail. Although the biblical narrative gives account of the great and exalted plans of God for his people, there is always the critical side of the story. An elected community is invited into the freedom to critically evaluate the practices of the community, or its social dynamics. Idealistic communities such as the church need this critical voice and the space to ask the necessary questions.

Just as the church's existence is not justified by her realized ethical standards, nor should it lie in realized goals or measurable effects upon society. An elected community has the creative freedom to stay away from market dynamics, success stories or utopias. Because 'success' does not constitute the church, but God's calling to mission.

Third, working from election creates the freedom to build strong communities. Zygmunt Bauman describes the social dynamics of community life in liquid modernity. He notices either light versions of community (cloakroom communities), or very strong 'ethnic-like' communities. They are strong because its members are born into the community, and because they display exclusive social dynamics towards other groups in society. These ethnic-like communities have violent tendencies, according to Bauman.²⁵ Working from the concept of election helps in creating strong communities (being part of the community rises above your particular voluntary choice), but need not depend on the exclusion of other communi-

25 See section 1.2.4.

ties for that strength. In other words, the church on the one hand cannot make the community, and on the other hand, does not need to defend it.

6.3.2 How does the church seek the wellbeing of society?

A diaspora as mission ecclesiology so thoroughly inspired by Jeremiah 29 seeks the peace of society. How is the church called to do the same? The church is first of all called to do so by being church. The very presence of a community of faith is saving the city, according to the biblical narrative. In *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (2003), Yoder sets out how synagogues as social phenomenon came into existence within the Babylonian exile. All it needed was ten families, he explains. Within Jewish tradition it is believed that the presence of this *minyan* can save a city. Genesis 18-19 describes the visit of God to Abraham before the destruction of the cities Sodom and Gomorra. At the end of Abraham's negotiation on behalf of the cities, God said: 'For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it' (Genesis 18,32 NIV). In *Midrash Rabbah* this story is interpreted as the very presence of a synagogue, a praying *minyan*, is able to save the city.²⁶ Christians adopted this principle, as can be seen in Eusebius' description of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. According to Eusebius, when the Christians left the city and fled to Pella, the wrath of God was poured out over the city.²⁷ The presence of synagogue and church can, as these stories illustrate, save a city from harm. A diaspora church seeks the wellbeing of society first of all by being church. Whether the presence of the church is saving the city from harm, inspiring the city by showing that a different

²⁶ *Midrash Rabbah* is an authoritative body of exegetical work within the Rabbinic tradition. See H. Freedman (translator), *Midrash Rabbah Genesis*, XLIX, 13: 'And why ten? So that there might be sufficient for an assembly [of righteous men to pray] on behalf of all of them.'

²⁷ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, III, 5,3: 'But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come there from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgement of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men.'

way of living is possible, or working its leavening effect, the church being church is good news for society.

As we noted before on the issue of a Christian presence in society, Yoder was only able to reason from the position of a church–state stalemate. Christian presence is either ‘not in charge,’ and thus the church, or ‘in charge,’ and thus part of the state. Jeremiah’s letter to the captives points to a third way of being present: seeking to influence society for good, but without the need for and use of political power. Jeremiah sums this up as ‘build, plant, marry.’ This describes a Christian presence in society, outside of the meetings of the community. The practices and theology of the researched communities of Urban Expression and the Simple Way indicate a way forward in what is needed to put this ‘build, plant, marry’ into practice.

First, *a theology of place*. The intentional part of God’s calling the church into diaspora to a specific place, requires the development of a more pronounced theology of place. The work of Wilson-Hartgrove sketched some very constructive lines for pursuing this.²⁸ Second, *a theology of hospitality*. The homes of Urban Expression team members and the Simple Way community house at 3234 Potterstreet in North-Philadelphia are the primary shapes of Christian presence in the neighborhood. What does this mean theologically? What is the place of hospitality in ‘seeking the peace of the city’?²⁹ Third, *a theology of work*. ‘Build’ and ‘plant’ are imperatives that fall within a category of work. In what way can the work of Christians contribute to seeking the peace of the city? How does their work relate to creation and new creation? In what way can Christians develop a theology and ethics of work with perspectives on contributing to the social dynamics within society? The publications of Miroslav Volf

28 See section 5.3.1.3.

29 Again, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove offers an inspiring reflection on these questions. See his *Strangers at my Door. A True Story of Finding Jesus in Unexpected Guests* (New York: Convergent Books, 2013). See also Francis, *Hospitality and Community*; Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room. Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); and Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality. Welcoming God and Other Strangers*, The Christian Practice of Everyday Life Series (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007).

and Tim Keller show some constructive lines to reflect on this question.³⁰ Fourth, *a theology of dual citizenship*. Jeremiah's imperatives are not only to build, plant and marry, but to

Build houses *and settle down*; plant gardens *and eat what they produce*. Marry *and have sons and daughters*; *find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters*. *Increase in number there; do not decrease*.

(Jeremiah 29:5-6, NIV, italics mine)

Yoder's Anabaptist ecclesiology emphasized that being dispersed means being strangers in a strange land. In Chapter 2 we noticed how for Yoder this was a historical, idealistic reading of what it means to be a Mennonite. His biography demonstrated that Yoder's position, a well-known academic scholar at the prestigious University of Notre Dame, was not that of a stranger to society at all. The fact that Yoder kept referring to himself as a persecuted minority revealed the gap that existed between his life and his theological reasoning. Jeremiah's imperative requires a certain rooting in the place where God placed his church, and a self-critical theological reflection on this rooting. A diaspora as mission theology therefore needs to embrace, besides 'the citizenship of heaven' (Philippians 3:20), a citizenship of 'the city I have carried you to' (Jeremiah 29:7).

All these required theological reflections – of place, hospitality, work, citizenship – are moves away from idealistic ecclesiologies toward theological reflection on the concrete practices of a diaspora as mission ecclesiology. Yoder's personal life³¹ and the engaged practices³² show that this concrete, self-critical theological reflection is vital for the well-being of the diaspora as mission communities, and as such for the well-being of society.

A possible Christian presence of a diaspora as mission ecclesiology concerns, besides the gathering of the church, the neighborhood as

³⁰ See Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene: Wipf&Stock Publishers, 1991/2001); Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., 2012).

³¹ See section 2.3

³² See Chapter 5.

the place where God is at work, the houses where hospitality is practiced, workplaces, and citizenship, not only of heaven, but also of the cities in which Christians live.

6.3.3 How does the church relate to Judaism?

Yoder's grand diaspora as mission narrative showed some interesting impulses for Jewish-Christian dialogue.³³ The major part of Jewish-Christian dialogue through the centuries concerned soteriological questions and the Christian claim that Jesus from Nazareth is the divine Messiah. Yoder's argument does not engage these soteriological questions. Yoder offers instead an ecclesiological model: church and synagogue share a calling, a calling to be dispersed over the earth and thus be used by God to reach the world with the gospel of peace. Yoder's grand narrative shows that (1) a careful reading of the history of Jewish-Christian relations is necessary, especially concerning the first centuries, (2) Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism are more intertwined than the standard narrative suggests, (3) an ecclesiological approach to Jewish-Christian relations can offer new possibilities, beyond soteriological approaches. An ecclesiology working from this grand narrative, however, proved to be in need of a theology of election. Working from the notion of election acknowledges God's previously and present dealing with his people Israel, and subsequently roots the church within God's salvation history.

Although inspiring, Yoder's grand narrative on this issue is limited by an approach that is too historical and idealistic. What are the implications of this when put into practice? Congregation Zera Avraham embodies one answer to the question of how the church might relate to Judaism, namely by being a community that is both church and Judaism. We noted how Kinzer's bilateral ecclesiology proposes an ecclesiology in which (Gentile) church and synagogue are connected by Messianic Jewish communi-

³³ The work of Steven Schwarzschild, Daniel Boyarin and Peter Ochs are examples of this, see Chapter 4.

ties. The study of Zera Avraham's community life offered several insights: it is a big step for messianic Jews and other observant Jews to mutually recognize each other, it takes 'in-between' ecclesiologies to facilitate this process, and soteriology and the Christian claim that Jesus Christ is the Messiah cannot be ignored in the process.³⁴

One of the major questions for Christians since 1948 has been how to relate to the state of Israel and its policy in the Palestinian territories. The two opposites are on the one hand an (uncritical) approval of Israel's policy, a position often inspired by millennialist theologies in which Israel functions as a necessary actor in apocalyptic scenarios.³⁵ On the other side of the spectrum are Christians who are concerned with questions of peace and justice for the Palestinian people. Liberation theology that is developed from this concern suffers however from supersessionist tendencies. Because of Zionist claims that lead to violence and suppression, theologians from this position feel compelled to deny the people of Israel any particular theological position whatsoever.³⁶ Yoder's revised diaspora as mission approach reasons from the basis of both the election of Israel and a principal suspicion towards the state, any state, including the Israeli state. Daniel Boyarin, Peter Ochs and Shaul Maggid's work show how Yoder's approach creates the possibility of appreciating the possible blessings of diaspora and reconsider pacifist tendencies within Judaism.³⁷ In the same way Yoder's approach has the potential to offer a constructive impulse for liberation theology, beyond supersessionism towards peace and justice.

How does the church relate to Judaism? A revised diaspora as mission ecclesiology does not answer all the questions. It does however offer fresh perspectives on a shared calling to diaspora, on the church's partici-

³⁴ See section 5.4.

³⁵ For an introduction see Carlo Androvandi, *Apocalyptic Movements in Contemporary Politics: Christian and Jewish Zionism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

³⁶ See for example the work of Palestinian liberation theologian Naim Ateek. For a critical review, see Daniël Drost, 'Review of Naim Ateek, *Roep om verzoening. Een Palestijnse christen over vrede en recht*,' *Soteria*, 29^{ste} jaargang, no. 4 (2012): 60-61.

³⁷ See sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.3.

pation in Israel's election, and on the connection between renewal of the church, mission and Israel.

6.4 Conclusion

With his diaspora as mission approach, John Howard Yoder wrote a classic anabaptist ecclesiology. New to this ecclesiology, was the fact that it was not only based on the sixteenth-century Anabaptists, but it reached back beyond the early church and Jesus, to Jeremiah's letter to the exiles. By putting this ecclesiology to the test, both theoretically and practically, I have put forward a self-critical diaspora as mission ecclesiology. Following George A. Lindbeck, this self-critical attitude is safeguarded by a theology of election.

To answer the question to what extent John Howard Yoder's diaspora as mission ecclesiology is helpful for engaging contemporary (post-Christendom Western) ecclesiological questions, we engaged the three questions raised in the Introduction: What does it mean to be church? (section 6.3.1), how does the church search the wellbeing of society? (section 6.3.2.), and how does the church relate to Judaism? (section 6.3.3.). In answering the questions, we noted how a diaspora as mission ecclesiology engages the three turns described in Chapter 1: a marginal turn, an ecclesial turn and a missional turn. The basic principle of the proposed ecclesiology is the church's calling to the margins, and at the core is the shape and calling of the local church, which is mission. In seeing how closely related a diaspora as mission approach is to these three turns, we may conclude that Yoder's diaspora ecclesiology is indeed helpful in engaging the current ecclesial questions in the Western context.

At several points the revised version of a diaspora as mission ecclesiology moves away from a classical anabaptist ecclesiology. First, in working from the election of Israel as a means to become a self-critical. The emphasis on God's election, moves the focus away from the community's realized ethical standards. This would be very hard for Yoder to accept,

since he emphasizes that the church is constituted by obedience to the Lamb. In other words, by her practices. However, in this study, this stance is criticized as an idealistic approach that is in need of correction. Second, a missionary diaspora ecclesiology puts the traditional anabaptist believers' church perspective to the test, or at least the entry into this church. In liquid post-Christendom times people are no longer acquainted with the biblical stories and customs, and need therefore time to grow into the community. Third, in emphasizing the importance of a theology of Christian presence in society outside of the church, this study shows the need for further development of a theology of place, a theology of hospitality, a theology of work and a theology of citizenship. Fourth, a major part of this research has concerned the violent tendencies of an idealistic ecclesiology. This was visible in Yoder's life, his abuse of women and his theological justification of it. But on a very different level also in the commitment of Urban Expression and the Simple Way team members. An ideal is enchanting, and that is why it is attractive. But it also has the tendency to be out of reach, and therefore to wear people out.

John Howard Yoder, a brilliant theologian and a deeply flawed man, wrote over a lifetime an illuminating proposal for an Anabaptist ecclesiology. Testing, criticizing and revising, this study has set out a diaspora as mission ecclesiology that still offers an inspiring invitation to being church in the Western context.

VICIT AGNUS NOSTER EUM SEQUAMUR



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SUMMARY

Diaspora as Mission. John Howard Yoder, Jeremiah 29 and the Shape and Mission of the Church.

What does it mean to be church in the twenty-first century? To answer this question I engaged the work of American Mennonite scholar John Howard Yoder. He developed a thesis, working from Jeremiah 29, that the people of God, both Israel and the church, are called to an existence in diaspora. According to Yoder, this diaspora lifestyle is the social shape that God uses to reach the nations with His mission. He calls this perspective 'diaspora as mission.' Yoder's proposal led to the main question of this study: *to what extent is John Howard Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' ecclesiology coherent and helpful for engaging contemporary (post-Christendom Western) ecclesiological questions?*

This question is answered by placing Yoder's proposal within the twenty-first century context, and is subsequently given a theoretical (theological and historical) and a practical critique. The latter is done by engaging three communities that are inspired by Yoder's 'diaspora as mission' ecclesiology. These communities are Urban Expression Nederland, Shane Claiborne's Simple Way Community and Mark Kinzer's Messianic Jewish Congregation Zera Avraham.

Recently Yoder has been under severe criticism because of his long-time abuse of women and his theological justification of it as an eschatological 'experiment.' Knowing this, can we still use his work? This research develops a critical hermeneutic to his behavior and work, and the idealistic tendencies it suffers from. This critical hermeneutic is subsequently used to engage ecclesiological questions of the twenty-first century.

