

Introduction:

This past election was an out of body experience for me. Since I have turned 18, it is the first presidential election in which I have felt more like an observer than a participant. The 2016 election was such a huge polarization of candidates, I just couldn't get on board with either of the major parties. If you're not on board with the Republican or Democratic parties, your actions are relatively meaningless as it relates to affecting the outcome of the vote.

But I don't regret being an observer. In fact, it was being an observer that most helped me to grow in my view on the Christian's relationship to politics. Because I distanced myself from the candidates and any impact I would have on the outcome of the election, I had little vested interest to cause me to rationalize my vote. I could just sit back and praise both sides where praise was due and criticize both sides where criticism was due. It was a pretty liberating experience – being able to be honest with myself when assessing politics and recognizing that the political sphere did not control my life. My hopes were not tied to any one candidate. The next president of the United States would not be my savior.

In all of this, it started me thinking more and more about what it means to be a Christian in a world run by politics and institutions (big business, religion and the moral majority, etc). The part that made such thinking difficult was that I was sure Christ had little to say about institutions. I mean, he really just provided a framework for personal ethics, but he didn't speak to a life lived in an empire like ours. But as I began researching, I came across a book that has revolutionized my view on Christian engagement in politics and society and has made coherent those intuitions that resonated within me when I was freed from political idolization for the first time in my life this past election cycle. I'd like to share with you my summary of John Howard Yoder's book, "The Politics of Jesus."

Before digging into the book, it's important to note that Yoder has two main goals. The first is to show that Christ's ethics are prescriptive for believers today. Many (at least in Yoder's 1970's America) tried to say that Christ's ethics weren't applicable to believers on an institutional scale for a variety of reasons. He does a lot to explain why he believes this is not so. The second goal for Yoder is to paint a picture of how Christ's actions taken collectively were extremely political. When you mix the two together, you see that Christ's actions were politically pointed and we are to likewise emulate those actions.

It is also important to understand that Yoder's writing preceded the establishment of the "Moral Majority." Heavy Christian involvement in politics occurred in the late 1970's. I'm not sure if Yoder saw this coming or not, but he is writing at a time where political involvement was starting to be pushed. I think this is important to understand because we now have a bias towards political involvement, and Yoder has a bias against it. It is important to remember that the gospel does not change, and neither does the waywardness of humanity's heart. The only things that change are the ways in which our hearts subvert the gospel and self-deceive. As you read my summary, please try to be aware of biases on both sides and try to sift through information to see the gospel as Christ intended it, not as we desire to skew it for our own ends.

The Cup of the Suffering:

Before delving into Christ's specific actions within his three year ministry, Christians must first understand what the gospel is. Many Christians get the gospel wrong – or at least only partially right. As good Western Protestants, we have turned the gospel into the cross - the substitutionary atonement for our sins and the expunging of our ledger with God. But that is not the whole gospel. Adding the resurrection to the cross isn't even the whole gospel. The gospel as proclaimed all throughout the scriptures is that the Kingdom is at hand (Mk. 1:15, Mt. 3:2, Mt. 4:17, Mt. 10:7, Lk. 9, Lk. 17:20-21). While the cross and the resurrection and the intercession of Christ are vital to taking away our condemnation, the removal of our sin is only one part of the gospel message. The great news is not that sin is removed, but that because our sin is removed we can live a freed life in communion with God. The impartial view (or overemphasis) of the gospel that focuses only on the cross turns the gospel into a business transaction. The full view of the gospel sees the good news as a rescue of the beloved and a restoration of relationship. Christ doesn't merely take our sin upon himself, but he imputes his righteousness to us so we can stand blameless before God and live free in loving community. The gospel is the Kingdom life. It is not just Ephesians 2:8-9, but Ephesians 2:10. We aren't just saved by grace, but we're saved unto good works. It's not just I John 1:9, but I John 2. We don't just get our sins forgiven, we have light enter our souls which enables us to live in communities characterized by freedom and love. The Gospel is the

Kingdom life!

In light of Christ's mission to bring the Kingdom, Yoder begins at the start of his ministry. Christ is hunkered down in the desert and being assailed by the Devil's temptations. As most know, Christ is then tempted in three ways: with bread, with kingdoms, and with miracles. Those all seemed like fairly arbitrary things to me before, but Yoder points out that if these were arbitrary, they wouldn't be temptations. There was a reason Christ was tempted by these specific things and Yoder explores the significance of each temptation.

Understanding that Christ came to bring a kingdom, we can see how the Devil's temptation of bread was significant to Christ. First, it seems that this temptation is more than just on the level of physical hunger. It's not like Christ's fast was a mandatory obligation. He was fasting out of a love for his father and a desire to be close to him and focus on him. To say that eating bread would be a sin would be like saying that the widow not giving her mite would have been a sin. These actions are outpourings of generosity and love, not mandated actions - which if not done - were sin. So there is more behind the bread than hunger.

Yoder explores this temptation by looking at what the bread symbolizes in light of the next temptations, as well as in light of Christ's ministry. The bread represents economic provision. Were Christ to turn the rocks in the surrounding area to bread, he would not only feed himself, but he would provide a feast for all of the many needy in the surrounding area. The devil is not merely appealing to Christ's physical notions, but to his kingdom notions. This is a temptation for Jesus to bring the kingdom now, and to bring it through the bellies of the masses.

This interpretation is by no means a stretch to make. John tells us that this is exactly what happens with Christ in his ministry. When Jesus multiplies the bread to feed the masses, they are immediately enthralled with him. A man who could provide sustenance and economic promise in such a tumultuous time (with high taxation and lack of resources) should be crowned the king. And what is Christ's response? John 6 tells us,

12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." 13 So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

14 After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." 15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

After Christ multiplied the bread, he fled from the people because they wanted to make him king! This is the context for Christ walking on the water. He is not first trying to show a sign to his disciples, he is escaping the crowds who wanted to proclaim him king - but through an economic motivation. Upon realizing that Jesus was gone, they pursued him to the other side of the lake. Just as the devil tempted Christ to turn rocks into bread to establish his authority, so we see that multiplying bread moved the people to proclaim Christ as king. But this was not how his kingdom was to be established. And as Jesus ran from Satan's temptation, so he ran from the temptation again.

The second temptation seen in Matthew is the Devil telling Jesus to throw himself off the high point of the temple. Jesus refuses. But Yoder argues that his reasons for refusing were very different than what most people think today. Many believe that Christ was unwilling to perform such a miracle because he wanted people to believe in him and not his miracles. However, that doesn't explain why Jesus then went on to perform astonishing miracles day in and day out, even raising others from the dead. Jesus even points others to his works, asking them to believe in him based on the validating testimony of his life and miracles. Jesus's refusal to give into the Devil here must be rooted in something much deeper than performing a simple miracle.

Yoder explains that being thrown from the high point in the temple was the standard punishment for blasphemy - with a stoning for those who survived the fall. Satan's temptation here is not simply performing a miracle, but performing a specific miracle at a specific place. This was Satan's temptation for Christ to establish himself as ruler through the power of religious institution. For Christ to claim his messianic role and to miraculously survive the penalty for blasphemy at the temple itself would be for Christ to establish his rule through the institution of the temple and all of the social structure and benefits that came along with it.

However, just as Christ refused Satan twice – in the desert and on the lake shore - so he refused this second temptation twice. He refused Satan in the desert and on the day of his triumphal entry. We see Christ enter Jerusalem and be proclaimed as the Messiah, enter the temple and kick out the moneychangers, and then set up shop teaching in the temple. This was the perfect opportunity for Jesus to set himself up as a leader through the power of the religious institution of his day. But Christ did not come to perpetuate this religious institution, he came in swinging his sledgehammer. According to Matthew, it is during this period that Christ condemned the religious leaders and predicted the end of this religious institution in the destruction of the temple. While the people wanted Christ to be established as their religious Messiah, Christ told them that the very institution over which they wanted him to preside would be demolished. Just as he threw away the kingly proclamation of the people for economic reasons, he did it again when they wanted to proclaim him their leader through the temple.

The final temptation Satan brings Christ is the temptation of kingdoms. This is political and militaristic might. Were Christ to be handed Rome and the Devil rescind his influence politically, what could Christ have accomplished in the world? But Christ refused. And once again, we see Christ face this very temptation again the night before the cross. As Christ was praying, he asked God for the cup to pass from him - the cup of his suffering. Yoder argues that this isn't just a simple prayer, but a very profound one. We must recognize that we get very few glimpses into the temptations of Christ. I have always found this puzzling, that the Christ who Hebrews tells us was tempted as we are never seemed to be tempted. We don't see a struggle with lust, a struggle with anger, a struggle with derision. The only place that seemed to me like temptation was Christ's anger when throwing out the moneychangers. Yoder argues that we actually see Christ tempted frequently, and we see it time and time again in a struggle with the way in which the kingdom is to be brought. Christ, the new Adam, is tempted most in just the way that Adam was, in the desire to be like God. We see Christ's temptation in Satan's assault in the wilderness, and we see it again when Peter tells Christ that he must not suffer. Notice Christ's response to Peter's determination to prevent the cup of suffering from coming to Christ:

“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

Jesus was extremely upset. Peter hit on a very tender nerve within Jesus - a nerve we see Satan pressing on at the very outset of Christ's ministry. So when Christ was asking for the cup to pass from him while praying in the Garden, he was asking for the same thing Peter was when Christ reprimanded him for creating temptation. In the Garden, it is likely that Christ thought back to the wilderness - to the potential of the kingdom brought through economies, through religion, and through political/military might.

It is immediately following Christ's prayer in the garden that we see him come face to face with the second iteration of the Devil's third temptation. As the men come to arrest Jesus, Peter pulls out a sword to prevent the cup of suffering from falling on Jesus. Christ tells Peter to put the sword away and says,

53 Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?

We see that in his last hours, when he most desperately wanted to prevent his suffering, Jesus refused to tap into the greatest power of all - God's military force. When God's Kingdom collided with Rome's kingdom - the greatest human kingdom at the time - Christ refused to win through military or political might. He did not come to conquer kingdoms through force or to rule his people through coercion. He came to lay down his life. It is in this that Christ won the victory, not only over our sins, but in our day to day lives. His sacrifice provides more than propitiation, it provides us with an example of what it truly means to live free. We are not to place our hope in economic prosperity and bread, we are not to place our hope in religious systems and institutions, and we are not to place our hope in military might or political systems. Our hope is in the fact that we are freed from all of these kingdoms to live in the Kingdom of God - the Kingdom that Christ came and established. This Kingdom life is the gospel message.

Drinking Our Cup:

Many may agree with the assessment up to this point. Yes, Jesus was called by God to lay down his life. However, individuals begin to diverge in opinion when Yoder argues that this life Christ lived is prescriptive for Christians today. Surely there were different expectations on the savior of the world than there are on his followers in modernity. The actions we see in the gospels are descriptions of the Son of God, not prescriptions for the sons of God. But Yoder begs to differ.

If the gospel message is that Christ came to establish a new kingdom - his Kingdom, then it seems clear that he showed us what Kingdom life looked like - what it meant to be a citizen and participant in his Kingdom. Yoder points out several lines of reasoning for why we can be sure Christ's actions are prescriptions for our lives today.

First, we see very few prescriptions in the Bible that are tied to Christ as an example. When Paul talks about the benefits of celibacy, it seems he could have easily appealed to Christ as the prime example of why we should be celibate. He doesn't. When the apostles lived itinerant lives, it seems it would have been easy to prescribe such lives for others based on Christ's example. But they don't. There are very few prescriptions we get from the apostles that are tied directly to Christ's example. Yoder argues that this is precisely where movements like monasticism go wrong. They focus on aspects of Christ's life that we were not prescribed to emulate. However, the one thing we do have prescribed for us is the taking up of our cross. It is constantly prescribed for the Christian throughout scripture, a direct prescription to imitate Christ in his suffering.

So what is meant by bearing our cross? This is where many Western Christians tend to go wrong, according to Yoder. We view our cross as any struggle in life. But Yoder shows that the cross means much more than trials and struggles.

1) The Cross is Purposed: "The cross of Calvary was not a difficult family situation, not a frustration of visions of personal fulfillment, a crushing debt, or a nagging in-law; it was the political, legally-to-be-expected result of a moral clash with the powers ruling [Christ's] society." Bearing our cross does not mean dealing with life's normal trials. It means living a life that inevitably leads to self-sacrifice and crucifixion. The cross of Christ was not Jesus offending rulers on a bad day, it was the culmination of a three year ministry that defied the powers that be. The cross was an inevitability for Christ and it is an inevitability for the Christian who lives like Christ, defying political, social, and religious institutions that enslave us to their definitions of needs and effectiveness. In fact, the Bible promises us in a number of places that if Christ was persecuted, so it will be for those who follow him.

This point was particularly convicting, as I have not lived a life worthy of persecution up to this point. I haven't challenged socially oppressive economic systems, systemic racism, and religious corruption. In many cases I have willfully blinded myself to these things so I wouldn't have to be faced with the daily choice between persecution and ease. Yet when we see the fervor with which the early church not only experienced, but embraced persecution, it is very convicting. It seems early believers understood that persecution was the inevitability of the Christian faith to be embraced, whereas we now view it as a liability to be avoided. However, Yoder makes very clear that embracing of martyrdom should not be done for the sake of martyrdom, but for the sake of love and the Kingdom.

"This Gospel concept of the cross of the Christian does not mean that suffering is thought of as in itself redemptive or that martyrdom is a value to be sought after. Nor does it refer uniquely to being persecuted for 'religious' reasons by an outspokenly pagan government. What Jesus refers to in his call to cross-bearing is rather the seeming defeat of that strategy of obedience which is no strategy, the inevitable suffering of those whose only goal is to be faithful to that love which puts one at the mercy of one's neighbor, which abandons claims to justice for oneself and for one's own in an overriding concern for the reconciling of the adversary and the estranged."

We do not embrace martyrdom and suffering for their own sake, but for the sake of agape love.

2) The Cross is not Insurrection or Quietism: If one does not engage in the politics of the day, many falsely dichotomize the remaining political options as being a quietist or insurrectionist. If the world is in desperate need of change and you abstain from invoking the powers of the day (political, religious, and business institutions), then you are either a quietist or insurrectionist. If you simply withdraw from action, then you are not really playing in the game. On the other hand, if you go outside of the system to overthrow the powers through other means or force, then you are an insurrectionist intending to upend order. But Christ engages in constant politics without being either a quietist or insurrectionist.

The cross of Christ was the culmination of choices made in both the political and social sphere. The call of at least one zealot (and as many as six) to be disciples flew in the face of Roman political sentiment. The call of Christ to Matthew, the tax collector, flew in the face of religious Jewish sentiment. Being in league with John the

Baptist, who was executed for political reasons made him a danger to Rome. Treating the societal outcasts, the overt sinners, the Samaritans, and others with love and respect upended the social order of both Rome and the religious leaders. Most of what Jesus did was outside of any accepted political, social, or religious sphere. As Yoder says,

"Because Jesus' particular way of rejecting the sword and at the same time condemning those who wielded it was politically relevant, both the Sanhedrin and the Procurator had to deny him the right to live, in the name of both of their forms of political responsibility. His alternative was so relevant, so much of a threat, that Pilate could afford to free, in exchange for Jesus, the ordinary Guevara-type insurrectionist Barrabas. Jesus' way is not less but more relevant to the question of how society moves than is the struggle for possession of the levers of command; to this Pilate and Caiaphas testify by their judgment on him...[Jesus] refused to concede that those in power represent an ideal, a logically proper, or even an empirically acceptable definition of what it means to be political. He did not say (as some sectarian pacifists or some pietists might), 'you can have your politics and I shall do something else more important'; he said, 'your definition of *polis*, of the social, of the wholeness of being human socially is perverted.'"

Jesus was crucified precisely because what he did was social and political, but outside of any of the accepted social or political powers that could claim him and protect him. This is exactly why the religious leaders had to kill him and the Rome that prided itself on orderly law had to run a kangaroo court to convict him. Christ's way held more power than any other way, even more than the overt zealotry of Barrabas. The cross does not accept political and social lines of order. Human institutions are founded on order in hopes that they will bring about good and love for some. The cross is about a love and good for all first, which in turn will bring about true human community. The cross may seem like a quietist option to the political and religious institutions that are bellowing "effectiveness" and "order!" But the cross bellows "love!" The cross only seems quiet if you've bought into a message that drowns out agape love.

3) **The Cross is not the Golden Rule:**

"It is often mistakenly held that the key concept of Jesus' ethic is the 'Golden Rule': 'do to others as you would have them do to you.' This is stated by Jesus, however, not as the sum of his own teaching but as the center of the law. But Jesus' own 'fulfillment' of this thrust of the law, which thereby becomes through his own works a 'new commandment,' is different. 'Do as I have done to you' or 'do as the Father did in sending his Son.' It is striking how great is the mass of writings on religious ethics seeking to deal specifically with whether the teaching of Jesus is any different from that of the rabbis (or of Confucius), which still fails to note this very evident structural change."

I can't tell you how many times I've heard it said that Christianity stole the Golden Rule from earlier religious leaders. While we could discuss how the amazing commonalities speak more to a core morality inherent in humanity rather than a necessarily borrowed and constructed ethic, it is important to note that Christianity goes far beyond the Golden Rule. While Jesus does tell us to treat others like we would treat ourselves, he demolishes that metric by then telling us that we need to go even beyond that. We are to love others - even our enemies - more than our own life. This isn't just hot air either, as Christ proved on the cross. The cross isn't merely bearing the difficulty of being nice to other nice people even if you're having a bad day. Rather, the cross is choosing to return love to those who cause you to bear difficulties, even in the midst of their malice.

In summary, Yoder has made a number of important points about the specificity of the cross. The cross is borne because of a continued choice to abstain from the powers that be and a move towards the laying down of our lives for even our enemies. In all of the scriptures, one of, if not the only way we are consistently told to imitate Christ, is in bearing such a cross. The life of Christ's disciple inevitably leads to persecution on all sides - from religious and political institutions (and likely businesses in our society) - because we refuse to buy into their definitions of power, control, effectiveness, society, and order.

The Cross and the Kingdom:

The last third of the book was probably the most influential for me because it tore down the theological dissonance I had brought to the table. The first two-thirds of Yoder's book made sense because I knew the Bible pretty well, and a lot of what he said was Sunday School stuff. "Jesus said love your enemies." Yes. "Jesus said turn the other cheek." Of course. "Jesus loved the outcasts." Undoubtedly. "Jesus pushed back

against the powerful religious institution of his day." Correct. But for some reason - my stupidity, the Western heritage and unique bias Christianity has in the U.S., etc. - I had always left Jesus's words where they were - with him. I never took them upon myself really. I had willfully and/or subconsciously made Christ's difficult expectations for me either suggestions, symbolism, or applicable only to him and his mission. But Yoder demolishes those options in his last section of the book.

Yoder makes a very important point that is vital for you to consider before you sift through his line of reasoning. Just as you've heard it said that where you spend your money is where your priorities likely lie, Yoder argues that where you spend your social capital is likely where you believe the levers of power lie. It will be vital to understand where your biases lie here as we progress through Yoder's arguments. Yoder says,

"One way to characterize thinking about social ethics in our time is to say that Christians in our age are obsessed with the meaning and direction of history. Social ethical concern is moved by a deep desire to make things move in the right direction. Whether a given action is right or not seems to be inseparable from the question of what effects it will cause. Thus part if not all of social concern has to do with looking for the right 'handle' by which one can 'get a hold of' the course of history and move it in the right direction. For the movement called Moral Rearmament, ideology was this handle; 'ideas have legs,' so that if we can get a contagious new thought moving, it will make its own way. For others, it is the process of education that ultimately determines the character and course of the civilization; whoever rules the teachers' colleges rules the world...

Whichever the favored 'handle' may be, the structure of this approach is logically the same. One seeks to lift up one focal point in the midst of the course of human relations, one thread of meaning and causality which is more important than the individual persons, their lives and well-being, because it in itself determines wherein their well-being consists. Therefore it is justified to sacrifice to this one 'cause' other subordinate values, including the life and welfare of one's self, one's neighbor, and (of course!) the enemy. We pull this one strategic thread in order to save the whole fabric. We can see this kind of reasoning with Constantine saving the Roman Empire, with Luther saving the Reformation by making an alliance with the princes, or with Khrushchev and his successors saving Marxism by making it somewhat more capitalistic, or with the United States saving democracy by alliances with military dictatorships and by the threatened use of the bomb."

So the question is, where is it that I believe the seat of power lies for the movement of history in our world? While most Christians would say they believe the seat of power is the throne of God, Yoder would likely point to the depths of Christian action and vocalness today in the political realm and say that this belies our true stance. The "moral majority" is a political term for a reason - Christians have so entrenched themselves in governmental affairs that their group is easily identifiable and influential. While the "Moral Majority" as an organization may have disappeared, it has not gone away as a movement.

Let's delve further into Yoder's analysis of how our view of power and shaping history plays out. Yoder says that those who desire to shape history through some mechanism of power do so with three major assumptions. First, they assume that "the relationship of cause and effect is visible, understandable, and manageable, so that if we make our choice on the basis of how we hope society will be moved, it will move in that direction." Second, we assume that "we are adequately informed to be able to set up for ourselves and for all society the goal toward which we seek to move it." Finally, they assume that "effectiveness in moving toward these goals which have been set is itself a moral yardstick." In summary, the movers and shakers of history generally believe in cause and effect, and that their ideal is the moral yardstick through which their actions are to be guided, and through which "good" is to be determined.

Taking that understanding of the working out of power, let's look at the "moral majority" in American politics. Their yardstick for effectiveness is the overt presence of God and his moral laws. By the overt presence of God I would mean Christian paraphernalia (e.g. the ten commandments in courthouses, "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, Bibles in hotel rooms, prayer in schools, etc) as well as a lack of competing idolatrous paraphernalia (e.g. religious symbols from other religions in public places). The second form, having God's moral laws, is ensuring that things like gay marriage are banned, transgendered bathrooms aren't implemented, and religious freedom is instituted and maintained.

The problem with a moral majority view in politics is really quite simple. Christians by and large know both logically and intuitively that effectiveness itself is not a goal. Actions are not deemed just or right based on their

effectiveness. On top of this, there are actions that are morally fine that are actually bad if love is taken out of the equation. Paul speaks to this very clearly when he talks about Christian liberty, and it is the very crux of his love chapter (1 Corinthians 13) - a chapter sandwiched between two chapters discussing how to effectively use the spiritual gifts and how to use them without bickering and competing. Yoder asks, "is there not in Christ's teaching on meekness, or in the attitude of Jesus toward power and servanthood, a deeper question being raised about whether it is our business at all to guide our action by the course we wish history to take?" I don't think there is a better question to ask, especially at this time in American history.

When you end up taking on the metric of effectiveness as your goal, you will find that you end up in one of two camps. You will either end up a conservative, where "any sense of movement is only a threat," or a progressive, where "the discernable movement of history is self-explicating and generally works for good, and therefore is the only terrain of significance from which ethics should self-evidently be derived." Effectiveness will either be measured by preservation or progress. But both of these systems have a major flaw to the Christian. Jesus's ethic was not measured by effectiveness, but rather servanthood and submission. To be a conservative or progressive who marks success by effectiveness makes the assumption "that history has moved us past the time of primitive Christianity and therefore out from under the relevance of the apostolic witness on this question."

Yoder is not surprised, however, that we have moved beyond the teaching of servanthood and submission to one of effectiveness. It was the main temptation of Christ, and it is what the world throws in our face constantly. It is what Yoder says next that clinches everything for me. It is a loosening of the shackles my heart has felt with all of my social compromise in the past decade. It is the spiritual intuition that Christianity is more than just establishing surface level morality through legislation. And it is the clarifying of how such a compromise as we saw in the last election could have come about.

"Whether Jesus be the Christ or not, whether Jesus the Christ be Lord or not, whether this kind of religious language be meaningful or not, most types of ethical approach will keep on functioning just the same... The cross is not a recipe for resurrection. Suffering is not a tool to make people come around, nor a good in itself. But the kind of faithfulness that is willing to accept evident defeat rather than complicity with evil is, by virtue of its conformity with what happens to God when he works among us, aligned with the ultimate triumph of the Lamb.

The vision of ultimate good being determined by faithfulness and not by results is the point where we moderns get off. We confuse the kind of 'triumph of the good,' whose sole guarantee is the resurrection and the promise of the eternal glory of the Lamb, which an immediately accessible triumph which can be manipulated, just past the next social action campaign, by getting hold of society as a whole at the top. What in the Middle Ages was done by Roman Christianity or Islam is now being attempted by Marxism and by democratic nationalism. In spite of all the difference in language, and in the detailed vision of just what a good society would look like (and as a matter of fact even the visions are not that different), the real uniqueness of each of these positions is only that it identifies differently the particular moral elite which it holds to be worthy of guiding its society from the top. We may well prefer a democratically controlled oligarchy to some other kind. We may well have a choice between Marxist and Islamic and other statements of the vision of the good society. But what our contemporaries find themselves practically incapable of challenging is that the social problem can be solved by determining which aristocrats are morally justified, by virtue of their better ideology, to use the power of society from the top so as to lead the whole system in their direction.

Once a desirable course of history has been labeled, once we know what the right cause is, then it is further assumed that we should be willing to sacrifice for it; sacrifice not only to our own values but also those of the neighbor and especially the enemy. In other words, the achievement of the good cause, the implementation in history of the changes we have determined to be desirable, creates a new autonomous ethical value, 'relevance' itself a good in the name of which evil may be done."

Christ himself, the one who moved his whole ministry towards the cross, teaches us what he thinks of effectiveness as a metric. It is wisdom. But God makes the "wise" things of the world foolish, for it is the "foolishness" of God that is truly wisdom. We see this clearly summarized in Philippians 2. In the context of being in right relationship, Paul says (emphases mine),

"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be **used to his own advantage**;
7 rather, he **made himself nothing**
by taking the very nature of a **servant**,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he **humbled** himself
by becoming **obedient to death**—
even death on a cross!"

While many interpret this as Jesus not grasping at deity, this doesn't make whole sense of the passage in its context. For Christ was deity. What does it mean for him to not grasp at it? What we see is that

"Christ renounced the claim to govern history...What Jesus renounced was thus not simply the metaphysical status of sonship but rather the untrammelled sovereign exercise of power in the affairs of that humanity amid which he came to dwell. His emptying of himself, his accepting the form of servanthood and obedience unto death, is precisely his renunciation of lordship, his apparent abandonment of any obligation to be effective in making history move down the right track... The universal testimony of Scripture is that Christians are those who follow Christ at just this point."

Yoder goes on,

"The lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power!" John is here saying, not as an inscrutable paradox but as a meaningful affirmation, that the cross is not the sword, suffering and not brute power determines the meaning of history. The key to the obedience of God's people is not their effectiveness but their patience (Rev. 13:10). The triumph of the right is assured not by the might that comes to the aid of the right, which is of course the justification of the use of violence and other kinds of power in every human conflict. The triumph of the right, although it is assured, is sure because of the power of the resurrection and not because of any calculation of causes and effects, nor because of the inherently greater strength of the good guys. The relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection... we find the most desperate encounter of the church's weakness (John was probably in exile, Paul in prison) with the power of the evil rulers of the present age. But this position is nothing more than a logical unfolding of the meaning of the work of Jesus Christ himself, whose choice of suffering servanthood rather than violent lordship, of love to the point of death rather than righteousness backed by power, was itself the fundamental direction of his life. Jesus was so faithful to the enemy love of God that it cost him all his effectiveness; he gave up every handle on history.

So the goal of the Christian in the world is not effectiveness, but servanthood, as seen in the example of Christ and the command for us to take up our crosses, as well as holding the expectation Christ's disciples should have of persecution. Yoder moves on to explore how this servanthood and submission are exemplified in scripture, and how we are to pursue them rather than effectiveness.

Before moving on, however, it is important to take into consideration Yoder's claim that the West has emphasized personal justification too heavily. This isn't to say that personal justification is unimportant, but that the Bible teaches much more than individualism. It is important to understand this point, as our servanthood and submission are always grounded in relationships, not in the individual.

Those who grew up in conservative circles and learned scriptures for evangelism likely know Ephesians 2:8-9 by heart. This speaks to our personal justification through grace by faith. But Yoder shows that this justification isn't just a personal thing, but a communal one. Ephesians 2:11-22 says,

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)— 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in

Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

As Yoder summarizes, "The work of Christ is not only that he saves the soul of individuals and henceforth they can love each other better; the work of Christ, the making of peace, the breaking down of the wall, is itself the constituting of a new community made up of two kinds of people, those who had lived under the law and those who had not." Yoder quotes Markus Barth to further clarify,

"Sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the means of justification: only in Christ's death and resurrection is the new man created from at least two, a Jew and a Greek, a man and a woman, a slave and a free man, etc.... The new man is present in actuality where two previously alien and hostile men come together before God. Justification in Christ is thus not an individual miracle happening to this person or that person, which each may seek or possess for himself. Rather justification by grace is a joining together of this person and that person, of the near and far;... it is a social event."

Such a notion puts into perspective Christ's words that the world would know his disciples by the way they loved one another. While Christianity is composed of individuals, were only individuals to exist there would be no Christianity. The triune, eternally communal God, not only reconciles individuals to himself, but also the new community of the Kingdom.

To explore the importance of relationships, Yoder examines a number of examples including the relationship of slave and free, husband and wife, and parent and child. But the example that stuck out to me most was that of women and the church. Yoder expounds on a very difficult passage - women covering their heads in church. This is a passage I had never heard explained well at all. But Yoder shows how the communal nature of Christianity and submission over effectiveness might explain such a passage.

We see in Corinth that a problem has arisen in the church. In their culture, a woman was to have her head covered, likely as a veiling of protection when she left home, and an indication that "she belonged somewhere in society." She had a protector in her husband or father. And of course, this was also a symbol of subjection. But didn't Christ come to free us from bondage? Didn't Paul say that we are all one in Christ? Didn't this community at Corinth receive that message? Yes. Yoder says that "if we are to understand the point of this passage, we must assume that the women in Corinth had heard [the message of her equal standing]. Otherwise [the women] would not be taking off their veils, especially not during the worship service." Yoder's point is that the only reason there is an issue with women being countercultural is because the gospel of freedom and oneness had reached these women's ears. The natural consequence is that they embraced their equality and loosed themselves from this social bond.

Surely Paul's response, then, would be that the veil of subjection should be taken off. But that's not what he says. Paul tells her to be subordinate. It is at this point that most interpreters go astray and either say that moral understanding was progressing or that the Bible is and always has been misogynistic. But Yoder exclaims that this passage is right at the heart of true morality and true communal Christianity. Yoder says,

"[Paul's] first element of counsel is to remain in the social status within which one is; 'in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God' (v. 24). This applied to the slave's remaining a slave, to the single person's remaining single, to the married woman's remaining with her unbelieving husband, to the forsaken married woman's remaining unmarried without her husband as long as he

lives; to accepting one's status as circumcised or as not circumcised. The reasoning supporting this general admonition is not that to change in any of these ways would be sinful or wrong, in the sense of an infraction of the law of God. The concern of the apostle is rather to assist everyone to remain 'free from anxieties' (v. 32), in a world whose structures are impermanent, and not so important that we should concentrate our efforts upon changing our status with regard to them. ('The appointed time has grown very short; from now on let those who have wives live as though they have none...for the form of this world is passing away' [vv. 29-31].)"

Our human view of freedom is that more opportunity and mobility provides us with more freedom. While that is true to an extent, Paul's point is that understanding our true status and the impermanence of worldly structures and status is what allows us to be free. In fact, at times fighting against one's social status betrays all senses of freedom. In one sense it may indicate that an individual requires a different social standing to truly feel that they have value. This belies their misunderstanding of value. Some of the women in Corinth may have believed they needed to be veil-free for their equality to be real. Secondly, freedom is taken away in that fighting for social status creates tension in all sorts of communities. For the women in Corinth this likely included tension with their husbands, other women, and their local community. Anxiety takes away one's ability to identify as valuable and free. Finally, pushing back against social status can take away freedoms. For some of the women in Corinth, there may have been strong repercussions. There may have been fines, they may have been forcefully kept in their houses, or they may have been abused by those outside their home. I'm not sure what the social repercussions were for them, but fighting one's social status often brings about these sorts of things.

Paul's point, then, is that if we understand our status in Christ, then it is true that women shouldn't have to wear a veil. But if we understand our status in Christ and our social context, we can see that women wearing a veil in no way detracts from their true value or freedom in Christ, regardless of the value the pro-veil faction attributes to them. If a woman in Corinth were to recognize that her value is equal with men's so that not wearing a veil doesn't devalue her - then certainly she can recognize that wearing a veil doesn't devalue her either. And in her social context, it may be better for her - both in terms of her freedom and her testimony to others - that she willingly subordinate to this custom.

Of course such a notion will sound horrendous to many progressives. To willingly subordinate oneself is despicable. Nobody would do such a thing, and to give in is to devalue oneself and their class. But the Bible says so much more on this freedom and subordination. Yoder explains,

"Yet right alongside this concern for that freedom which is maintained by not being rebellious about one's status in the present, there runs a second strand of instruction which seems at first to be opposed to it. If a slave can become free, he should avail himself of this opportunity (v. 21). If the husband of the forsaken woman dies she is free to remarry (v. 39); if anyone is strongly inclined toward marriage, that is quite proper (v. 36), but a freed man must not become a slave since that would be to move away from rather than toward freedom (vv. 22-23). Thus the Christian is called to view social status from the perspective of maximizing freedom. One who is given an opportunity to exercise more freedom should do so, because we are called to freedom in Christ. Yet that freedom can already become real within one's present status by voluntarily accepting subordination, in view of the relative unimportance of such social distinctions when seen in the light of the coming fulfillment of God's purposes... The apostles rather transformed the concept of living within a role by finding how in each role the servanthood of Christ - the voluntary subordination of one who knows that another regime is normative - could be made concrete. The wife or child or slave who can accept subordination because 'it is fitting in the Lord' has not forsaken the radicality of the call of Jesus; it is precisely this attitude toward the structures of this world, this freedom from needing to smash them since they are about to crumble anyway, which Jesus had been the first to teach and in his suffering concretize."

As Yoder points out again and again, the New Testament is all about relational living. Jesus Christ himself lived relationally and subordinated himself to God, despite Satan's continuing attempts to have Christ bring the Kingdom in a way that did not involve suffering. Yet Christ was obedient even to death, and death on a cross. Paul is by no means teaching that women, slaves, or children are unequal with men, masters, and parents. In fact, we can see by the disunity caused by the women at Corinth or Onesimus the slave that the implication of equality in Christ was well understood. But Paul had to continually preach towards the temptation that faced Christ, for it is the same temptation that faces humanity - control. Paul reminds us that just as Christ condescended to become a servant, and just as he fulfilled his role by willfully giving up his right to call the shots, so it is to be with us. We are to be content in whatever role we find ourselves in knowing that our value is

unchanged by our role, and our Sovereign is in control. As our example of servanthood and willful subordination takes root, we may find, as early Rome did, that society is changed much more meaningfully, more deeply, and more permanently by humble submission than it is by armed revolt or coercive legislation. And if the world isn't changed through our effort and means, it by no means changes our standing with God. Effectiveness as the world sees it is no replacement for humble faith, submission, and obedience to God's ethic and agenda.

Christianity's View of Government's Role:

Thus far Yoder has set up the idea that Christ's life of willing subordination is a model for us as Christians. This subordination is done within the context of culture, but more pointedly for the Christian, it is done within a specific culture of a new kingdom, the Kingdom. It is here that reconciliation takes place and where the world sees the inexplicable, undeniable, compelling love of God. But that leaves the Christian with a very important question. If we are in a new Kingdom and we are to live as Christ, what implications does that have for our relationship to human kingdoms - to the political sphere?

Yoder delves into Romans 13, probably the best place to start when dealing with the topic of government. However, Yoder does something that I have seen very few people do - he puts the passage on government in the context of the surrounding chapters. When he does that, it makes Romans 13 sound much clearer than I had heard it before. Yoder summarizes,

"The entire text thus sees Christian nonconformity and suffering love as driven and drawn by a sense of God's triumphant movement from the merciful past into a triumphant future. Any interpretation of 13:1-7 that would make it the expression of a static or conservative undergirding of the present social system would therefore represent a refusal to take seriously the context. Any interpretation in which God's mercies are not seen as overcoming hostilities through the creation of community, reaching even the nuts and bolts of financial sharing and missionary support, has covered over the meaning of each part of the text by not seeing the whole...The immediate concrete meaning of this text for the Christian Jews in Rome, in the face of official anti-Semitism and the rising arbitrariness of the Imperial regime, is to call them away from any notion of revolution or insubordination. The call is to a nonresistant attitude toward a tyrannical government. This is the immediate and concrete meaning of the text; how strange then to make it the classic proof for the duty of Christians to kill."

When one begins to look back to chapter 12 of Romans and read about enduring persecution, being patient in affliction, not repaying evil with evil, allowing the Lord to avenge, feeding our enemies, and allowing good to overcome evil - it seems strange then for Paul to move into a passage that tells Christians how government is the one institution in which their killing can be justified. This is even stranger when you look at the verses immediately following the government passage that discusses love doing no harm (vs. 9-10). No, it seems the point of Romans 13 is that even when the government oppresses us, we know that God is sovereign over it. We can be good Christians by subordinating ourselves to the government - even a bad and idolatrous one. Even bad governments provide a structure wherein individuals can function and thrive and justice can be served - more so than in anarchy, and always in light of God's sovereignty.

In context, the first important thing to note is that Paul is telling the Christian how to subordinate to the government, not how to work within the government. He has told the Christian concepts that should mark a Christian life - enduring, patience in affliction, repaying only with good, giving vengeance over to God, and love as never doing harm - and puts the notion of government right in the middle. The government doesn't endure persecution, they stamp out oppression. The government isn't patient in affliction, they look for effective results immediately. The government does not repay evil with good. The government does not give vengeance over to God, but bears the sword. The government does not love, for it constantly distributes harm. It may be true that governments are better than anarchy, it may be true that God is sovereign over political kingdoms, and it may be true that Christians should willingly subordinate themselves under the governments into which they are born. But Christians live in the Kingdom Christ established - a kingdom that willingly subordinates in relationships, accepts social status with the patient movement towards freedom, and cannot do harm if love is to define them. How is it that a Christian can then participate in most or any governmental function? Even in a democracy, subordination is not the standard outworking. The will of the majority overpowers the will of the minority, the greater brother over the weaker. Government does not live out the Kingdom community, and in many ways is contrary to the true freedom found there.

In thinking about this view of the Kingdom's relation to government, it is important to note two particular points. The first is that while Romans 13 tells us that God is sovereign over government, this in no way implies that God approves of their methodology. One of the clearest places such a concept can be shown is in Isaiah 10, where God, in a sense, raises up Assyria's military to judge Israel, but at the same time condemns Assyria for their violence against Israel. While God ordained the circumstances for Israel's judgment, God also judged the wickedness of the Assyrians for their hearts and actions. Yoder says,

"There is a most specific dialectical interplay around the concepts of vengeance and wrath. Christians are told (12:19) never to exercise vengeance but to leave it to God and to wrath. Then the authorities are recognized (13:4) as executing the particular functions which the Christian was to leave to God. It is inconceivable that these two verses, using such similar language, should be meant to be read independently of one another. This makes it clear that the function exercised by government is not the function to be exercised by Christians. However able an infinite God may be to work at the same time through the sufferings of his believing disciples who return good for evil and through the wrathful violence of the authorities who punish evil with evil, such behavior is for humans not complementary but in disjunction. Divine providence can in its own sovereign permissive way 'use' an idolatrous Assyria (Isa. 10) or Rome. This takes place, however, without declaring that the destructive action by pagan powers which God thus 'uses' is morally good or that participation in it is incumbent upon the covenant people. That God turns human wrath to praise (Ps. 76:10) is an affirmation of providence overriding human rebellion, not ratifying it."

The second point to consider is that subordination to the government is a very different call than allegiance or obedience. Yoder explains this vital distinction as follows,

"It is not by accident that the imperative of 13:1 is not literally one of obedience. The Greek language has good words to denote obedience, in the sense of completely bending one's will and one's actions to the desires of another. What Paul calls for, however, is subordination. This verb is based upon the same root as the ordering of the powers of God. Subordination is significantly different from obedience. The conscientious objector who refuses to do what government demands, but still remains under the sovereignty of that government and accepts the penalties which it imposes, or the Christian who refuses to worship Caesar but still permits Caesar to put him or her to death, is being subordinate even though not obeying.

The imperative and the enablement of this subordination are found not in fear or in calculation of how best to survive, but, as we saw, 'in the mercies of God' (12:1) or in 'conscience' (13:5). But how does conscience motivate subordination? If the ground of our subordination is not God's having created the governments, what is it? Further attention to the motif of subordination as it is urged upon the slave (1 Pet. 2:13ff., 19ff.), or upon wives and children (Eph. 5:21ff.; Col. 3:18ff.), shows the reason to be that Jesus Christ himself accepted subordination and humiliation (Phil. 2:5ff.). The willingness to suffer is then not merely a test of our patience or a dead space of waiting; it is itself a participation in the character of God's victorious patience with the rebellious powers of creation. We subject ourselves to government because it was in so doing that Jesus revealed and achieved God's victory."

As Christians, then, it is our job to recognize as our only sovereign the Lord Jesus Christ. To God alone we are to be both fully subordinate and fully obedient - even unto persecution and death. Understanding that God is sovereign over all provides us with the peace of Romans 12, and the ability to willingly subordinate ourselves as Romans 13 calls us to. And both of these notions come together in the example of Jesus Christ, the bringer of the new Kingdom in which we are citizens. He has called us to be content with our status, to avoid violence, to have our actions aligned with God and independent of the powerful institutions of our day, and to avoid coercive power. Yoder summarizes in a similar fashion.

"It is not the case that two imperatives affirmed in the New Testament, obedience to government on the one hand and loving the enemy on the other, between which we must choose when they contradict. Romans 12-13 and Matthew 5-7 are not in contradiction or in tension. They both instruct Christians to be nonresistant in all their relationships, including the social. They both call on the disciples of Jesus to renounce participation in the interplay of egoisms which this world calls 'vengeance' or 'justice.' They both call Christians to respect and be subject to the historical process in which the sword continues to be wielded and to bring about a kind of order under fire, but not to perceive in the wielding of the sword their own reconciling ministry."

The Christian Life Under Government

So we have seen that Christians have two major obligations under government - subordinate themselves and maintain obedience to a sovereign God in their subordination. However, the big question that arises next is how the Christian can live a life of impact under such a worldview. While Yoder has pointed out that the metric of effectiveness is not a Christian one, we also understand that God has placed us in this world to make a difference. If we acknowledge that the government is largely a power structure to be avoided for the Christian, aren't we just giving in to the notion of Christian withdrawal? Yoder addresses this rebuttal well when he says,

"It is thus a fundamental error to conceive of the position of the church in the New Testament in the face of social issues as a 'withdrawal, or to see this position as motivated by the Christians' weakness by their numerical insignificance or low social class, or by fear of persecution, or by scrupulous concern to remain uncontaminated by the world. What can be called the 'otherness of the church' is an attitude rooted in strength and not in weakness. It consists in being a herald of liberation and not a community of slaves. It is not a detour or a waiting period, looking forward to better days which one hopes might come a few centuries later; it was rather a victory when the church rejected the temptations of the Zealot and Maccabean patriotism and Herodian collaboration. The church accepted as a gift being the 'new humanity' created by the cross and not by the sword..."

All resistance and every attack against the gods of this age will be unfruitful, unless the church itself is resistance and attack, unless it demonstrates in its own life and fellowship how believers can live freed from the Powers. We can only preach the manifold wisdom of God to Mammon if our life displays that we are joyfully freed from his clutches. To reject nationalism we must begin by no longer recognizing in our own bosoms any difference between peoples. We shall only resist social injustice and disintegration of community if justice and mercy prevail in our own common life and social differences have lost their power to divide. Clairvoyant and warning words and deeds aimed at state or nation are meaningful only insofar as they spring from a church whose inner life is itself its proclamation of God's manifold wisdom to the 'Powers in the air.'... 'Our duty is not to bring the powers to their knees. This is Jesus Christ's own task. He has taken care of this thus far and will continue to do so.'"

The church then has two roles within its subordination to government and obedience to God. The first role of the church is a positive one. It is to be the Kingdom community. "...the very existence of the church is its primary task. It is in itself a proclamation of the lordship of Christ to the powers from whose dominion the church has begun to be liberated. The church does not attack the powers; this Christ has done. The church concentrates on not being seduced by them. By existing the church demonstrates that their rebellion has been vanquished." As Yoder says, it is only a church that is living in new community that will be able to have influence in the world. This we see no more clearly than today, when the fractured church's moral calls fall on deaf ears due to the hypocrisy and enslavement to money, lust, and government so prevalent in the church. To be "effective" the church must be obedient to the foolish wisdom of God. It is only in this manner that believers, and subsequently the lives touched by believers, will be freed from the powers that be.

The second role of the church is a negative one. The church is to avoid being seduced by the powers that be. Just as Christ was tempted to bring the Kingdom throughout his ministry and refused, so it is to be with the church today. Money tempts us because it provides us with a larger platform from which to speak and access where we may not otherwise have access. And while money isn't inherently wrong, we must be very wary of its pursuit because it is a power that tempts us. Political platforms may be alluring because we believe we can circumvent the painful process of the cross in our lives by manipulating and coercing the volition of others, but this is a fool's errand, sacrificing the sovereign wisdom of God for a quick fix that is no fix at all. The church must avoid the seduction of the powers, no matter how strong their message of "effectiveness" is.

This is our assurance and hope, that in avoiding the seduction of the Powers and in the death - and just as importantly the life - of Jesus Christ, we have victory in the world.

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

encounters the other power and value structures of its history, the same kind of relevance that the man Jesus had for those whom he served until they killed him."

Conclusion

I am still trying to sift through where I line up with Yoder's thoughts – especially as they pertain to the implications of pacifism and the abstention from government. I think his work is a very important one to consider due to the messiah complex we slap onto politics, but it would be a terrible thing to simply swing the pendulum the other way without careful consideration. I want to pose each concluding point as questions to consider and leave you to grapple with the answer I believe Yoder would give.

1. Is Christ's life as important to us as his death? No Christian will deny the importance of Christ's death for our sins, especially most in the West who hold to penal substitutionary atonement. However, to place so much emphasis on his death as payment for our past and not on his death as that which frees us unto new life and the new Kingdom does a huge disservice to the work of Christ. The joy and hope we have is not that our debt is expunged but that our relational standing is made right. We are now in right relationship with God and can be in a right restored relationship with our fellow brothers and sisters.

For many of my friends who are in the Reformed tradition, Men like John Owen (e.g. "The Death of Death in the Death of Christ") should ring loudly on this point. We understand that Christ's work was not simply his death on the cross. Sacrifice alone would make him an imperfect high priest. Christ's work as high priest extends into intercession on behalf of those for whom he sacrificed – the application. Christ's work extends not only beyond the cross to intercession, but in the procession of the Holy Spirit unto believers, as Joel and other prophets looked forward to. It is this Spirit who now lives within believers and transforms individuals in the context of communities to live in the Kingdom. The gospel is not death, but life – Kingdom life.

2. Is the Gospel death or new birth? If Christ's life is vital to our understanding of our lives and obligations, and if Christ reigns in power now as the Scripture seems to indicate, then his example and his power are applicable now. While Christians certainly have hope in a future resurrection, our new birth into the Kingdom happens here and now. We are already there, though not fully yet. Christ's enemies are being made his footstool, but just as the Powers were defeated by Christ's willing subordination and servanthood, so they are defeated in the same way today, in Christ's sacrificial body, the church. We are so free in our new lives that not even the fear of death can hold us back from choosing rightly. We are God's subjects living in his Kingdom under his rule. We are made right before him and our brethren and should live freely now.

3. If Christ is seated at the right hand of God and rules in power, how does our allegiance to his Kingdom impact our allegiance to earthly kingdoms? This will be one of the biggest points of contention for modern Christians. Since Constantine and Augustine, Christianity and politics have been mingled inseparably. But should this be? Many in the early church railed against participation in the government and military, and any (as far as I am aware) early quote (pre 200, and largely up through 300) one finds on the government - and particularly military service – view the two in a negative and prohibitive manner. While the context of some of these quotes may be due to the overt idolatry associated with some of these services in a country where Caesar was also god, it is hard to imagine that similar compromises aren't required in many areas of today's political and military service.

The big question, then, is "where is there conflict between the two kingdoms?" If God has truly called us to love our enemies, even to our own harm, to avoid courts for our own internal judges, to do no harm and return good in the face of evil - it is hard to imagine how this doesn't preclude a Christian from close participation in the kingdom of men because the Christian has a primary allegiance to the Kingdom of God. The Christian owes the Kingdom allegiance and obedience, while the earthly kingdom is owed only subordination. Such a stance means embracing persecution for not buying into a system the Powers prescribe. It also may mean forgoing effectiveness as the world defines effectiveness. But most importantly, it means following the example of Christ, obeying the king, and subordinating our wills to the God we say is sovereign.

4. If we truly believe the church is the seat of power, how does that influence where we spend our social capital? Christians believe that Christ came to establish his Kingdom. Christians believe that the church is the body of Christ in the world. Christians believe that Christ's words are wise prescriptions for our lives. If we are a new creation - both individually and communally, then how should that influence where we spend our

"lobbying" potential? How much time and money should we spend on changing the minds of politicians versus working within our own church community and local community?

As a wonderful example of this, look at the film "The Drop Box." (<http://www.thedropboxfilm.com/>). It is a film about an elderly Christian couple who recognize the travesty of abortion in South Korea and create a box where mothers can place their children instead of leaving them out in the elements to die. Knowing that most of the children who will be abandoned will have special needs, this couple has taken on caring for and finding homes for many children over the decades. None of this is to say that a governmental ban on abortion is necessarily better or worse than allowing for it, but that the method whereby this couple moves forward is compelling in a number of ways.

First, their actions avoid any legitimate condemnation and don't create the vitriolic atmosphere lobbying and politicization bring. Second, their money and efforts go directly into helping people. Third, their efforts directly impact their community and their relationships. Fourth, they are blameless in their ethic, as nobody can tell them they are only pro-birth and not pro-life. They actually contribute to human thriving and uphold life. We could go on and on about how such actions escape blame, stifle judgmentalism against them, create an atmosphere of love, actually helps individuals in the real world and local community, and displays a love unfathomable to a world who desperately needs to see such a thing. If the church is the seat of power, and we believe that, this is how we should live and spend our resources.

5. Should effectiveness be an ethical metric for a Christian? Christians often belabor the point – and for good reason – that ends don't justify the means. Euthanasia is a despicable evil, even if it ends suffering and allows the rest of a society to have more resources and a better quality of living. Life is valuable and we should not end a life lightly (or for the Christian, perhaps not at all). Abortion for most or all circumstances is considered by Christians to be wrong. It doesn't matter if a mother can't provide for her kids, if her kids will experience physical, mental, or economic hardship, or whatever else – the ends don't justify the means.

While the above situations were morally intuitive to me, there were many situations that weren't. For instance, there was an episode of M.A.S.H. where a group of individuals was hiding from the North Koreans and one of the members in the group had a baby. The baby started screaming and the mother had to choose between smothering the baby and killing it to save everyone, or allowing the baby to cry and have the whole group found and killed. To me, that was a situation in which I had no idea how I'd act. To kill a child is horrific, but to allow fifty to die so that one doesn't have to be killed by my hands seems worse. Fifty to one. Before reading Yoder's book, I thought that the terrible deed had to be done for the greater good. My stance on abortion and my stance on this situation were not the same. I was a hypocrite.

After reading "The Politics of Jesus," I recognized that I had always had an "ends justify the means" mentality. While I might not have taken this as far as many non-Christians, I and my fellow Christians were just a little farther down the utilitarian scale. We still were consequentialists. Nothing made this more clear than the last election did for me.

Since Yoder has highlighted my tendency towards the metric of effectiveness, I recognize that the answer to the M.A.S.H. moral dilemma is simple to answer, though it would be hard to enact. I should not kill the child to save the fifty. Knowing this, it might mean that I let any group with whom I travel know that if such a scenario came up, I would not kill. That may mean they ask me not to travel with them, increasing my likelihood of death. But whatever it means for my physical wellbeing, I should not let such a decision corrupt my soul. It is far better that my body be thrown to the flames and my soul be saved – my soul escaping the flames unscathed.

This last election was the first time I recognized my tendency towards measuring success in terms of effectiveness. The Republican platform is more friendly towards Christians, promotes religious freedom (at least for Christians), is anti-abortion, pro-traditional family, etc. These are all platforms that many conservative Christians desire to see advanced. But as I thought about the candidate representing the Republican party, the immoral actions that characterized his life, and the questionable ways in which he wanted to advance the conservative platform – it crossed some line in my moral threshold. It was too much. I wanted to end abortion, but I didn't want to be a hypocrite by advancing agendas that dismissed the needs of people beyond their birth. I wanted abortion to end, but I knew that advancing a political platform was only effective so long as that platform held power. Legislation would not change the hearts of people. I wanted to end abortion, but I didn't want to put my hopes for legislating against it on the back of an individual who was so morally flawed. I wanted to end abortion, but I didn't want my savior to be identified with the narcissistic, self-proclaimed and Republican

acclaimed "savior." I wanted to end abortion, but I didn't want to do it through the power of coercion and majority rule.

What Yoder provides is not just a negative ethic about what Christians should avoid. It is a positive one. We are to flee the Powers that be when they are in conflict with the true Kingdom. Running to a system that is founded upon coercion, majority rule, moralism, immorality, violence, and vitriol is not what we are to embrace as followers of Christ. We are to be little Christs who love our enemies, obey our savior, trust in God's sovereignty, be willing to be persecuted and die, and bring light, not darkness into the world. Observing this last election, I saw Christians so willing to go against the negative ethic and do harm, hate enemies, and seek self-preservation, with so little of the positive ethic willing to stand up for the oppressed, bear persecution, and love even their enemies. It rather convinced me that politics may be the most effective route to take, as it has worked to bring back the Mexico City Policy against abortion and appoint conservative Supreme Court Justices. But for all of that effectiveness, I fear it has irreparably marred both the body and image of Christ for decades to come.

6. Finally, when looking at Christ's prophetic expectation for his followers and when looking at the common Christian experience from around the world and throughout the ages - what does it say about us that we live lives devoid of real persecution? As Yoder points out, persecution and the bearing of the cross are distinct events. We move towards these events. They are culminations of continued willful decisions to throw off the powers of our day as we live our lives in a specific manner that offends the established institutions. Is it that we Christians truly live in such a blessed and holy nation that persecution just doesn't result?

One needs only take a cursory glance at history to see that much of the Christianity in America has been a Christianity defined by the avoidance of persecution because it was a Christianity that avoided putting on Christ. Atrocities committed against Native Americans? We sacrificed on the altar of Colonialism and Imperialism. Slavery? We sacrificed on the altar of nationalism and the in-race. Unethical labor practices? We sacrificed on the altar of the economy. Civil Rights and women's rights? We sacrificed on the altar of religious institutions, not wanting to acknowledge wrongdoing and fallibility. Japanese internment camps? We sacrificed on the altar of self-preservation and safety. For the minority of Christians who stood firm in the example of Christ and who have joined the heavenly cloud of witnesses before us - they chose persecution. For some it was social ostracization, and for others it was death. But no one can say that there was ever a time in our country's history when persecution wasn't the road less traveled by Christians, but the road that needed to be traveled. The road less traveled is an inevitability for true Christians. It is the narrow gate - the eye of the needle.

I wonder now what persecutions I am avoiding and in need of embracing. We have many to choose from. Maybe I should really stand up for the unborn, through the seat of power, the church, and with the daily strength God so graciously apportions me. Maybe I should truly stand up for refugees and house them, or call my church to shelter them in the midst of their persecution, creating the potential for my own. Maybe I take a stand against mainstream Evangelicals who have bought into the idolatry of the political sphere and face being called a heretic and disowned by the people I love most. Perhaps obedience to my king requires that I disobey my government, though I willingly subordinate to the consequences that this may bring. Opportunity for real persecution is never far off when Christ is put on.

When we measure our lives by how well we avoid persecution, how well we forcefully impose morality on others, and how well we accrue comfort and wealth - I have to ask whether we're using the appropriate metric. The metric of Christ not only indicates that our current measures are wrong, but also that we are a long way from the metric of Calvary. We allow Christ to bear his cross and relish in this thought, while refusing to bear our own. We are like the disciples when they knew only crucifixion without the promise of resurrection. We scatter in the face of hardship, scared that our fate may be like our savior's. We are not like the disciples who knew the risen Christ - fearlessly living under their sovereign king and obedient to him alone, even when his decrees seemed foolish and lead to a torturous end.

While the world stands in need of those willing to die to self, we Christians are content to let Jesus do the dying alone. We allow our savior who was sacrificed once for all to die over and over again as the only example of love - an ethic we are unwilling to exemplify. We are not disciples, we are freeloaders. We've counted the cost of discipleship and found it too rich for our blood - yet suitable for God's. We maintain the power politicized

moralism grants to us and live our lives as demigods rather servants. We refuse to even consider dying the death of a martyr. For the sake of our agenda we forsake all others, while a savior asks us to make him Lord and forsake ourselves.