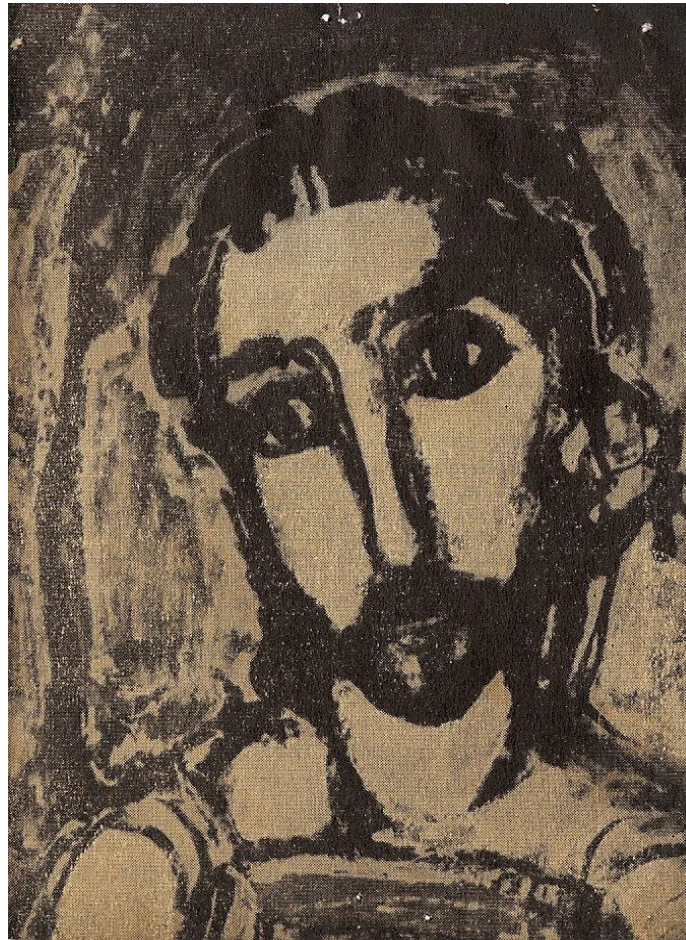# The Church as Alternative *Polis*:
An Anabaptist Perspective on Diakonia in the Church of Norway

How can the 'sectarian' theology of John Howard Yoder contribute to strengthening the understanding and practice of diakonia in the Church of Norway which, though historically a majority-church, appears to be becoming a functional minority?

by
John E. Krahn

Georges Rouault

Vicit Agnus Noster, eum sequamur—"Our Lamb has conquered; Him let us follow"

Abstract

Research question: *How can the 'sectarian' theology of John Howard Yoder contribute to strengthening the understanding and practice of diakonia in the Church of Norway which, though historically a majority-church, appears to be becoming a functional minority?*

In the CoN's Plan for Diakonia (PFD) diakonia is defined as the 'gospel in action'. This is a paradigm shift which moves diakonia from the 'worldly regiment' to the 'spiritual regiment'; within the doctrine of Justification by Faith it moves diakonia from law to gospel. Using a Liberation Theology-based praxis-action-praxis methodology, this study argues that these doctrines do not adequately support the paradigm shift. The hermeneutical 'location' out of which these doctrines developed was a variation of the Constantinian synthesis of church and state. When theological reflection takes place from a position of power in society it tends to legitimate the goals of the state and reinforce a conservative social praxis. The new PFD calls the church to a more radical social ethic. This study presents the theology of J.H.Yoder, an Anabaptist whose social ethic, though rejected by Lutheran theology, supports the PFD paradigm shift. Yoder argues that: 1) the social ethics of Jesus are found throughout the NT, 2) justification, sin, the cross, and the sacraments are all rooted in the radical ethics lived and taught by Jesus and the community he established, 3) the 'principalities and powers' is NT language describing power and helps to explain the autonomy of politics, 4) the message of Jesus was political. The cross is Jesus' way of 'ruling' and overcoming evil; servanthood replaces dominion, forgiveness absorbs hostility. This study argues that the CoN is becoming a minority church. Yoder's theology can strengthen congregational diakonia and provoke the re-formulations of Lutheran doctrine the CoN needs to meet the challenges of its new minority status.

Key words: social ethics, hermeneutics, diakonia, Pauline theology,

Preface

Having worked for many years as a carpenter, writing this thesis has been similar to building a house. My two-year study at the Diakonhjemmet has prepared me to 'construct' this thesis with different materials, some which I had with me when I started, others that are new. As everyone knows, a well-built house is never the work of just one person. I have been fortunate to have the help of many others whose contributions I want to recognize.

First I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Kjell Nordstokke. He is a 'master builder' whose experience, insight and generous spirit have been a great encouragement to me. Our discussions have provoked new reflections on my own theological heritage. In the process I have discovered a treasured ally in the common task which Luther called *ecclesia semper reformanda*—the continuing struggle to discern what it means to be the people of God in our age. Thanks go too to my fellow 'apprentices'. We have shared office space, ideas and meals. When I found myself overwhelmed by the piles of 'building materials'—both supplied and needed—there was encouragement to be found. I want to especially thank my wife Hilde whose generous support—despite her being at times a single-parent—has modeled diakonia in the ordinariness of daily life. Thanks go too to my three daughters Katinka, Tiril and Frieda. Their hugs at the end of long days brought healing, comfort and joy!

I want to dedicate this study to the Lutheran confession into which I have been adopted. The emphasis on God's boundless grace has been a significant gift to one who is sometimes tempted to believe that the Kingdom of God stands or falls on my faithfulness. I submit these reflections to the discernment of the hermeneutical community of which I am a part—the Diakonhjemmet, my own local congregation and the wider Lutheran confession. Their contributions will help to correct and fill in the many gaps which my being only one small member of the church catholic implies.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge that it is the triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—who has daily carried me in this building process. In times of confusion and self-doubt I have needed to become silent and listen. Many times I have been given an awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence and illumination. Without this inspiration, diaconal theory, like yesterday's manna, becomes stale and dried-out. Yet with the Spirit's power diaconal praxis—and a master's thesis—can be born.

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John E. Krahn,
Oslo, Pentecost 2010.

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1 Introduction

In her well-known book *Religion in Britain Since 1945*, sociologist Grace Davie begins her introduction by recounting one of the more interesting responses in a survey on religious commitment. In answer to the question, 'Do you believe in God?' one respondent replied 'Yes.' To the follow-up question, 'Do you believe in a God who can change the course of events on earth?' the respondent replied, 'No, just the ordinary one' (Davie 1994:1). Consider as well the following response Norwegian sociologist Olav Helge Angell reports in his study entitled "Church-Based Welfare Agency and Public Religion". Commenting on what role local churches play in diaconal work, a local leader for one of the Church of Norway's (CoN) most respected diaconal institutions, City Mission said: 'I think that the role of the local church is related to *traditional church activities*. To me it seems more important to improve the public welfare system' (2007:184, my emphasis). In different ways both these statements say much about the content of belief and the role of the church in what some describe as post-Christian Europe. For those (like myself) who believe that the content of the church's faith is still 'Good News', and who long to see the church perceived as relevant to the deepest needs of the post-modern person, as well as concrete issues such as climate change and economic justice, such statements are a source of sadness.

Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor says that post-modern western societies are characterized by two dominant and contradictory tendencies: the emphasis on self-realization and the strong faith in collective solutions for solving social problems (Wyller 1998:200). Between the micro and the macro levels in Taylor's polarity there is a vacuum which the two examples above describe sociologically. This study will also try to describe this vacuum theologically. One of the central assertions which I will seek to demonstrate and respond to is that the Church of Norway's new Plan for Diakonia (PFD) articulates an understanding of diakonia that focuses primarily on the two ends of Taylor's polarity—the individual and the wider society. Between these one can ask: "Where is the local church as a *locus* for diakonia"? This study suggests that there is a vacuum in the PFD which reflects the fact that 'believing Christians' are a shrinking minority, a fact which parallels the more general descriptions of Taylor, Davie and Angell.

In my view the new PFD pays relatively little attention to *congregational* diakonia. I will argue that this needs to be understood in light of the CoN's history as a state-church as

well as the ways in which Lutheran theology has often understood diakonia as associated with the realm of 'law' whereas the realm of 'gospel' is reserved for 'traditional church activities'—preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments.

Since coming to Norway 16 years ago I have hoped to find an opportunity to present the 'theology' of John Howard Yoder within the Lutheran context I have become a part of. Now that time has come. I believe that Yoder's work is relevant to a discussion of diakonia precisely because his strong linkage between ecclesiology and social ethics addresses the 'vacuum' identified above. Since the new PFD now defines diakonia as 'the gospel in *action*' (CoNNC 2007:6), the perspective of *Christian* social ethics—understood as a reflection on what action the church (and the individuals comprising it) should take in relation to challenges arising within the specific historical context—becomes vitally important. The question this study will address is as follows:

> *How can the 'sectarian' theology of John Howard Yoder contribute to strengthening the understanding and practice of diakonia in the Church of Norway which, though historically a majority-church, appears to be becoming a functional minority?*

The first task in answering this question (chapter 2) is to delimit the scope of diakonia in the Church of Norway and say something about what resources I will bring to bear on a reflection on both its diaconal understanding and praxis. In considering both theological and historical questions concerning diakonia I devote significant attention to the question of hermeneutics. Both my own perspective, as well as those which this study engages, are located in a specific context, a context whose definition is itself the result of a selective process determined by the *a prioris* of the eyes that see (Gilje and Grimen 1993:148).

In chapter 3 I look at Lutheran theology as well as the history of diakonia in Norway as a backdrop for an analysis of the new PFD. As I hope to demonstrate, this document reflects a shift in paradigm in terms of the way diakonia is understood. Of particular interest is what implications this shift has for two of Lutheranism's central dogmas—the doctrine of Justification by Faith and the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. Or put another way, how does this shift impact Lutheran ecclesiology? I also look at the interplay between historical praxis—what actually happened socially, politically, economically etc—and the development of Lutheran theology, particularly during the time of the Reformation.

Chapter 4 moves on to present the thinking of John Howard Yoder who was convinced that the radical vision of Jesus—expressed most poignantly in the Sermon on the Mount—can "speak to our age as it seldom has been free to do so before, if it can be unleashed from the bonds of inappropriate *a prioris* (1972:6). Identifying some of these *a prioris* will be one

important task throughout this study. Yoder's ecclesiology sees the church as an alternative *polis* (society) not removed from, but within society; this distinct community's (*koinonia*) diaconal lifestyle and eschatological hope is a clear witness, a witness which is seen before it is heard. Chapter 4 also takes a closer look at Yoder's understanding of the *political* dimensions of NT social ethics. As we shall see, Yoder argues that the letters of Paul, for example, are in continuity rather than discontinuity with the radical Jesus-tradition reflected in the gospels. With Constantine, says Yoder, the church's social location changed decisively. From the time of the Jewish Exile in the OT and through Jesus' Jewish renewal movement, to the period of the Apostolic Church until Constantine, the self-understanding of God's People was that of a *minority community* within wider society. The 'Constantinian-shift', as Yoder calls it, represented a gradual, complex and unfortunate departure from this pattern.

Having presented Lutheran theology and Yoder's response to it, chapter 5 begins with the assertion that the CoN is becoming a functional minority within Norwegian society. If this is the case, to what extent is there a link between the *corpus christianum* tradition within which the CoN has stood, the theology undergirding this tradition, and the 'ordinary God' of a church taken up with 'traditional church activities'?

Is the CoN's new status as a functional minority something to be lamented or welcomed? Yoder thinks it should be welcomed since it opens up the possibility of recovering a revitalized *witness*. Given that church membership and citizenship continue to overlap to a significant degree, this witness will be directed first and foremost to that majority which Grace Davie describes as "believing without belonging" (1994:2). Davie points out that the *content* of that believing has dramatically shifted away from Christian orthodoxies (1994:76). If the CoN (or the church more generally) is to recover a *prophetic* witness, then Yoder's social ethics rooted on the Sermon on the Mount's three foci—money, sex and power—could help to fill 'believing' with a new content.[1]

In terms of diakonia, the shift in paradigm expressed by the PFD needs to be undergirded by the witness of a strengthened local congregation. In chapter 5 I hope to expand on the ways in which I believe Yoder's ecclesiology can contribute to strengthening the local church's self-consciousness of its diaconal identity. This is particularly important in light of the major challenges including globalization, growing religious and cultural pluralism and the crisis of 'belonging' which the PFD identifies. To see the church as *community* has the potential to fill the vacuum which Charles Taylor's polarity identifies.

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[1] This trilogy is captured in the title of Richard Foster's book on Christian spirituality, *Money, Sex and Power: The Challenge of a Disciplined Life*.

2 Method, Theory and Scope of This Study

In the first part of this chapter I want to explain why Yoder's work is relevant to the topic of this thesis as well as which material within Yoder's extensive authorship I propose to focus particularly on. I have chosen to present Yoder in considerable breadth, a choice which in my view is justified since this will permit an assessment of his relevance to different aspects of the CoN's diaconal praxis and understanding. Given the limits of space, the reader may at some points wish for greater depth. Nevertheless, I believe that pursuing greater depth in those areas would serve to corroborate rather than weaken the central elements of my argument.[2] I will also account for my selection of source material used to present the CoN's understanding and practice of diakonia. These include a number of Lutheran theologians from the global North and South who will act as dialogue partners for Yoder. In the second part of this chapter I want to outline the hermeneutical framework within which I present Yoder in relation to the Lutheran tradition.

2.1 Method

In terms of method I propose to use text-analysis and interpret specific texts selected from Yoder as well as a number of Lutheran theologians. In approaching these texts I will be using a dialectical method which alternates between a critical reflection on theory as well as praxis (Nordstokke 2009:30), and suggests an inter-disciplinary approach. In reflecting on diaconal theory the tools of biblical and systematic theology will tend to predominate. Reflecting on diaconal praxis uses the tools of the social sciences, primarily sociology and historical analysis. Together, these will help to present a clearer picture of the economic, political and cultural elements of the *context* in which diakonia takes place. This is important since the context influences the church's diaconal praxis and the theologians who reflect on it. At the same time the context is itself shaped by diaconal praxis and reflection.

In terms of hermeneutics I shall try to understand the texts I focus on in the wider context the writers stands in. As we shall see, there are very often many different ways to interpret both church history and the thinkers and writers that are a part of it. My own hermeneutical point of departure, or 'theological location', is within the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition which developed in the16[th] century. The fact that the

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[2]Towards the end of his best known book, *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder makes a similar defense, claiming that the reader will not necessarily have found original material or unheard of interpretations. "[The] thrust of the present book is not original except perhaps in the consistency with which it attempts to draw ethical conclusions from what more specialized scholars have already found" (1972:224).

Anabaptists were a persecuted minority contributes to a predisposition to what has been called a hermeneutics of 'suspicion', a stance which is shared by Liberation theology and Feminism (Gilje & Grimen 1993:201). Precisely because these are suspicious of the 'hegemonic' interests of the dominant class, sex or theological tradition, it is important not to lose sight of the value of a hermeneutics of 'mercy'. For the Anabaptist with a commitment to non-violence and peace-making, it is especially important to represent the Lutheran tradition in such a way that reader feels that the Lutheran tradition has been fairly represented. For this reason I shall seek to present a breadth of Lutheran perspectives on diakonia rather than presenting Yoder in relationship to a narrow caricature of 'the Lutheran position'.

2.1.1 Church of Norway

Given limitations of space I have chosen to narrow the focus of my study to the Lutheran understanding and practice of diakonia as expressed in the CoN's new PFD. The fact that this document is relatively brief means that the amount of textual material has already been reduced.[3] The PFD articulates four strategic ways in which diakonia is an expression of the gospel and part of the nature of the church. Diakonia as 'subject' within the document comes to expression at several different levels: the individual, the congregation, diaconal institutions and the wider Lutheran and Christian church. I have chosen to pay particular attention to the role of the local church congregation and how Yoder's thinking can contribute to strengthening diakonia on that level.

In this study I will argue that Yoder's major contribution to diakonia within the CoN relates to the understanding of what it means to be the church (ecclesiology). For Yoder ecclesiology is intimately linked with social ethics. Yet a discussion of ecclesiology also needs to be narrowed down. Which of the marks of the church (*ecclesia notae*)—and there are many variations within the different church confessions—should be highlighted?[4] For the purpose of this study I have chosen witness (*martyria*) as a window on two others: service (*diakonia*) and fellowship (*koinonia*). The focus on witness is one of the central themes in this study.

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[3] The published version of the PFD is a 24-page pamphlet.
[4] The classical marks mentioned in the Nicene Creed are: unity, catholicity, apostolicity and holiness. CA 7 contains a very minimalistic and functional description limited to two points: preaching the word and administering the sacraments. To these the Reformed tradition added 'proper discipline' while the Anabaptist added four more: holy living, brotherly love, unreserved testimony, and suffering (Yoder 1994:76).

2.1.2 Choice of Yoder

Why Yoder? Swedish theologian Anders Rasmusson considers Yoder to be the most formative figure within what he calls Contemporary Radical Reformation theology (1994:17).[5] Yet despite his stature within the Mennonite world, Yoder's theology represents a significant challenge to many of the churches stemming from the Anabaptist tradition.[6] In a somewhat wider circle, Yoder is referred to as a prominent spokesman for 'post-Christendom' or 'post-liberal' theology which is asking what it means to be the church in contexts such as Europe and North America where Christianity no longer is the dominant ideology (Harink 2003:19). I believe Yoder deserves being presented because the Anabaptist tradition has received relatively little attention within the European majority-church traditions. These include the Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed churches which are well represented in the ecumenical dialogue, whereas the so-called 'Free Churches', which would include the Mennonites, are less well represented.[7] From its origins as a severely persecuted minority, Anabaptism has been a minority Christian tradition, both ideologically and numerically. In Heiene and Thorbjørnsens' survey of ethical traditions, the closest we come to Yoder's social ethics would be a radicalized version of Karl Barth's christocentric approach (2000:44).[8] Given Yoder's extensive authorship I will focus primarily on three of his works: *The Politics of Jesus*, *The Royal Priesthood* and *Body Politics.* These have been selected since they refer in different ways to Yoder's emphasis on the link between ecclesiology and social ethics, a link which is central to the thesis of this study.

2.1.3 Dialogue Partners

Kjell Nordstokke is a Lutheran rooted in his own tradition, yet influenced by the ecumenical movement and his experience as a missionary in Brazil.[9] In my opinion, much of Nordstokke's writing is an attempt to re-formulate his Lutheran theology in response to the social reality of Latin America and Liberation Theology's analysis of that reality.[10] As will become clear in my later analysis of the PFD, Nordstokke's thinking concerning the 'science

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[5] The other central figure Rasmusson mentions, Stanley Hauerwas, is perhaps more well-known in Scandinavia.
[6] Groups which trace their origins to the Anabaptists of the 16th century include the Amish, the Hutterites, Old Order Mennonites, General Conference Mennonites, the Mennonite Brethren, Brethren in Christ (Dyck 1967:176). For a further summary of the history of the Mennonites, see chapter 4, page 32.
[7] Regarding the dynamics of the World Council of Churches in relation to the Free Churches (also referred to as Believer's Churches) cf. 5.2.5 below, '*The Church as a Hermeneutical Community*' p. 77.
[8] While a doctoral student under Karl Barth at the University of Basel, Yoder wrote a 50-page critique of Barth's views on pacifism, arguing that Barth had not followed in his views to their logical conclusion. Yoder gave a copy to Barth shortly before Barth was to be on the panel conducting Yoder's final oral examination.
[9] Nordstokke also served for many years as professor and Dean of the Diakonhjemmet.
[10] Nordstokke's doctoral dissertation was on Leonardo Boff.

of diakonia' comes to expression throughout the new plan.[11] Nordstokke is also interesting because he represents a bridge between the churches of the global South and the CoN. Given that this thesis seeks to establish what Yoder can contribute to the Lutheran understanding and practice of diakonia, Nordstokke will be an important dialogue partner.

José Míguez Bonino is an Argentinian Methodist and liberation theologian who is conversant with both the Protestant and Catholic traditions. He is highly respected in all theological camps, and as previous president of the WCC has shown a commitment to an ecumenical approach to doing theology.[12] It is also worth noting that Bonino has read Yoder who in 1976 edited a book in Spanish entitled *Textos Escogidos de la Reforma Radical* (1983:33-36).

Tor Aukrust's two-volume work on social-ethics, *Mennesket i samfunnet*, was the first Lutheran formulation of a social ethic which responded to the challenges presented by contemporary ideologies including Marxism and socialism. For centuries the CoN used its privileged position as a state-church to promote its moral vision for society. As a result, it is only in recent decades that it has become possible to gain a hearing for a *Christian* social ethic. Aukrust, as I understand, was the first to take up this task.

Walter Altmann and Klaus Nürnberger have been selected because they are Lutheran theologians whose reflection on ecclesiology as well as what I refer to as 'key Lutheran doctrines'—while anchored in a majority theological tradition—nonetheless takes place within a social context from the global South. Like Bonino, their reformulation of what it means to be the church takes place within a socio-economic context in which poverty and injustice are a central and pressing reality.

2.2 Theory

The 'theory' which Yoder's theology uses is rooted in the *particularity* of the story of God and of God's People. The purpose of this people was—in modern ecumenical language—to be a 'sacrament' for world (Bonino 1975:160; Nordstokke 1987:145). In the fullness of time this God sent a Messiah whose life and teaching so threatened the provincialism of this people as well as the idolatrous claims of the empire under which they were forced to live, that he was executed for political sedition. The NT witness is that the death of this Jew, whose resurrection confirmed him to be the long-awaited Messiah, opened for all people everywhere the possibility of becoming a part of God's People. Yoder calls this

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[11] Cf. Nordstokke (1999), "Diakonivitenskapens teoretiske rammer" in Diakonos, vols. 5 (Part 1) & 6(Part 2).
[12] That the title of his 1983 book is *Toward a Christian Political Ethic* reflects a humility without which the current ecumenical climate would not be possible.

the 'scandal of particularity' (1984:40). Yoder's 'straightforward' reading of the biblical narrative, says Thomas R. Yoder, reflects the Anabaptists' suspicion of sophistication when it is in service of avoiding the Bible's clarity, particularly its ethical challenges (2009:3).[13] As we shall see, many of the more systemic approaches used by the theological traditions of mainline Protestantism and Catholicism relativize Jesus' radical social ethics.[14] Much of Western philosophy and theology has for centuries attempted to find some 'safe' and 'solid' ground upon which to build *systems* of meaning which claim to be universal. The continuing dominance of *systematic* theology within mainline Protestantism and Catholicism is a testimony to this fact. The question as to why these traditions prefer the safer high ground of a variety of over-arching meta-perspectives to Yoder's contingent 'particularity' is a question I hope to carry into this study.

Having rejected the possibility of finding a *static* hermeneutical 'position', I propose instead the more *dynamic* approach used by Nordstokke and Bonino. One of its strengths is that it operates with both a normative *and* a descriptive frame of reference. In a chapter entitled '*From Praxis to Theory and Back*', Bonino argues for the necessity of a dialectical dialogue between theory and praxis. In describing the relationship between these two, he quotes from Paul Lehmann's study of political ethics: "The responsibility for the *determination* of priorities is a *theological* one. The responsibility for the *identification* of the priorities is a *historical* one" (1983:54). The theory of what *should* happen is defined by theology. The description of what *actually* happens (praxis) is the task of the social sciences. Both are necessary, says Bonino, since "reality is transformed through human action, and action is corrected and reoriented by reality" (1983:39). It is never the case that theology presents diakonia as an ideal which then needs to be realized as a second or consequential stage. For Bonino, it is an 'idealist inversion' to talk of praxis as *deriving* from an idea or system of thought (1975:110). This perspective on the various 'utopian' visions of diakonia is

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[13] Tom Yoder characterizes J.H.Yoder's hermeneutics as related to 'Biblical Realism', a school of biblical interpretation within the ecumenical movement of the mid 20th century associated with names like Paul Minear, Otto Piper and John Bright. This view assumes that the experience to which the Bible witnesses is recoverable, even to us in our time. Second, it shares Barth's faith in the Spirit's help to hear and interpret the text, albeit within the context of the community. Third, a "realistic" reading of the Bible means that "the particularity of the text, its lexical meaning, its time in place and culture, is to be attended to *prior* to any doctrine of authority and inspiration or hermeneutical method" (Yoder 2009:3). This means that more emphasis is placed on *acts* and *events* than on words and sentences, since the purpose of the text is to testify. Lastly, "realism" in practice means "paying close attention to the world of biblical authors and interpreting the texts from there, as it were, rather than forcing them into alien contemporary categories before mining them for meaning, thus, in effect, predetermining their relevance" (Yoder 2009:4).

[14] In this study I will refer to 'enemy-love' and 'jubilee economics' as shorthand for Jesus' socio-ethical teaching contained in the Sermon on the Mount/Plain (Matt. 5-7; Luke 6).

not meant to deny their importance, but rather to underscore the need to be at once critical *and* self-critical.

A second major axiom which comes from Liberation theology is "a critical perspective in relation to power and power structures" (Nordstokke 2000:109). It asks the question: Whose interests are served by the theologizing of those who set the agenda? In the same way that no hermeneutic can claim to stand outside the contingencies of context, no theology, says Bonino, can be socially uncommitted (1983:43). Like the Feminist discourse, Liberation Theology is a hegemonic discourse, that is to say, it has taken sides. The 'preferential option for the poor' is the 'canon within the canon' for Liberation Theology in the same way that doctrine of Justification by Faith is for Lutherans. Bonino sees two major lines of sociological analysis which can be used to describe social dynamics. The *functionalist* perspective sees society as an organism which should function *harmoniously*; the *dialectical* perspective has a *conflictual* orientation (1983:46). These two divergent perspectives, says Bonino, "have their roots in two specific locations in social reality. The functionalist perspective is a vision 'from the top'… Dialectical sociologies, on the other hand, express a vision 'from below'" (1983:47). Within Liberation Theology the prior commitment to the 'preferential option for the poor' implies that a perspective 'from below' informs both diaconal praxis and reflection. Though sharing much in common with both Feminism and Liberation Theology in terms of doing "theology from the underside of history" (Russell 1993:25),[15] Yoder's hermeneutics replace the female sex or 'the poor' with the 'Lamb that was slain' as the point of departure for theological and ethical reflection. This is Yoder's 'canon within the canon'.

Bonino speaks of the theologian as operating from within a 'double location', the one theological and the other social (1983:42). In this study I use this distinction not only in relation to the individual, but also in relation to church traditions. Like feminist Letty Russell, Kjell Nordstokke prefers using the language of centre-periphery in describing the axis of power (2000:110); in his discussion of the place of diakonia in church history he talks about the tension between the prophet on the margin and institutionalized power at the centre. Russell points out that the relationship between the various locations—gender, theological, cultural, economic etc.—is both dialectical and complex. It is important to bear in mind that these axes have a fluid and dynamic character which means, for example, that theological traditions which have had the power to set the agenda, can lose that power. Minority movements can develop within majority traditions. Combinations are also possible.

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[15] Feminist Letty Russell borrows this phrase from Gustavo Gutiérrez whose book, *The Power of the Poor in History* has as a recurring theme presenting the 'view from below' in Latin America (1993:25).

Sociologically speaking, a black illiterate woman in Mali finds herself in a social location quite different from that of an educated white woman in Norway—despite the fact that their 'gender' location puts them both in a 'from below' position in relation to men. Furthermore, an individual theologian can represent a minority theological tradition while being situated in a majority socio-economic context, and so forth.

For the better part of its history, the CoN has been a majority-church, both socially and theologically; church membership has for the most part been synonymous with being Norwegian. This situation has started to change though the CoN continues to enjoy certain privileges related to its status as state-church. This fact may help to explain why Kari Jordheim's presentation of the new PFD pays so much attention to the theme of *empowerment* (2009:23-25). Much of her overview focuses on defining the move away from a subject-object relationship between the 'helper' and the one 'helped', a stance which, as we will see somewhat later, has characterized much of the CoN's diaconal work throughout its history. The new emphasis on empowerment can perhaps be understood as an effort to redress the power imbalance in a church with a history of operating 'from above'.

One of the questions which we will try to bear in mind throughout this study is to what degree diaconal praxis—accessible for reflection through historical analysis—can be understood as reflecting the social location of a dominant theology. Yoder maintains that "it is only possible to think seriously about what difference it makes that a moral community is a minority if one has come to grips with the difference that dominant status can make" (1984:82). In what ways is it possible to read off history the linkage between a particular theology and the 'fruit' it produces? On the other hand, in what ways does a change in social location make new theological reflection possible, and bring new theological 'subjects' to the discussion? The question which the final chapter in this study seeks to address is in what ways the CoN's change in social location—from being a majority-church to becoming a functional minority—opens up new possibilities for re-thinking the theological foundation for diakonia, particularly the understanding of what it means to be the church.

3 Diakonia in the Church of Norway

The purpose of this chapter is to present both the understanding and practice of diakonia within the CoN. As Bonino's chapter title 'From Praxis to Theory and Back' suggests, understanding diakonia is a dialectical process and requires both sociological-historical and theological reflection (1983:37). I have chosen to focus on the Plan for Diakonia (PFD) as representative for the CoN's diaconal theory. However, to begin with, I will try to locate this document within a wider socio-historical context from the Reformation to the present, a perspective which is *implicit* in the PFD. This is important because the understanding of diakonia is both the *result* of social and historical changes within the CoN and society, as well as a *contributor* to these same changes.

This chapter then moves on to analyze the theological basis for diakonia as presented in the PFD. Since what is *explicitly* said in the PFD concerning diakonia's foundation is very brief,[16] I shall present the wider context of Lutheran theology implicit in the document. I have chosen to concentrate the presentation of the PFD's wider theological context on two key doctrines: Justification by Faith (including the law/gospel distinction) and the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. These have been chosen because they have a bearing on Lutheran ecclesiology, and therefore congregational diakonia. With this discussion as a backdrop, I will then look at what the PFD *does* say concerning diakonia's theological basis. This in turn provides a basis for selecting those aspects of Yoder's work which can make a contribution to a fuller understanding of congregational diakonia in the CoN.

The new PFD is part of the CoN's ongoing process of redefining diakonia's identity in relation to a changing world. It begins with the statement, "Diakonia is the caring ministry of the church. It is the Gospel in action…" (CoNNC 2007:6). In relation to earlier definitions, the PFD then goes on to broaden the scope of diakonia in two ways: 1) Diakonia is presented in a holistic manner, and comes to expression in four strategic ways: through loving one's neighbor, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation, and struggling for justice. There is also a clear attempt to move away from the traditional subject/object relationship between the 'helper' and the one helped. And 2), diakonia comes to expression at the individual, congregational, institutional and global level (Jordheim 2009:20).

Identifying diakonia unequivocally as 'the gospel in action' represents a paradigm-shift in terms of how the CoN's understands diakonia's identity. Diakonia is not simply the

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[16] Chapter 2, 'The Theological Basis of Diakonia' is not quite 2 pages long (CoNNC 2007:6-7).

consequence of faith or a merely human response to need, but is in fact part of what *constitutes* the church (CoNNC 2007:6). This understanding moves away from the medieval Catholic view which identified diaconal care with the process of sanctification. In this view, the order of salvation (*ordo salutis)* begins with justification, understood forensically, and is then *followed* by sanctification, understood as the individual's response to God's gift. Given that many Lutherans have feared that too much attention on 'action' (diaconal good works) might undermine the principle of justification by faith alone, (Nordstokke 2009:34), how are we to understand the link between gospel and diaconal action? Did Luther's understanding of justification break with the *ordo salutis* pattern? Or did Lutheran *praxis* in subsequent centuries in fact revert to this pattern? These questions are important to bear in mind as I now turn to a brief sketch of the history of diakonia in Norway.

3.1 History of Diakonia in Norway

According to church historian Reidar Astås, the Reformation was introduced to Scandinavia by the political authorities 'from above', that is to say, by force of law (1992:282).[17] This was a continuation of the pattern established by Constantine who during the 4th century declared Christianity to be the state religion of the Roman Empire. The 'Christianization' of Norway by King Olav in the early 11th century went hand in hand with his conquest of the country (Astås 1992:248). Thus while the theological *content* of the Christian faith introduced to Norway may have differed, the fact that it was introduced 'from above'—whether by edict or by the sword—is similar in the 4th, the 11th and the 16th centuries. Having become a state-church the CoN both legitimated and reinforced the various projects of first monarchist and then republican nation-building. In return the CoN was given a monopoly on religious power and privilege (Repstad 1998:27; Rasmusson 2009:46).

During the Medieval period it was the Catholic Church—and primarily the monasteries—which took responsibility for the sick and the poor. Based on his understanding of the two regiments of God's rule in the world, Luther initiated reforms which led to the transfer of these responsibilities from the church to the state (Wyller 1999:170).[18] The church, said Luther, should focus on preaching the gospel. Hence diaconal praxis on a society-wide level seems clearly to have been handed over to the realm of 'law'. Since the 1600's, therefore, the care of the poor in Norway has been strongly linked to the public sector (Astås 1992:283). During the period of the absolute monarchy, the parish priest was a public

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[17] Astås writes: "The wider population had […] little knowledge of Reformation thinking which never became a popular movement in Norway" (1992:282). Cf. also Nürnberger 2005:151.
[18] In Norway, this transfer was reflected in the *Church Ordinance* of 1607 (Wyller 1999:176).

employee and therefore also functioned as the King's representative (*embetsman*), responsible for giving help to the *deserving* poor (Wyller 1999:178). The dual function of the priest within both church and state is a reflection of Luther's doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. The priest preaches the Word of God and dispenses the sacraments within the 'spiritual' realm, and administers the state's diaconal services in the 'worldly' realm.

The diaconal renewal which began in Germany in the mid 1800's can be seen as an attempt to reclaim diakonia for the church (Skjevesland 1989:19).[19] The PFD sees this renewal as "the starting-point of diaconal ministry as we know it today" (CoNNC 2007:8). A significant impetus to this renewal was Pietism which, in many ways, was a grass-roots reaction to what was perceived as the loss of spiritual vitality within the institutionalized church (Foss 1992:95; Nürnberger 2005:7). The development of civic organizations parallel to the church is a social innovation from this period. Yet as Skjevesland points out, the form this diaconal renewal took was primarily *institutional* and not congregational. The church at the parish level lacked both the financial resources and a *theological self-understanding* for diaconal work (Skjevesland 1989:20).[20] The latter is an important observation which I will return to in a later chapter.

Tim Knudsen's analysis of how the state used the church in its nation-building efforts (cf. Wyller 1999:177), and Berge Furre's study of the Enerhaugen Society in the late 19th century, each in different ways show how the church's *caritative* diaconal praxis served to control and re-integrate both the poor and the emerging working class back into the existing 'Old Order' (Furre 1998:12). In this respect elements of the diaconal renewal can be said to have been socially conservative. However Knut Aukrust sees a distinct shift which took place around 1914. In response to socialism's social critique, the church's diaconal work began to move from a charity to a justice-based perspective (Aukrust 1995:129).

The socio-historical context for the diaconal renewal was the Industrial Revolution. This resulted in large-scale migration into the cities, the breakdown of old established social structures, and the emergence of a new working class and labor movement (Skjevesland 1989:20). Faced with widespread urban poverty, and inspired by the diaconal renewal in Germany, diaconal leaders like Halling and Guldberg responded by reclaiming diakonia for

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[19] According to Wyller (1999:184) it was first in the 18th century that the revival movements nourished by Pietism sought to reclaim diakonia as the church's domain. As a result, one still finds local congregations within the CoN today who own diaconal institutions, even though the State funds them.

[20] Knut Aukrust sees two main tendencies in this regard. There were those who wanted to gather the core of confessing believers and build up diaconal responses to human need with the local congregation as a centre. At the same time there were others who wanted to compete with the public system, yet use and expand the existing institutions (1995:128).

the church.[21] The diaconal institutions they built represented a critical alternative to the state's welfare-system which was considered cold, impersonal and ineffective. In addition, this system was criticized for being based on compulsion since it was funded by a special poverty tax (Aukrust 1995:118). Diakonia's dialogue with the labor movement and competition with state-based welfare services during the first half of the 20th century contributed to a more fundamental analysis of the structural dimensions of poverty, a development which reached a climax in the socio-ethical revival of the 1960's (Skjevesland 1989:20; Seip 1998:47). This was also a time when the welfare-state increasingly 'colonized' many of what initially were the church's diaconal initiatives—e.g. hospitals (Repstad 1998:28). Many have pointed out the decisive role which the establishment of church-sponsored diaconal institutions played in the development of the modern Norwegian welfare-state (cf. Wyller 1999:205).

In summary, the diaconal renewal in Norway represented movements from within the church which were initiated 'from below'. This renewal made a monumental contribution which shifted social-welfare dramatically from the public to the church sphere. In the latter half of the 20th century, many of the diaconal initiatives became universal welfare services. During this period, the CoN was once again faced with the task of redefining its diaconal identity. What is it that diakonia can contribute which other public and civic actors cannot? The CoN's response to this question needs to be seen in light of a range of issues in the post-World War II era. Two of these, I believe, have had a significant impact on the development of the current PFD.[22] The first is the ecumenical dialogue which began in earnest with the establishment of the World Council of Churches in 1948. Sven-Erik Brodd's analysis of a 1965 WCC report entitled "The Role of the 'Diakonia' of the Church in Contemporary Society" is significant in this regard. This document, says Brodd, is a careful critique of the caritative diaconal theory of the 19th century. He characterizes it as quite individualistic. The document goes on to sketch a theology of diakonia which sees diakonia as foundational for the church's life and witness. Brodd writes, "The church as a collective, and not merely individual initiative, is diakonia's primary form. The church is diakonia which preaches through its diakonia" (1997:33, my translation). Here we find the same language that is used in the new PDF which describes diakonia as 'the gospel in action' and as a fundamental dimension of the church.

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[21] Knut Aukrust argues that during the period at the end of the 19th century, the diaconal renewal hoped that it could replace, or at least provide a better alternative to, the public welfare system (1995:127).
[22] Other significant influences, though they are worth mentioning. These would include a new focus on human rights, including the continuing struggle for women's liberation (Feminism), as well as the emergence of the environmental movement as a response to economic globalization and the ecological consequences this has led to—pollution, climate gasses, increasing material poverty for the majority of the world's people etc.

The second major influence is that of liberation/contextual theology. These can be understood as theological articulations of the different movements demanding justice for the poor and oppressed, particularly in Latina America and South Africa. The socio-ethical revival of the 1960's can in part be understood as the fruit of global winds of change from Medellin to Johannesburg. In this 'revival' the Marxist analysis of the mechanisms of poverty and oppression played a decisive role, one which eventually has placed the 'care for creation' and the 'struggle for justice' at the centre of the CoN's diaconal self-understanding.

The 2007 PFD's adds two new strategic foci to those of the 1987 PFD—care for creation and the struggle for justice. I believe these new foci to be a response to the influences mentioned above. Previously I mentioned that the emphasis on empowerment reflects a growing conscientization on the part of the CoN. Thus, the new PFD represents an attempt to call the CoN to a more holistic, prophetic and global vision of diakonia. It marks the end of a long transition from understanding diakonia primarily as a *karitativ* response to poverty and as human action *independent of the preaching of God's Word*, to understanding diakonia as a structural response to poverty, and as constituting the gospel itself. This change is nothing less than a theological 'earthquake' within the Lutheran tradition! As mentioned earlier, it represents a paradigm-shift in terms how diakonia's 'good works' are understood. It also has far-reaching implications for Lutheran ecclesiology. I turn now to the question of to what extent Lutheran dogmatic theology can bear the weight of such a paradigm-shift.

3.2   T he CON's Plan for Diakonia in the Wider Context of Lutheran Theology

In his book *Martin Luther's Message for us Today*, South African theologian Klaus Nürnberger refutes later Lutheranism and Protestantism's misunderstanding of Luther:

> Luther's famous (or infamous) juxtaposition of law and grace has been misunderstood to be supportive of a dualistic approach to spirituality, theology and ethics. It has led to quietistic attitudes and unethical behavior. His doctrine of the two kingdoms of God has been used […] to concentrate on the spiritual dimension of salvation and ignore the social, economic and political dimensions of life, accept the legitimacy of the status quo and support untenable secular policies (2005:8).

Reflecting his social location in South Africa and his theological location in dialogue with contextual theology, Nürnberger goes on to respond to this critique from both an historical and theological point of view. He focuses particularly on what Lutherans consider the centre of their faith, the doctrine of Justification by Faith. In addition, I will also look at Luther's doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. These two doctrines have a direct bearing on Lutheran ecclesiology which I see as the point of engagement with Yoder and the PFD. In addition to Nürnberger I will also refer to another contemporary Lutheran theologian, Walter Altmann

whose thinking reflects the influence of ecumenical dialogue in general, and Latin American Liberation theology in particular. Together with Kjell Nordstokke they will function as the primary dialogue partners for my presentation of Yoder in the next chapter.

3.2.1　Justification by Faith

Before beginning with a theological reflection on these two key doctrines I want, once again, to begin at the point of praxis and look at the historical context in which these two important doctrines emerged? In medieval scholastic theology the relationship between justification and sanctification was understood as being consecutive (*ordo salutis*), (Harink 2003:146). In the tradition of Anselm, justification had come to be understood *forensically*, and used the language of the court of law to describe the process whereby God, as ultimate judge, declares the guilty sinner to be righteous because of Christ's righteousness (Nürnberger 2005:124). Many scholars, including Nürnberger and Yoder, link the development of this legal approach to justification to the fact that during the Constantinian era, the church adopted many of the legal and administrative forms and structures of the Roman Empire. This led to the development of an elaborate church hierarchy led by the bishop of Rome who came to be regarded as the earthly representative of Christ (Nürnberger 2005:107) .

At the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church condemned Luther's formulation of justification, insisting that God's grace initiates a process of sanctification whereby the believer's own works of merit contribute to God's declaring them righteous (Nürnberger 2005:125). As in so many other areas of his theology, Luther uses the same legal language to describe justification, yet the content which he gives this doctrine "changed the entire content and character of theology" for centuries to come (Nürnberger 2005:108).[23]

Luther's formulation of this doctrine cannot be understood apart from understanding the climate of fear which prevailed at the end of the Middle Ages. In addition to the ravages of poverty and sickness (e.g. the Black Plague), the average person, says Nürnberger, lived in fear of eternal damnation. Relief from the purification process of purgatory could be bought in the form of indulgences which were sold by the Catholic Church. In addition, 'good works' combined with prayers to the saints could contribute to achieving eternal salvation. At the end of a difficult life's journey, righteousness *might* be achieved. Like many others, Luther's own greatest fear was the final judgment. His study of Romans and Galatians convinced him that

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[23] Despite the fact that Nürnberger's theological location is within a majority-church tradition, his social location within South Africa means that his reflection on Luther's doctrine of Justification is to a significant extent 'from below', highlighting, not surprisingly, the significant influence Liberation Theology has had far beyond the Catholic world, but also South African Contextual Theology closer to home.

the righteousness demanded by God would be given as a free gift of grace; it cannot be achieved by good works, but only by participating in the righteousness of Christ, a righteousness which does not belong to the believer (*justitia aliena*). Luther could say,

> We conclude therefore that a Christian does not live in himself, but in Christ and in the neighbor, or else is no Christian; in Christ by faith, in the neighbor by love. By faith the person is carried upwards above himself to God, and by love he sinks back below himself to his neighbor…" (LWF 2009:36).

For Luther salvation is a metaphysical status related to each individual; it is the *individual's* relationship to God which is primary. All other relationships flow from this primary relationship. Such a view, says Nürnberger, stands in contrast to the Hebrew concept of *shalom* which describes the inter-relationship of God, God's People and the whole of creation as a unity characterized by health, peace and justice (2005:126). For Nürnberger, Luther's individual-oriented understanding of sin and salvation constitutes a weakness in his thinking. His concept of salvation concentrated mainly on the believer's situation 'before God' (*coram Deo*). For Luther, the true object of theology was the "guilty and condemned person and the justifying and redeeming God" (Nürnberger 2005:126).

In a forensic understanding of salvation, sin is likewise strongly linked to the one's personal relationship to God. It is not so much a break in one's relationship to the neighbor—what Paul speaks of as the 'hostility' between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14)—as it is a metaphysical status based on the fact of original sin. This leads Nürnberger to conclude:

> […] in Lutheranism, the gospel became restricted to a particular formulation of a particular spiritual concern, namely how we can survive the last judgment. Psychological, physical, social, economic, political and ecological concerns were not deemed to be part of salvation… These […] did not quite attain the status of being part of God's ultimate redemptive intentions for humankind (Nürnberger 2005:97).

As a missionary to Brazil, Kjell Nordstokke's encounter with poverty and oppression, combined with the response of Liberation Theology's, provided a new vantage point from which to reflect on old dogmas. In *Diakoni in Context*, we see Nordstokke wrestling with the way Lutherans have tended to view the doctrine of justification by faith as a *status* given by God. Writing about diaconal spirituality, Nordstokke begins with the archetypal OT story of the Exodus, noting the way God responded to the Israelites who were slaves in Egypt. YHWH is said to have seen their misery and heard their cries. "I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them…" (Exodus 3:7-8). For Nordstokke this way of conceiving of God "is closer to verbs that indicate salvific intervention than to nouns that express static being." (LWF 2009:37). To move the definition of salvation from the realm of noun to verb represents a new contextualization of Luther; it moves salvation from the realm of systematic

theology to social ethics. To what extent Nordstokke's change of social location provoked a theological re-location is an interesting question. That many academics without such an experience often retain a more traditional view of justification is perhaps not accidental.

Walter Altmann is a Brazilian Lutheran theologian who seeks to present Luther as relevant in his own Latin American setting. Altmann argues that Luther had a much more dynamic view of salvation than many of his Lutheran successors. According to Altmann, Luther taught that the experience of being justified should open the way for a daily conversion and repentance. Baptism, though a one-time experience, is like a cloak which needs to be put on each day in order that the believer should more and more be renewed in the image of Christ (Altmann 1992:36). At the same time, Luther clearly distanced himself from those who sought to practice the imitation of Christ (*imitatio)*, particularly what the *Schwermere* called the 'counsels of perfection'.[24] Luther felt that given the believer's continuing sinful nature, attempts to live out such high ethical standards were doomed to failure.

For Tor Johan Grevbo while justification is total, sanctification can never be more than partial in this life (2008:23). This fits with Luther's realistic view concerning human perfectibility. Though justified by God, the believer continues to be a sinner (*simul justus et peccator*). In fact Luther had a rather pessimistic assessment of the sanctity of the majority of those who comprised the church: "The world and the masses are and always will be un-Christian" (cited in Bonino 1983:25).Whereas Luther's undoubtedly *sociological* observation is pessimistic, Grevbo's *theological* assessment is more optimistic. The believer's good works spring out of God's gracious forgiveness, and *lead to* a life of holiness (2008:23). At the same time Grevbo maintains the "unshakeable connection" between the *forensic* and *effective* aspects of justification (2008:23). To what extent this is a two-step process or one process involving two movements is perhaps a matter of semantics. Grevbo's formulation nonetheless seems to be an echo of the *ordo salutis* pattern; justification is a status given as a gift whereas sanctification is seen as a *consequence* of faith (2008:21).

Luther's radical disjunction between God's work in justification and the believer's response would later be picked up by Lutheran Pietism which used Luther's theology to reinforce the view that salvation is an abstraction from reality and concerns a spiritual sphere that is 'not of this world'. This, says Nürnberger, results in the gospel being cut off from being perceived as relevant to the modern world. "Fortunately, in many Catholic, Protestant

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[24] The Anabaptists of the 16th century were called Schwermere by their adversaries. For a further discussion, see the summary on Anabaptist history presented in chapter 4, pp. 34-37.

and Evangelical circles the environmental, communal and social dimensions of sin and reconciliation are increasingly being recognized today" (2005:127).

Since we are seeking to place the CoN's understanding of diakonia within the wider context of Lutheran theology, I want now to look more closely at the question of 'good works'. In light of Luther's pessimistic assessment of the Christian masses, is Grevbo justified in stating that being justified in fact *does* lead to holy living? As one considers church history, what has been the effect of separating human action so completely from God's action? As indicated previously, the Catholic view saw good works as evidence of sanctification. Luther, on the other hand, was adamant that they played no role in justification. He even went so far as to say that the letter of James was an 'epistle of straw' because it did not contain the gospel as he understood it (Nürnberger 1995:82). This letter states that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26), suggesting that a person's response to God's gift reveals whether they have faith or not. Kjell Nordstokke states that Lutherans often react when good works are presented as necessary for faith.

> It is feared that too much attention on works (or deeds) might undermine the principle of justification by faith alone. For this reason, some Lutherans may find diakonia in principle to be problematic, especially if diakonia is presented as part of what constitutes the Church (LWF 2009:34).

Nürnberger is careful to point out that Luther did *not* consider good works to be a response of gratitude to God's gift. Such a form of reciprocity could be seen as an attempt to restore one's lost dignity before God, thereby ending up as yet one more form of works-based righteousness (Nürnberger 2005:116). Nordstokke states that Luther taught that faith produces good works *like a tree produces fruit*. It is Christ the good tree, who produces good fruit in and through the believer. This picture makes it clear that the good works are not our own. They are the fruit of the believer's union with Christ. To be justified means to be one with Christ— Paul uses the expression to be 'in Christ' (e.g. 2 Cor. 5:17). It also means, says Nordstokke, being "one with Christ in his mission to the world, one with him in his diakonia" (LWF 2009:36). Salvation is not a drama in two acts (*ordo salutis*), but one.

> It is not the case that first faith is born and then loves develops and after that good works are produced as the result of faith… No, faith and love are two sides of the same coin. They are given at the same instant by God's grace through the gospel (Nordstokke 2002:40, my translation).

This brief review of how different Lutheran theologians view the relationship between faith and works makes clear that Luther's doctrine of justification can be interpreted in different directions.

The form in which God's grace is given to the believer is the Word of God. Luther considered that the Catholic Church's greatest failing was that it had ceased to preach the pure Word of God, building up around it a host of human traditions which limited its effect. It is the preaching of the gospel which creates faith in the heart of the believer and is the instrument of God's grace in declaring the sinner righteous. This is another formulation of what is often called Luther's 'canon within the canon' (Altmann 1992:50). Since the preaching of God's Word was so central for Luther, it also becomes the central foundation for his ecclesiology. Luther contributed enormously to making the Bible more widely available by translating the Greek NT into German. "He wanted every German, including every simple plowboy, to be able to read the Bible (Dyck 1967:22). Yet for Luther, God's Word is not understood narrowly as being contained only in the Bible. The sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist are also seen as visible expressions (*verbum visible*) of God's Word. Hence CA7 speaks of the preaching of the 'pure' Word of God and the proper administration of the sacraments as together constituting the church (Brunvoll 1972:25).

A central hermeneutical key which Luther uses to understand both the Old and New Testaments is the distinction between *law* and *gospel*. These represent two different ways in which God rules the world. God rules with his 'left hand' by means of the law, and with his 'right hand' by means of the gospel (Nürnberger 2005:151). For Luther, God's demands are made known to all people by means of the 'natural law' revealed in creation (Romans 1:19ff). Luther understands the law as serving two purposes. Within a sinful world (the Wordly Regiment), God's law defines the standards by which society is to be justly ordered, including the legitimate use of the sword in punishing evil and maintaining public order. Nürnberger calls this the political use of God's law (2005:110). The Ten Commandments were an example of this function in the Old Testament. Luther also spoke of the need to develop '*new decalogues*' which represent the church's discernment of God's will within a specific social and historical context. Luther himself wrote hundreds of pages on specific ethical and moral issues, the most famous of which, says Nürnberger, is his treatise *On Good Works* (2005:115). Since the Bible does not give all the answers which a new situation demands, Luther was open to searching for insight in the 'wider wisdom', including the Greek and Roman classics.

The second use of the law applies within the Spiritual Regiment. Here its purpose is to drive people to repentance, causing them to turn to the gospel and receive the grace of God. While the law is an expression of God's will and in that sense good, Luther was clear that the law always accuses, enslaves and condemns us (*lex simper accusat*), (Nürnberger 2005:111).

The gospel on the other hand "liberates us from the enslaving fetters of divine law, doctrinal fixations and human authority" (2005:111).

How did Luther view the so-called 'counsels of perfection' contained in the Sermon on the Mount (e.g. love for the enemy)? Luther was emphatic in pointing out that it would be "a grievous misunderstanding", a "really bad habit" to interpret the example of Jesus or the exhortations found in the New Testament as a 'new law' (Nürnberger 2005:115). Even the Sermon on the Mount can be turned into a new law.

3.2.2 Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms

Tor Aukrust's two-volume work entitled *Mennesket i samfunnet – en sosialetikk* was published in 1965 and represents a new 'decalogue' written in part in response to the Marxist critique of capitalism and religion's role in it. Lutheran social ethics since the Reformation has been rooted in the 'wider wisdom' which goes under various names— Catholic 'natural law', moral reason, or the most recent liberal consensus articulated by John Rawls in his seminal book *Justice as Fairness*. Early on in his work, Aukrust rules out the relevance of the Sermon on the Mount as a suitable Christian social ethic. The crux of Aukrust's dismissal of this text as normative rests on his analysis of the 'middle passage' (Matthew 6:1-7:12)— Jesus' teaching concerning almsgiving, prayer, fasting, accumulating treasure on earth etc. In this passage, Aukrust argues, Jesus *himself* relativizes the absolute demands of God's will to a level where they are practicable. Jesus does so by introducing a natural law-based ethic into the middle of a passage which sets forth the absolute ethic. Thus the Sermon on the Mount contains both a radical *ethic of revelation*—inspired by eschatological expectations of Jesus' imminent return—and a practicable *natural law-based ethic.* In a masterful way, says Aukrust, Jesus provides a pattern for all subsequent social ethics and a clue concerning the relationship between revelation and reason (Aukrust 1965:92). Some Lutheran theologians call this pattern a 'dichotomy'; others call it a 'dualism'. What is striking is that despite the fact that a person's capacity for moral reasoning has been affected by the Fall, Aukrust is convinced that the difference between what people—including Hindus and atheists—can know by natural law, and what is added or corrected by the Decalogue and what he calls the added 'revelation in Christ', is not so very great (1965:58).

Aukrust's social ethics is built on the theological assumptions implicit in the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. This doctrine sees the autonomy of the world, not as a fact of history— as we shall see in Yoder—but as the *intention of God* who rules in different ways in the

spiritual and in the worldly regiments. This in turn rests on Luther's understanding that the norms for God's rule 'with the left hand' cannot be found in the Bible.

> Certain streams within theology find it truly difficult to speak of a specifically Christian ethic, since Christianity's definition of the contents of ethics does not distinguish itself from insight which can be gained on a human basis… Christianity's identity does not lie on the ethical plane, but comes to expression in a new and never before heard of message of salvation and grace (Aukrust 1965:25 my translation).

Hence it comes as no surprise when Aukrust uses just three pages in his two-volume treatment of Christian social ethics to look at what the Old and New Testaments have to say on the subject. A little later I want to return to looking at the hermeneutical assumptions which makes such brevity possible.

The Two Kingdoms doctrine needs to be understood as Luther's response to the particular historical situation of the late medieval Catholic Church. Beginning with the Roman emperor Constantine in the 4th century, the church gained a position of not only ecclesiastical power, but increasingly political power as well. In many ways Luther's view of the church represented a continuation of what Sven-Erik Brodd calls the territorial (*parochia*) model which developed in the 6th century. During this period the church, according to Brodd, developed into a 'monolithic Christian system. In becoming identified with society as a whole, the local church no longer functioned as a *sign* for the world (Brodd 1997:13). All citizens belonging to the *parochia* belong to the church. In fact, all *must* belong to this church.

According to Astås, Luther inherited and passed on a modification of this view; church and state are two ways God rules in and over the world (1992:142). Luther made a clear distinction between the way God rules in the 'worldly' and in the 'spiritual' regiments. In the worldly regiment, God rules through the established authorities who have been divinely ordained, and who have been given the power of the sword in order to uphold public order and punish evil. In the spiritual regiment God rules through his Word which is preached by the church. Gunnar Heiene says that Luther distinguishes between these two regiments but does not *separate* them completely. God is ruler over both, and God's will is the overarching norm for both. The purpose of both of these means of God's rule is human well-being. The worldly regiment is God's way of ruling through the *political* use of the law. God "uses the authorities and outward ordinances in order to resist sin and sustain creation" (Heiene 2001:37). According to CA16, the Christian citizen has both the right and duty to hold positions of public office, lead public legal inquiries, act as judge in legal proceedings, pronounce the death penalty, go to war according to the law, do military service according to the law, conduct business according to the law, hold private property, swear oaths when

required, and take a husband or wife in marriage. For Luther, all of these are proper 'callings' in which Christians participate in God's rule with his 'left hand' (Nürnberger 2005:117). Heiene points out that these obligations are to be exercised on a foundation of law. This understanding opens for widely different applications in the realm of political ethics, a fact which can be seen in how different understandings of the Two Kingdoms doctrine led the majority of German Lutheran churches and the Church of Norway to diametrically opposite conclusions in their respective responses to Adolph Hitler during WW II.[25]

One of the major abuses which Luther reacted to was what he perceived to be the Catholic Church's mixing of the spiritual and the worldly spheres. In the geo-political power game of 16th century Europe, many Catholic bishops, instead of guiding souls according to God's Word, had begun to function as worldly rulers; "church dignitaries were both feudal lords and wielders of political power" (Altmann 1992:3). Though Luther never imagined that his demands for reform would establish a new church, the fact that he placed the authority of the Word of God above that of the pope and the Catholic Church, meant that many soon realized what Altmann refers to as the "revolutionary force implicit in Luther's ecclesiology" (1992:66). Luther's attack on the Catholic Church encouraged others— including the German peasants and their princes—who saw the possibility of being freed from the Roman church's role as guardian of the dominant political order. Over a long period of time a system of central taxation had built up deep resentments and discontent. Astås writes: "The desire for liberation from a guardianship one was dissatisfied with was one of the strongest forces behind the spread of the Reformation" (Astås 1992:142, my translation).

The one historical development which more than any other seems to have influenced Luther's not always consistent thinking regarding the relationship between the worldly and spiritual regiments, was the Peasants' Revolt in 1525. At first Luther supported the peasants' demands for land reform. However when their protests turned violent, Luther feared the ensuing chaos and encouraged the princes to crush their rebellion by force. Within a few weeks, more than 100,000 people were killed. According to Nürnberger, though Luther afterwards severely criticized the princes' massacre, "he never questioned their divine legitimacy" (2005:271). Luther's response to this pivotal event leads Astås to conclude that while Luther went in a new direction in defining how God rules through the church, his view

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[25] The CoN's 1942 Confession of Faith, art.5, entitled "The Church's Foundation" states that where the power of the state departs from the God's law, the state no longer functions as the instrument of God, but becomes a demonic power (Heiene 2001:273).The content of God's law, says Heiene, corresponds to natural law based on Romans 2:14ff where Paul says that the demands of the law are also written into the hearts of the Gentiles.

of how God rules in the wordly regiment remained conservative and traditional (1992:142).

Altmann shares this assessment:

> At a particular historical moment, Luther accommodated himself to the secular territorial authority. He saw this as a temporary measure at a stage of transition. But what was for him temporary became institutionalized: The territorial churches became allied with and subject to their respective princes. This development carried with it the inevitable loss of solidarity with the weak (1992:66).

Luther's reforms were met with differing responses from different quarters. Fighting a battle on several fronts, Luther also began to attack the wordly rulers who had betrayed their original 'calling'; instead of ruling their countries, their attempts to crush the Lutheran apostasy represented interfering in the spiritual regiment (Heiene and Thorbjørnsen (2001): 272).[26] On the one hand, the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms can therefore be understood as *reflecting* the historical realities of the time. On the other hand this doctrine legitimated and further strengthened a development taking place elsewhere in Europe at the time—the development of national churches, including state Lutheran churches in Scandinavia. The forces which the Reformation unleashed, says Altmann, soon resulted in conflict and war between Protestants and Catholics, a pattern which continued for centuries (1992:25).

In the early years of the Reformation Luther had hoped that a visible, reformed and voluntary church would emerge (Yoder 1994:78). However, as a result of growing conflict, an agreement was eventually reached whereby a person was bound to the religion of the prince in whose territory they lived *cuius region eius religio* (Altmann 1992:25). This often involved taking an oath of allegiance to the local prince. For those like the Anabaptists who wished to practice a faith different from that of their prince, there was the option of moving to a different territory. But very often, as Altmann notes, this was not practically feasible. "With the development of political absolutism, the churches became domesticated and integrated into the state political systems" (1992:25). Luther felt he was forced to give up the vision of a purified church. Given the general climate of religious struggle in Europe, it is easy to see why Luther concluded that most of Christendom had and always would be un-Christian.

For Luther, the church's most important responsibility is to preach the Word and administer the sacraments. The church's secondary purpose is to actively seek to influence the conscience of the worldly authorities in the exercise of their public duties.[27] Luther's many writings concerning a host of social problems bear witness to his conviction that it was important for the church to give 'political counsel' to the state (Astås 1992:142). Within the

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[26] Taken from Luther's treatise, "Concerning Wordly Authority" of 1523.

[27] The preaching of God's Word to the Christian princes who sat in church on Sundays was intended to call them to discharge their public duties in a moral and just manner.

framework of *corpus Christianum*, it was natural for Luther to have high expectations concerning what standards of justice could be expected within the wordly regiment. The worldly authorities were Christian and expected to be in church on Sunday. This helps to explain why Luther understood Romans 13 to mean that earthly authorities are ordained by God and need not be accountable to the church (Astås 1992:142). Furthermore, this 'outward rule' as Nürnberger calls it, "is not only found in the state, but also in the family, in the informal structures of society, [and] in the economy" (2005:136). Yet as Bonino points out in his review of Gustav Wingren's 'ethic of call', for Luther, the norms for God's rule in these areas cannot be found in the Bible. Afraid of establishing yet another 'law', Luther hesitates to name exactly where it can be found, appealing at different points to moral conscience, natural law and reason (1983:25). Commenting on Luther's approach to authority in general, Nürnberger says that in Luther there is a dialectic between submission to—but also at times a critique of—authority, be it political or churchly (2005:85).

According to Astås, one consequence of Luther's doctrine of Justification and the Two Kingdoms doctrine was that he saw the church primarily as a spiritual entity (1992:141). The church was the 'invisible' fellowship of those who were justified by God. As a result Luther considered the church's organizational structure and leadership to be no more than *derivatives* of the gospel. They did not, as in the Catholic Church, *constitute* the very nature of the church. As a result, Luther's understanding of the priesthood of all believers implied that all believers have a duty and right to be involved in the congregation's organization and tasks. At points, Altmann, like Nordstokke, discerns a 'communitarian' emphasis in Luther's ecclesiology, a drive toward "liberation from institutional tutelage" as well as the conviction that "the ecclesiastical structure is both reformable and meant for service" (1992:66); in places one finds dialectical elements in Luther's thinking and, as Altmann points out, this could lead to seeming contradictions in his ecclesiology. As mentioned, the early Luther had hopes that the Reformation would lead to congregations of believing members living a life of holiness.[28] Yet in later years Luther became disillusioned in terms of what could be expected of the institutional church.[29] As Astås has pointed out, "Luther talked more about 'Christendom' than about 'church'" (1992:141). The sociological framework within which his

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[28] Referring to Luther's preface to his 'German Mass' of 1526 Yoder writes: "[He] thought seriously of the possibility of creating a committed Christian community" (1994:78), and refers to his own article entitled, "Martin Luther's Forgotten Vision," in *The Other Side*, April 1977.

[29] This same pattern can partially be seen concerning his expectations of what justice could be expected of political authorities in the worldly regiment. One example is the difference between "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate" from 1520, and his later writings following the Peasants' Revolt.

theological reflection took place continued to be the Christendom-*parochia* model. It would be from other quarters, including the Anabaptists, that the Free Church tradition would eventually develop. The parochial model continues to be the shape of Christendom in Norway, and the concrete ecclesiological context within which the CoN articulates its understanding of diakonia.

3.3 Plan for Diakonia

What follows is a summary of the short section in the PFD (pages 6-8) which outlines the theological basis for diakonia. Given its brevity, my focus will be on what—from all that the Bible and church tradition have to say about diakonia—the writers of the PFD *have* chosen to highlight, as well as what is not mentioned. Despite the fact that I will be drawing attention to those formulations which stand in tension with Yoder's Anabaptist theology, it is important to be aware that there is much concerning the understanding and practice of diakonia which both traditions share in common.

"Diakoni is […] the gospel in action." This formulation moves beyond the consecutive understanding of *ordo salutis*. Nürnberger's conclusion that Liberation Theology's historical project in service of justice for the poor represents God's rule on the left, suggests that some still see diaconal praxis as belonging to the realm of law (2005:283). Yet Nordstokke and the PDF affirm the unity of justification and sanctification, and therefore place diakonia squarely on the side of the gospel, rather than seeing it as a *response* to the gospel.

"Diakonia […] is expressed through loving your neighbor, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice…The Church of Norway sees itself as a serving church." The four ways in which diakonia is expressed are all different forms of *action*. This establishes a direct link between diakonia and Christian social ethics. At the same time they are markers which speak of the church's *identity*. However, traditionally the true church is found where the Word of God is preached correctly and the sacraments administered properly (CA7). Such a definition sees the church's identity not by looking at the gathered community of believers, their common life or their service, but by saying something about the church's *leadership*. Hence one could interpret the PDF's identifying diakonia with the gospel as moving Lutheran ecclesiology's centre of gravity from 'being' (or receiving) to 'doing'. If this is indeed the case, it represents a significant shift.

"We are created in God's image for fellowship with one another [and to] serve one another…Our faith in God involves responsibility for the world around us."[30] This statement can be understood as anchoring diakonia's general responsibility 'for the world' in *creation theology* and therefore in an ethic that is 'wider' than a specifically Christian ethic. As mentioned previously, Aukrust speaks in terms of variations of Catholic 'natural law' (1965:96). The capacity for doing good is understood as being part of what it means to be created in the image of God. The next sentence notes that "for those who believe in Christ, faith will work through love", though whether or what the 'more' which believing might add to what those who do not believe in Christ can do, is not spelled out. Does believing in Christ, for example mean that we are being transformed 'into the image of Christ' (2 Cor. 3:17-18) so that enemy-love or practicing significant economic sharing becomes thinkable? Would 'not believing' be associated with the willingness to take life (war), whether in order to defend privilege or in the 'struggle for justice', as Liberation Theology opens for? Such an ethic would need to be premised on a distinction between church and world, a distinction which cannot be discerned in the PFD's discussion of diaconal identity.

"Diakoni is being as well as doing… Diakonia is rooted in and united with God's reconciliation in Christ." Both 'being' and 'doing', as well as atonement and reconciliation, have both *individual* and *communal* dimensions. As the PDF's discussion of the four strategic dimensions of diakonia makes clear, both being and doing can be linked to the communal dimensions of the church's witness and identity. The reference to God's "reconciling all things… through the cross" (Col. 1:19) later in the same paragraph suggests an action with clearly social dimensions. Yet traditionally, the doctrine of Justification relates to the *individual's salvation*, while the Two Kingdoms doctrine defines the *individual's* different *responsibilities* in two different spheres.[31] Against the backdrop of changing understandings of diakonia, does the PDF perhaps articulate a new understanding of diakonia's identity without fully developing the theological significance of moving from an individual to a more communally-oriented ecclesiology?

"All who have been baptized are called to care for their fellow human beings." This statement raises the question of how baptism relates to diakonia. Despite there being different understandings related to baptism and faith, the PDF's formulation seems to reflect the praxis of the CoN as a majority-church. First the (infant) is baptized. At some later point,

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[30] The following citations in bold are all taken from the PFD (CoNNC 2007), pages 6-7.
[31] Another significant CoN document which reflects a similar ambiguity concerning the individual-communal dichotomy is the CoN Council on Ecumenical and International Relations' booklet, "The Church and Economic Globalization" (CoNCEIR 2007).

perhaps after confirmation, the individual is called to diaconal service. The common practice of speaking about diaconal 'volunteers' suggests that diakonia is an *optional* activity rather than a part of every believer's identity. This reinforcing the *ordo salutis* pattern.

"In baptism we become […] members of the world-wide church." The identity given in baptism is linked to the *individual* in relation to the 'wider' church; that it implies a commitment to the local church is not referred to. Given a Christendom context, an appeal for 'all the 'baptized' to practice diaconal service is, in effect, *a general appeal to society*. In the paragraphs addressing the church's responsibility to care for creation and struggle for justice, the language, understandably, becomes more sociological. Is the fact that there are no biblical references here related to limited space? Or does it suggest the conviction that the Bible does not address such modern and complex issues? The church's prophetic challenge in these areas is addressed to 'social structures' and 'global systems' on the macro level, and to 'one's own life' on the micro level (CoNNC 2007:6). That the church's prophetic witness could be borne and made visible by the *local congregation* is not spoken of. This, as much as anything in the new PFD, is an illustration of the vacuum Charles Taylor' polarity describes.

Without further commentary at this point, it is interesting to note *the themes which do not appear* in the PFD's treatment of the theological basis for diakonia: the church's missionary witness, the Kingdom of God, discipleship, enemy-love,[32] and the human Jewish Jesus of history; the designation 'Christ' is used throughout the document.

In concluding this section, I want to draw attention to some of the ways in which the PFD document opens for some of Yoder's thinking, this being the subject of the following chapter:

1. Diakonia defined as the gospel in action places diakonia squarely on the side of the gospel, thereby making it central to Lutheran ecclesiology rather than remaining part of God's rule with the left hand.

2. Diakoni understood as 'being' and not simply 'doing' is given an ontological meaning in itself, and is not simply the *result* of the individual's being justified by God.

3. The reference to 1 John 3:16 ("Love one another as Christ loved us") is perhaps the closest we come to describing an 'inclusive fellowship' which also has room for the enemy. "While we were God's enemies, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:10).

4. The PFD makes a major effort to present meeting human need within the wider context of structures of oppression. In this way the dignity of both those who serve and those

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[32] "Giving our lives for others" is mentioned, though without further clarification or example (CoNNC 2007: 7).

served— as subjects and not objects—is affirmed. This represents a move away from the 'from above' tradition characteristic of diakonia through much of the CoN's history.

5. Though not central in the document, the church's eschatological hope is referred to briefly on page 19 in terms of Christ's return.

In this chapter we have seen that CoN's diakonia reflects changes which took place in the relationship between church and state, renewal movements including Pietism, the industrial revolution and the resulting development of a labor movement which reflected the interests and growing self-consciousness of a new and urban working class. These centuries mark a clear shift in terms the social location for the individual's sense of 'belonging'. With migration into the cities there is a loss of local community. A sense of belonging once associated with the extended family becomes increasingly linked to social class. It is clear that the shape of the CoN's diaconal work during this period was clearly influenced by these changes. At the same time the church's diaconal initiatives and dialogue with the labor movement were instrumental in shaping Norwegian society. One example is the development of the welfare-state in Norway. Lutheran diakonia following the Reformation represents a continuation of the *karitativ* understanding of diakonia. However this gradually gave way to a more holistic understanding. The new PFD reflects the culmination of a process whereby diakonia moves from being understood as a *consequence* of preaching the gospel, to being seen as *constituting the gospel itself*. This is a paradigm-shift. Diakonia is not merely a *means* but an *end* in itself; it therefore is moved from the realm of law to the realm of gospel.

There are three themes in this chapter which are carried further in this study. First, diakonia in Norway is introduced 'from above' and therefore becomes part of the Norwegian nation-building project within the wordly regiment. Taken together, the doctrines of Justification and the Two Kingdoms provide the theological legitimation for this praxis. Theologically the major question the latter doctrine raises is: How does God *rule*? What does it mean that an emperor, king or president (or *country*) is 'Christian'? Second, the diaconal renewal in the 1800's was in many ways a layman's movement 'from below', and represented a reaction to the church/state partnership's diakonia. And third, diakonia's continuing search for identity takes place in a social context in which the emergence of the welfare state takes over the bulk of what initially were diaconal initiatives. However the PFD does not clearly identify the need for the development of *congregational* diakonia.[33]

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[33] It is, however, worth noting that congregational diakonia is *not listed clearly* as one of the forms for diaconal ministry in the PFD's ch.. 3.1 "Many Forms of Ministry". The following are listed: general diakonia, organized diakonia, specialized diakonia and international diakonia (CoNNC 2007:9).

4 The Theological Contribution of J.H.Yoder

As a Mennonite, John Howard Yoder offers a critique of the Anabaptist tradition which he himself stands in, a tradition whose emphasis on the church as a non-violent community led many Anabaptist groups in later centuries to withdraw from society and become *passive* rather than pacifist (Yoder 1984:4). I begin this chapter by giving a brief account of the Anabaptist origins during the Reformation. For Bonino, Yoder's position is not simply a reiteration of traditional pacifism, but a polemic against the tendency of the major church traditions to relativize the radical social ethics of the Sermon on the Mount (1983:35). Lutheran theology has, for the most part, limited the normativeness of this ethic to the realm of the *individual* within the 'spiritual regiment'.[34] If diakonia is 'the gospel in action' and a fundamental dimension of the church's being and doing, then the new PFD establishes a clear link between ecclesiology and social ethics. That the church is not only the *preaching* of the gospel, but the *living-out* of the gospel underscores this link. This link, which is central in Yoder, lies at the heart of the paradigm-shift reflected in the PFD. Yet to say that diakonia (or the church) is the gospel in action raises the question: *What is the gospel*? In the second part of this chapter I will look at four main areas which I believe make Yoder relevant to this question: 1) The way in which the message and ministry of Jesus is *political*, 2). Paul's understanding of justification by faith, 3) the NT understanding of the state, and 4) the church as an alternative community. It is my hope that a presentation of Yoder on these points will contribute to underpinning the theological shift necessary to sustain the new PFD's paradigm-shift regarding diakonia.

4.1 A Brief History of the Mennonites

According to Mennonite church historian C.J. Dyck, the Anabaptists were not a unified movement, but consisted of three major groupings—1) the *Spiritualists*, 2) those with a *theocratic* vision who wanted to establish God's Kingdom on earth, if necessary by force, and 3) a variety of groups who later became known as the *'Believers Church' tradition*.[35] According to Rasmusson it is the latter group which lived on and has had continuing influence

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[34] Other interpretations relativize Jesus' radical ethic by relegating it to an interim period in view of the Early Church's imminent apocalyptic hopes for Jesus' return to establish the Kingdom of God in its fullness, a view which, somewhat surprisingly, Tor Aukrust rejects in his treatment of the Sermon on the Mount (1965:92).

[35] The designation Believers' Church to describe the traditions stemming from the Anabaptists was introduced by Franklin H. Littell (Kärkkäinen 2002:65). For a fuller discussion of the various strands within Anabaptism see Kärkkäinen (2002:59-67).

(2007:187).[36] Anabaptists wanted to push the Reformer's biblical understanding and praxis to their logical and radical conclusion (Bonino 1983:34).[37] They consciously sought to restore the church to what they considered was its original purity during the Apostolic era. The Reformers knew very well of the 'fall of the church'. But they dated this fall not in the 4th, but in the 6th and 7th century. "They did not see that the signs of fallenness to which they objected—papacy, Pelagianism, hagiolatry, sacramentalism—were largely fruits of the [Constantinian] confusion of church and world" (Yoder 1994:58).[38]

Medieval moral theology distinguished between the 'counsels' derived from the gospels which are binding only for the 'religious' (monks/nuns), and the 'precepts' or 'mandates' that the church and state have the moral right to demand of everyone (Kärkkäinen 2002:63). "Thus a moral dualism, not between Christians and non-Christians, or between belief and unbelief, but between different kinds of Christians, was given legitimacy within the church" (Yoder 1994:117). Both Catholics and the magisterial Reformers considered the radical demands of gospel, which the Anabaptists found not only in the Sermon on the Mount, but throughout the NT, a burden which could not be expected of all the baptized. Within *corpus Christianum* the true church was considered 'invisible' (Kreider 1957:181). As we noted in the previous chapter, the Reformation did not change, but re-formulated the rejection of a Christian social ethic based on the NT. Luther was adamant in rejecting any kind of link between justification and what the Anabaptists called the 'counsels of perfection'. For the Anabaptists, the church was an 'assembly of the righteous' rather than a 'mixed body'. Yet living a life of holiness could lead to the suspicion that a person belonged to the Anabaptists. The court record at the trial of Hans Jeger states:

> …because he does not swear and because he leads an unoffensive life, therefore men suspect him of Anabaptism… He has for a long time passed for such, because he did not swear, nor quarrel, nor did other such-like things (Dyck 1967:312).

Anabaptists, says Dyck, were often accused of trying to earn their own salvation since they stressed the importance of obedience to Christ and moral purity (1967:312). Faith without works was dead; a person should show what they believed by the way they lived since the purpose of doing good works was to underscore was the church's witness to the 'new creation' made possible by Jesus' death. This view of the church implied that membership was voluntary and was entered into by adult baptism. Inspired by the accounts of the Early

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[36] Rasmusson 2007:187. Cf. also Kärkkäinen's discussion of the various strands of Anabaptists (2002:59-67).
[37] Luther's more hegemonic appellation during the Reformation was 'Schwermere'. Only slightly less so is the designation 'sectarian' popularized by Ernst Troeltsch (Kärkkäinen 2002:63).
[38] Cf. Nürnberger 2005:107 for a description of the decadence of the Catholic Church at the time of Luther.

Church in the book of Acts, many of the Swiss and Dutch Mennonite groups practiced different forms of a community of goods. Hence their ecclesiology fits into what Brodd calls the '*communio*' (*koinonia*) model. In this model, "the church *itself* is seen as a *diakonia*" (Brodd 1997:16), a fellowship of mutual service where all take responsibility for each other, not only spiritually but also materially, where the *leitourgia* of the worshipping fellowship comes to expression in the levelling-out of social differences around the Lord's table, and where *martyria* represents the community's witness to Christ in the world (Brodd 1997:12). Menno Simons, an important leader among the Anabaptists in the Netherlands, added holy living, brotherly/sisterly love, unreserved testimony, and suffering to the traditional marks of the church (Yoder 1994:79). Kärkkäinen notes that these four additions are actually *notae missionis* since their ultimate purpose is to carry out *mission* (2002:67).

It was the Anabaptists insistence on the separation of church and state which proved to be the issue which ultimately led both Catholics and the magisterial Reformers to consider them a threat to the order of Christendom (Kreider 1957:181). Their practice of adult baptism created 'illegal' societies since the Anabaptists believed—based on Jesus prohibition against bearing the sword and swearing oaths—that they could not swear the oath of allegiance which each local prince required of all their subjects. The Anabaptists also refused to perform mandatory military service, preferring to be burnt and drowned rather than killing. Their enemy-love also included the 'infidel' Muslims of the Ottoman Empire, and represented a clear witness amidst the many religiously-based conflicts in Europe at the time.[39]

The Anabaptists communal emphasis is also seen in their reading of scripture. They emphasized a discernment process which assumed unmediated access to God. Each member of the local congregation, having received the gift of the Holy Spirit, can help to discern the will of God.[40] That excesses occurred not infrequently recalls similar challenges which are reflected in some of Paul's letters (1 Cor. 5:1-6:20; 14:1-37). The Anabaptists did not believe in the necessity of an accredited, educated religious elite,[41] nor did they have a sacramental understanding of the Lord's supper and baptism.

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[39] The parallels between the plight of the Anabaptists in the 16th century, and the persecution of Christians by the Romans in the 2nd and 3rd, is striking. Like Anabaptists in certain of the Swiss cantons, the early Christians had no civil rights in the Roman Empire, their religion was illegal and could be punished by death, and they were considered to be 'enemies of humanity' (Astås 1992:29).

[40] In terms of flat leadership structure, reading the bible 'in a circle', as well as emphasis on community and mutual service, the Anabaptists shared a great deal in common with the Base Christian Communities which have grown up within the Catholic Church in Latin America.

[41] In most Free Church traditions, ordination is understood as a public confirmation of God's call. 'Quality control' is the responsibility of the local congregation, not a central church hierarchy.

As a result of severe persecution, particularly of their most important leaders, Anabaptists, like the Jews, were eventually dispersed throughout the world. Some groups like the Amish and the Hutterites withdrew into colonies completely separated from 'the world'. Others like the Swiss and Russian Mennonites emigrated to North and South America. For many this meant a change in 'social location' which in time resulted in a theological re-location.[42] With growing prosperity many Mennonites, particularly in North America, lost much of 'the Anabaptist vision',[43] abandoning their costly non-violence and economic discipleship. Sociologically speaking, they became less and less a 'visible church'. Like church history in general, Mennonite history confirms Luther's claim that the church is in continual need of being reformed (*ecclesia semper reformanda*).

4.2   The Ecclesiology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder

This brief history of Anabaptism shows the clear connection between their ecclesiology and their social ethics, a connection which presupposes that the church is something separate from the world. I want now to look more closely at some of the 'building blocks' in Yoder's thinking which support the claim that this vision is biblical, contemporary to Jesus and the Early Church, and still relevant for the church—including the Church of Norway—today.

4.2.1   The Politics of Jesus

As the title of this study suggests, Yoder's 'sectarian' theology sees the church as an alternative *polis*.[44] For Yoder, the ministry and message of Jesus are through and through political. Jesus' life and teaching concerning God's Kingdom reveal a new possibility of human and social, and therefore *political* relationships. The Lutheran doctrine of the Two Kingdoms divides this Kingdom into two realms, making Jesus' radical social ethic relevant only for the individual within the spiritual regiment. For Yoder, the NT makes the claim that it is the church's radical praxis, including enemy-love, which declares the lordship of Christ over *all* things, including the wordly regiment. The political dimension in Jesus' life and

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[42] In Europe, Pietism was a major influence whereas in North America, Fundamentalism, Dispensationalism and, more recently, Evangelicalism have had a greater impact.

[43] This is the title of an article by the well known Mennonite scholar, Harold S. Bender, who was one of Yoder's early mentors. The article was published in the book *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision – Twenty Three Essays by Contemporary Scholars Trace the Story of Anabaptist Though From Martyrdom and Disrepute To Rediscovery and Present-day Interpretation* (quite the subtitle!). Many of the spiritual descendents of the Anabaptists today can be found in intentional Christian communities which are developing throughout the Catholic and Protestant worlds (e.g. Shane Claiborn, one of the key speakers at the 2009 Korsvei Festival). For those among these who are theologically inclined, Yoder is required reading.

[44] This formulation was first suggested to me by the title of Swedish theologian Arne Rasmusson's book, *The Church as Polis*.

teaching, says Yoder, was not a misunderstanding. Nor was it merely *derived* from his teaching; it was conscious, and is reflected throughout the entire New Testament (1972:63).

The form of the God's declaring a new possibility for all of mankind was not a new teaching but the establishment of a new *polis*. Jesus establishes a *community* of disciples whose common life makes visible the way God rules in the world: 1) the breaking down of all social barriers based on culture, class and sex, 2) the exercise of power through servanthood, forgiveness and enemy-love, and 3) a redistribution of material resources in the practice of jubilee economics. In his summary of Yoder, Bonino writes:

> The inauguration of this new order was conceived not as an event outside of time, or at the end of time, but as the result of that particular intervention of God which sets human history [...] on a new track. In the effort to bring about such a society, Jesus rejects the use of violence or political wisdom and chooses instead the way of 'defenseless resistance'" (Bonino 1983:34).

The first part of Yoder's best known book *The Politics of Jesus* is a study of the gospel of Luke, and tests the hypothesis that Jesus is a model of radical political action (1972:12). Yoder begins by drawing attention to the many revolutionary overtones in Mary's magnificat ("he has put the mighty down from their thrones"), Zachariah's song concerning the meaning of his own son's ministry ("that we should be saved from our enemies…), the birth narrative which includes Herod's slaughter of innocent boys because he feared a rival to his throne. John the Baptist's preaching which was 'good news' to the poor, has traditionally been filtered through the assumption that the language of "laying the ax to the root" was meant 'spiritually', and was not aimed at Herod and his Roman masters (Yoder 1972:27).

At the beginning of his public ministry Luke records that Jesus was led into the desert and tempted by Satan (4:1-13). We need, says Yoder, to understand these temptations against the backdrop of 1st century Palestine: an oppressed people living under Roman occupation, where the vast majority of people, like Jesus' own family, were poor and forced to pay high taxes both the political and religious authorities. It is easy to understand why theologians whose social location ensures that they never need to miss a meal, never lose a child to contaminated water, never are imprisoned because anything they say or write could be construed as threatening to the established order, could miss the revolutionary undertones which were crystal clear to Jesus' listeners. How else are we to understand the statement that 'the poor heard him gladly (Mark 12:37)?

The economic temptation of turning boulders into bread, the political temptation of ruling over all the kingdoms of this world, and the religious temptation of making a spectacular demonstration of God's anointing, were all ways of exercising power and being

king which Jesus rejected (Yoder 1972:30-34). The one temptation Jesus faced again and again in his public ministry was the Zealot temptation: to exercise social responsibility in the interest of justified revolution through the use of available violent methods (Yoder 1972:98). The 'spiritualist' option—to withdraw from society into a 'spiritual regiment' like the Essenes—was no temptation. The 'theocratic' option—by which the Sadducees made a 'church-state' alliance with the occupying Romans—was also rejected from the start.[45] Very seldom has Jesus' radical ethic been seen as a relevant alternative. The NT church and the Anabaptists of the 16th century are among that minority which interpreted the life and ministry of Jesus as a third alternative to these two options.

Immediately after the desert temptations Jesus returns to his hometown Nazareth and delivers his first sermon (Luke 4:14-30), the content of which, says Yoder, contained a bombshell for his listeners—the declaration that in his own person, God was inaugurating a new year of jubilee, the 'acceptable year of the Lord'.

> We may have great difficulty in knowing in what sense this event came to pass or could have come to pass; but what the event was supposed to be is clear: it is a visible socio-political, economic restructuring of relations among the people of God… We must conclude that in the ordinary sense of his words Jesus, like Mary and like John, was announcing the imminent entrée en vigueur of a new regime whose marks would be that rich would give to the poor, the captives would be freed, and men would have a new mentality (metanoia), if they believed this news (Yoder 1972:39).

According to Yoder, the four jubilee practices that were part of the Mosaic Law (Lev. 25) were announced by Jesus as 'good news to the poor' in the year 26 AD. The practice of leaving the land fallow, says Yoder, was the one provision which had become common usage (1972:64). Yet allusions to the cancelling of debts, release of slaves and land-reform can be found throughout the gospels. Yoder acknowledges that there are great doubts as to what degree these practices were implemented throughout Jewish history. The critical question is not, however, whether the modern exegete believes Jesus' proclamation to have been 'realistic', but whether the jubilee was a part of the Jewish collective memory and imagination. Limitations of space permit me to give only one example of Yoder's arguments in support of the assertion that the jubilee tradition was still alive at some level—the rabbinic practice of the *prosboul*. The demand that debts be forgiven led lenders to freeze credit prior to the jubilee year. The *prosboul* was an arrangement whereby a lender could transfer a loan to the court. The court could in turn demand payment where the lender, according the requirements of jubilee, could not (Deut. 15:7-10). The language of the jubilee is also heard in

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[45] Yoder maintains that the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, each in their different ways, are variations of this 'theocratic' option, since they all share in common the overlapping spheres of church and world (1964:62-64).

the Lord's prayer—"forgive us our *debts* as we forgive our debtors". "We have every reason to assume that the inauguration of the jubilee was understood by Jesus' hearers with the same concreteness as the Exodus story or the deliverance of Jehoshaphat had for them" (1972:89). Yoder goes through an extensive list of indicators which suggest that the jubilee was, at minimum, a part of the collective Jewish imagination and memory. The Sermon on the Mount indicates that Jesus considered the tithe insufficient. "Lend, expecting nothing in return" (Luke 6:35) was a jubilee injunction to the new community. In fact, Jesus' teaching concerning jubilee economics take up more space in the gospels than do teaching concerning more 'spiritual' themes such as prayer. The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matt. 18:21-35) whose loan was called in, and who in turn demanded re-payment of a much smaller loan, makes the link between forgiveness of sins and the jubilee practice of debt-reduction clear.

The second theme in Jesus' first sermon in the synagogue is directly offensive to his Jewish listeners. "Appealing to prophetic precedent, he proclaims the opening of the New Age to Gentiles" (Yoder 1972:39). This thrust is not related to the jubilee proclamation but grows out of Jesus' response to the disbelief bred in his hearers by their familiarity with his family— "Isn't this Joseph's son?" Whereas preaching jubilee economics was popular, exploding the Jewish monopoly on defining who is part of the People of God quickly brought Jesus onto a collision course with the Jewish religious establishment.

The choice of a group of disciples as the core of a community gathered around his leadership represented a transition towards a potential power base. His feeding of the 5000 in the desert (Luke 9:11-17), as the Devil had said, moved the crowd to acclaim Jesus as the New Moses, the 'Welfare King' they had been waiting for (Yoder 1972:42). Like today's guerilla movements, the people wanted a king with 'from above' power who could rid their country of the Romans and 'restore the kingdom to Israel' (Acts 1:6). Yet when Jesus makes clear that his kingship is not like that of the 'kings of this earth who lord it over their subjects' (Luke 22:25), when he starts to talk about the cross, he begins to be estranged not only from the Jewish leaders, but from the crowds as well. The alternative Jesus presents to the way the earthly rulers 'rule' is not spirituality but servanthood (Yoder 1972:46).

It is at this point that many orthodox doctrines of salvation see Jesus' rejection of kingship as evidence that his kingdom was 'spiritual'. Yet the cross, says Yoder, began to loom "not as a ritually prescribed instrument of propitiation, but as the political alternative to both insurrection and quietism" (1972:43). If Jesus' central purpose in coming was to achieve *forensic propitiation* for mankind's sin, then a linkage between the manner of his life and the cross is unnecessary. In this view, the reason Jesus refused to be king or defend himself was

not that there was anything wrong with kingship or self-defense, but that by making such choices he might not have met his destiny on the cross. Such a view sees Jesus as an individualist teacher whose radical social ethics were limited to the personal sphere. Yet Yoder's response to those theological traditions which say that the only two options are sectarian purism or political realism, is that Jesus refuses both these definitions of *polis* (1972:113).The cross is the punishment of one particular Jew who threatened society by creating a new kind of community. The ethics of the Sermon on the Mount—enemy-love and jubilee economics—define not only the i*ndividual's* encounter with their neighbor, but the social form of a peculiar people in the world. In terms of the disciple's imitation of Christ, says Yoder, there is only one realm in which the concept of imitation holds.

> […] but there it holds in every strand of the New Testament literature and all the more strikingly by virtue of the absence of parallels in other realms: this is at the point of the concrete social meaning of the cross in its relation to enmity and power. Servanthood replaces dominion, forgiveness absorbs hostility. Thus—and only thus—are we bound by New Testament thought to 'be like Jesus' (1972:134).

Furthermore, the cross is not suffering which is the result of factors such as sickness or accident, *over which the disciple has no control.* The cross is rather "the political, legally to be expected result of a moral clash with the powers ruling society" (Yoder 1972:132). It was the end of a long series of conscious choices. For the later NT writers, the cross was God's way of 'taking responsibility for society'; the cross reveals a new means of exercising power. More often than not, the church has simply ignored this strategy in the exercise of its social responsibility. The resurrection bears witness to the fact that *agape* love is, ultimately, *effective* despite the fact that the eschatological proof of this still awaits being revealed.

4.2.2 Was Paul A Lutheran?

If one grants that the picture Yoder presents of an upside-down political Jesus whose radical ethic is reflected throughout the gospels, can such a view have something to say to the CoN in the 21st century, a question I will come back to in the next chapter? Yet the prior question is: Did this ethic even reach into other parts of the NT? A common assumption behind both questions is that it did not; Yoder's list of reasons for this include: 1) the Early Church believed this world would soon pass away, 2) Jesus' ethic grew out of a simple rural society and isn't suited to the complex problems facing the modern world, 3) Jesus lived in a world over which he had no control, a situation which changed after Constantine, requiring that Christians needed to begin to take 'responsibility', and 4) Jesus' message is spiritual and Paul's social conservatism—reflected in terms of the husband/wife and slave/master

relationships (*haustafeln*)—is evidence of this fact. Further evidence is the shift from the human Jesus of the gospels to the 'higher Christology' (cosmic Christ) of the later epistles, a shift which, as Yoder points out, reflects a Docetic tendency. All these assumptions, says Yoder, are different ways of reading back into the biblical story our own hermeneutical assumptions (1972:103).

The traditional debate concerning the place of Jesus' social ethics in the Early Church usually places Paul in tension with Jesus (1972:230). Since Paul's central teaching was the doctrine of justification, the perfectionist social ethics of Jesus is no longer binding for our age. The rhetorical question which began this section really asks the question of whether Paul had the same understanding of justification as did Luther. Despite there being many new elements in Nürnberger's understanding of Lutheran theology, he expresses a traditional view of Pauline justification: "…the central aspect of our faith [is] the relationship between human beings as sinners and a God of love and justice" (2005:97). First, justification relates to the relationship of an *individual* to God. Second, sin is not something which refers to concrete relationships within history—to creation, to the neighbor or to the enemy—but to the individual's *status* before God. And third, the status of the person's relationship to God is a reality on a metaphysical level. The *ordo salutis* pattern sees justification at this level, while sanctification as a second stage (if at all) represents the movement back into history/praxis. Few assumptions, says Yoder,

> have been more widely shared in Protestant thought than the identification of the messages of Paul and Luther with the promise of a new hope for the individual in his subjectivity (Yoder 1994:73).[46]

Yoder asks us to consider the hypothesis that for Paul, righteousness—either in God or in a person—has both social and cosmic dimensions (1972:218). Such a perspective does not deny the personal character of justification but sets God's reconciliation into a wider and fuller reality, the People of God living *in* the world as a 'New Creation' (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17). In support of this hypothesis, Yoder draws on the work of Pauline scholars Krister Stendahl, Markus Barth and Hans Werner Bartsch. The position Yoder sketched out in the 1970's has in succeeding decades proved to be seminal. Elements of his summary can be found in the more recent 'new Luther research' of Finnish theologian Risto Saarinen and

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[46] As recently as 1990 Gustaf Wingren could write: "Romans and Galatians are characterized by the tension between guilt and forgiveness, a tension which is central during the stage when the Early Church's neighbor is the Jewish synagogue with its emphasis on the law" (cited in Rasmusson 2007:175, my translation). Stephanie Dietrich's recent re-interpretation of justification and the role of grace—while moving from Wingren's emphasis on guilt to the post-modern person's sense of shame and the pressure for self-realization—does nothing to shift the locus of this doctrine beyond the level of the *individual* (2005:196-209).

Swedish theologian Arne Rasmusson, as well as Canadian Reformed theologian Douglas Harink. Though there are significant differences among these scholars, they are in agreement concerning the social dimensions of Paul's understanding of justification. Due to limitations of space I can give only a brief overview of their research.

In an influential article entitled "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West", Krister Stendahl demonstrated that all the elements of the classic 'Luther experience' cannot be found in Paul's thought or own experience. These include 1) Paul was not preoccupied with a sense of guilt; on the contrary he had a robust conscience; 2) Paul does not understand the purpose of the Law to be the awakening of guilt as preparation for receiving a message of forgiveness; 3) for Paul, faith was not a movement from trust in good works to trust in God's grace but rather a confession which separated Jewish Christians from other Jews—that the Messiah had come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth (Yoder 1972:219).

Stendahl further points out that Paul's concept of sin was not rooted in a sense of existential anguish under the wrath of a righteous God, but rather in his not having recognized that the Messiah had come (Yoder 1972:221). Douglas Harink adds that Paul's 'zeal' lacked 'knowledge'. What Paul did not know was *not* that he needed faith instead of works, but that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah through whom God had fulfilled his promise to bless the whole world (2003:31). Paul's sin was social and concrete; he had *persecuted* the renewal movement within Judaism which declared that the Gentiles could also be part of God's covenant. On the road to Damascus Paul discovered that this Jesus whom he had been persecuting had chosen him to be the bearer of this good news (gospel); to him was revealed a 'mystery' hidden for ages in God (Eph. 3:3). What is this mystery? It is that on the cross, Christ has broken down the 'wall of hostility' between Jew and Gentile; the 'mystery' is that through all the ages it has been God's purpose to reconcile those who were enemies into one community, indeed, to reconcile the whole cosmos to himself in and through Christ.

> The work of Christ is not only that he saves the souls of individuals and henceforth that they can love each other better; the work of Christ […] 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 1972:223).[47]

Paul's understanding of the law, says Yoder, was not that of Luther. Yoder makes this point in a book which gathered together writings related to his life-long dialogue with the Jewish faith,

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[47] Douglas Harink, in *Paul Among the Postliberals*, develops a detailed argument in support of the assertion that Paul's use of *pistis Christou Iesou* (e.g. Gal. 2:6) in the phrase 'justification by faith *in* Christ' (Luther's translation) should instead be translated 'faith *of* Christ'. He sees the former as having an anthropocentric focus on the person's passive reception of God's grace, rather than Christological, focusing on the work of Christ whose death has created a whole new world, of which the church is the 'firstfruits', in which all the walls have been broken down (2003:25-28).

The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited. Drawing on the work of James Dunn, he maintains that the law which Paul speaks of refers to those *social markers* which show who belongs to Israel—circumcision, dietary laws, Sabbath etc. The writers of the NT, says Yoder, retained, "in parallel to Judaism, the affirmative sense of God's holy will being law and grace in one unity, not in contrast or paradox" (Yoder 2003:109). For Jews, the law was understood as a gracious ordering of the life of God's people until the Messiah comes; obedience to the law was viewed as the "path which leads to life" (Deut. 30:19) and not as an impossible standard whose intent was to drive the repentant sinner into the arms of a gracious God.[48] The Jews already saw God as a righteous judge and a gracious and forgiving protector; becoming a Christian did not mean a new idea about sin or God's righteousness. Nor, says Yoder, was the issue that Jewish Christians believed that the law could 'save' them. Paul was tolerant of those Jewish Christians who continued to believe that keeping the law was important (1972:220).[49] Paul's concern was the identity of this new sect within Judaism. Would it be a new and inexplicable community consisting of Jews *and* Gentiles, or would it be two *separate* communities? This is the backdrop for Paul's letters to both the Galatians and Romans;[50] *this is the problem which Paul's doctrine of justification sought to resolve.* When Paul says that the 'the old has passed away, behold the new has come' (2 Cor. 5:17) he is not making a statement that is introspective or emotional, but one that is social and historical. In Jesus Christ, two kinds of people who before were enemies are now reconciled! It was only in later generations, says Yoder, once the Jew-Gentile schism was a widespread fact, that Paul's language of justification could—in the new hermeneutical context of Constantinian Christianity—be reinterpreted and translated into that introspection which ultimately contributed to the post-modern quest for self-realization (1972:221).

No NT texts are cited more often in demonstrating the radical discontinuity between Jesus and Paul than those of the *haustafeln* found in Col. 3, Eph. 5 and 1 Peter 2.[51] These contain ethical teaching directed towards husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves

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[48] In his study entitled "The Pauline Luther and the Law – Lutheran Theology Reengages the Study of Paul" Risto Saarinen notes that theologians like Reinhard Hütter, Andreas Wöhle and David Yeago come closer to a more positive view of the law. Yeago argues that Luther recognized that "divine law [ultimately] presupposes the presence of grace and not sin". This reveals "the original and fundamental significance of the law, which is to give concrete historical from to the 'divine life' of the human creature deified by God (Saarinen 2006:79).

[49] Harink makes the same point (2003:37).

[50] Whereas Nürnberger understands Paul's showdown with Peter in Gal. 2:11ff as evidence of Jewish Christians' continued belief that keeping the law would win them God's acceptance (2005:105), Yoder sees Paul responding to the threat which the insistence that Gentile Christians also obey the law posed to the unity of the Galatian church (1972:225). Rasmusson (2007:180) and Harink (2003:38) adhere to the latter view.

[51] Yoder says that the fact that the *haustafeln* are not found only in Paul is evidence against the traditional view (1972:170).

and masters.[52] The Protestant liberal claim is that since Jesus did not provide a social ethic relevant beyond the expected *parousia*, the Early Church found it necessary to borrow one from somewhere else (Yoder 1972:163). In the Christian moral tradition, says Rasmusson (commenting on Yoder), this has been used to argue that the standards defining one's duty or social role (or 'vocation' in Luther) must be found in the nature of things, 'natural law' or, for Luther, the 'orders of creation' (2002:37). I cannot pursue here Yoder's extended argument that the *haustafeln* do *not* represent a borrowing from other Jewish and Gentile sources, but that they can be seen in continuity with Jesus' socio-ethical stance.[53] I will mention only a few points. The *haustafeln* contain several radical elements which make them distinct. These point away from the traditional argument concerning their conservative social function.[54]

First, in the culture of the day the subordinate persons in the social order—women, children and slaves—had no moral or legal status. Yet they are addressed as moral agents in a way that suggests that their subordination was a matter of *choice* (Yoder 1972:174).[55] Second, given that the dominant culture is patriarchal, the fact that the call to subordination is *reciprocal*—also addressed to husbands, parents and masters—is truly revolutionary. If the status of women, children and slaves in the church was the same as in the rest of society, what possible reason could there be for calling them to be subordinate?

> Only if something in the life or the preaching of the church had given them the idea that their subordinate status had been […] changed, would there be any temptation to the kind of unruliness to which these texts are addressed (Yoder 1972:176).

This new preaching was not conservative but was in continuity with the Jesus-tradition which was later reflected in the gospels.[56] By means of his own 'revolutionary subordination' to the Roman and Jewish power structures (I Peter 2:18; Eph. 5:22), Jesus' death on the cross breaks all the alienating and enslaving powers of this world. The result is that in the community he

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[52] Yoder notes that in 1 Peter 2 the reference to children and parents is missing, but is replaced by a reference to government (1972:165). Yet when the call to subordination is addressed to the Christian as a political subject, the challenge to mutual submission—as to husbands and masters—is *not* addressed to the ruler. Yoder suggests that this was in line with Jesus' instruction to his disciples that governmental dominion over others is unworthy of the disciple's call to servanthood (1972:188). Christian ethics is for Christians, and the nature of political power in 'the world' by those who do not acknowledge the lordship of Jesus, does not include 'revolutionary subordination'.

[53] The traditional view makes a link between the *haustafeln* and Stoicism (Yoder 1972:169).

[54] The traditional argument, says Yoder, is that these texts represent the church "gradually preparing to become the religion of the established classes, a development that culminated in the age of Constantine" (1972:169).

[55] Since it is to freedom we are called, says Paul, the slave who is offered his/her freedom should take it (Gal. 5:13). Yoder points out that the word *hypotassesthai* is not best translated as *subjection* (which connotes being downtrodden) or *submission* (which connotes passivity), but as *subordination* . This implies "the acceptance of an order as it exists, but with the new meaning given to it by the fact that one's acceptance of it is willing and meaningfully motivated" (1972:175).

[56] Though the debate concerning the dating of the various NT books is not one that can be pursued at this point, the fact that the gospels are in many cases later writings than the epistles suggests that exclusion of the 'difficult' sayings of Jesus, though perhaps expedient, was considered impossible.

creates "there is no longer male nor female, Jew or Gentile, slave or free" (Gal. 3:28). But, says Yoder, what Jesus rejected was the 'violent' imposition of this radical liberation upon the social order *beyond the new community* (1972:190, my emphasis).[57] The call to 'revolutionary subordination' is a strategy for social change which reflects the wisdom of God revealed through weakness and suffering. In submitting to the unbelieving husband, says Paul, the witnessing wife may 'win' him. "The voluntary subjection of the church is understood as a witness to the world" (Yoder 1972:190). The church's eschatological perspective relativizes the importance of social distinctions. This means that freedom in Christ can already be realized by voluntarily accepting subordination within one's existing status. We will allow the following extended quotation from Yoder to summarize this section:

> We have now tested, at another quite distinct point in the New Testament literature, the systematic axiom of modern Protestant ethics, the contrast between the ethic of stable society in the late teachings of Paul and the ethic of the immediate kingdom in Jesus. Right where we have been told that the systematic split between two kinds of ethical thought is located and symbolized, in the reasoning with which the Apostle Paul speaks to the relation of persons to each other within the most stable functions of society, the family and the economy, we find an ethic that is derived in its shape and in its meaning [...] from the novelty of the teaching and the work and the triumph of Jesus (1972:183).

4.2.3   The Principalities and Powers – The Concept of Power in the NT

Having discussed the *social* dimensions of justification made possible by Jesus' 'revolutionary subordination' to the cross, I want to turn now to looking at its cosmic dimensions and to ask what these might imply for our understanding of the church's relationship to the state. This is relevant to our study since as we saw in Aukrust, Lutheran theology most often sees the radical social claims of Jesus as relevant only in *one* of the two regiments in which the Christian lives. In the 'worldly regiment' other norms apply. For Yoder, the church-world distinction does not define two separate yet overlapping realms. It is not a separation of the spiritual from the material or the ecclesiastical from the civil. It is the divide between those who confess Jesus as Lord—who live in both regiments—and those who do not confess Jesus as Lord—and who also live in both regiments (Yoder 1994:108).

"The hard reality of power refuses to submit to general principles or moral norms. Politics reveals an autonomy that has to be recognized and respected unless one is willing to forgo efficacy altogether." This statement by Bonino (1983:36) states succinctly the problem which the doctrine of Two Kingdoms is a solution for. The traditional argument is that the radical ethics of Jesus, even if they are reflected in other parts of the NT, are not relevant to

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[57] The new and the old order exist side by side, though in contrast to Luther, this recognition does not imply acknowledging the moral legitimacy of the tares which grow up alongside the wheat (Matt. 13:24-30).

the problem of power as manifested in, for example, modern economic globalization. Drawing particularly on the work of Henrikus Berkhof, Yoder argues that the language of the 'principalities and powers' in Paul—once understood within its original context—provides a sophisticated and relevant analysis of what political and social scientists today call 'power' and 'structure' (1972:137). Yoder's word-study of NT texts including Col. 1:15-17, 2:13-15 and Eph 3:11, looks at political language ('thrones and dominions', 'principalities and powers'), cosmological language ('angels and archangels', 'elements', 'heights and depths'), and religious language ('law', 'knowledge'), and points out how these all are associated with the function of *structuring* life and society. In current language the 'Powers', says Yoder, include: religious structures (particularly those undergirding ancient or primitive societies), intellectual structures ('ologies' and 'isms'), moral structures (codes and customs) and political structures (the tyrant, the market, the school, the courts, race, and nation) (1972:145).[58] Structure is a part of God's good creation. The 'Powers' were created by God and were intended to serve creation by giving *order* to it; without them human society could not exist. Yet like the rest of creation, the NT sees the Powers as 'fallen'; they now seek to separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:38). What was intended to serve now has a tendency to become totalitarian. In spite of this fact, the Powers are subordinated to God. According to Yoder, "even tyranny (which according to Rom. 13:1 is to be counted among the powers) is still better than chaos and we should be subject to it" (1972:144).

In the NT letters the cross is consistently presented as Jesus' victory over the Powers. Yet this victory is not seen as their *destruction*—since their ordering is needed—but rather, as Yoder puts it, their being 'put in their place'.[59] In his mission to establish God's Kingdom and overcome evil and injustice and death, Jesus did not enter into a head-on clash with the Powers as many of those who awaited the Messiah hoped. The manner of his being political was not to get involved in the game of Roman or Jewish power politics. The following lengthy quotation is a compact summary of a major portion of Yoder's answer to the question, 'How *does* God establish justice? How *does* God rule?'

> […] the Powers cannot simply be destroyed or set aside or ignored. Their sovereignty must be broken. This is what Jesus did, concretely and historically, by living among men a genuinely free and human existence. This life brought him, as any genuinely human existence will bring any man, to the cross. In his death the Powers—in this case the most

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[58] In light of contemporary Lutheran 'creation theology', Yoder's assertion that Paul's language of the 'Powers' combines a recognition of mankind's 'fall' and God's continuing providential care, is interesting. The 'orders' of the state, family, economy "have generally been considered to have an autonomous value unrelated to redemption and the church, by virtue of their having been created by the Father" (1972147).

[59] This sense of re-establishing the Powers to their original ordering function is the way Yoder understands Paul's reference to Jesus making a 'public spectacle' of them on the cross (Col 2:15).

worthy, weighty representatives of Jewish religion and Roman politics—acted in collusion. Like all men, he too was subject (but in his case, quite willingly) to these powers. He accepted his own status of submission. But morally he broke their rules by refusing to support them in their self-glorification; and that is why they killed him. Preaching and incorporating a greater righteousness than that of the Pharisees, and a vision of an order of social human relations more universal than the Pax Romana, he permitted the Jews to profane a holy day (refuting thereby their own moral pretensions) and permitted the Romans to deny their vaunted respect for law as they proceeded illegally against him. This they did in order to avoid the threat to their dominion represented by the very fact that he existed in their midst so morally independent of their pretensions. He did not fear even death. Therefore his cross is a victory, is the confirmation that he was free from the rebellious pretensions of the creaturely condition. Differing from Adam, Lucifer, and all the Powers, Jesus did 'not consider being equal with God as a thing to be seized" (Phil. 2:6). His very obedience unto death is in itself not only the sign but also the first fruits of an authentic restored humanity. Here we have for the first time to do with a man who is not the slave of any power, of any law or custom, community or institution, value or theory. Not even to save his own life will he let himself be made a slave of these Powers. This authentic humanity included his free acceptance of death at their hands. Thus it is his death that provides his victory: "Wherefore God has exalted him highly, and given him the name which is above every name… that every tongue might confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil 2:9-11), (Yoder 1972:148).

This is a potent summary of the 'war of the lamb'. This, says Yoder, is the 'original revolution'.[60] It also describes the heart of the church's witness in the world and the *modus operendi* of its struggle for justice. In the Anabaptist vision, as in the gospels, every disciple is called upon to 'take up the cross' and to 'fight' as Jesus fought.

Once again, the church's witness is not first and foremost a *message* but the fact of its being a new community. The church's life of reconciliation, sharing, forgiving, peacemaking, serving, and suffering are, in the words of Paul, the means by which the "manifold wisdom of God is made known to the principalities and powers in heavenly places" (Eph. 3:11). Berkhof states that the very existence of a community in which Jews and Gentiles, who previously walked in the 'elements' (*stoicheia*) of the world but who now eat together around one common table, is in itself a statement to the Powers that their 'lordship' has come to an end (Yoder 1972:151). The implications of Yoder's analysis have much to say concerning how the church 'takes responsibility' for society. The church's challenge to society concerning the evils of consumerism or economic globalization will have only limited credibility as long as its own praxis reveals that it is itself enslaved to 'mammon'.[61] "We shall only resist social

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[60] This is the title of Yoder's book published in 1971, *The Original Revolution – Essays on Christian Pacifism*.
[61] In his book *From State Church to Pluralism* Franklin H. Littell, writing about the debates on prohibition and evolution in the US says: "Politicians in the churches attempted to secure by public legislation what they were unable to persuade many of their own members was either wise or desirable…. Lacking the authenticity of a genuinely disciplined witness, the Protestant reversion to political action was ultimately discredited, and the churches have not to this day recovered their authority in public life" (Yoder 1972:154).

injustice and the disintegration of community if justice and mercy prevail in our own common life and social differences have lost their power to divide" (1972:151). To reject nationalism and the wars waged in its name, the church must begin to act as if being an inclusive fellowship is actually at the heart of the gospel.

Earlier in this study I noted that the Reformers, while they desired to re-establish a faithful church, found it necessary to appeal to the autonomous forces of the state. Yoder's discussion of the Powers helps us understand why these forces are autonomous, and why—whether it is the revolutions of the poor (the Peasants' Revolt or Sandanistas in Nicaragua) or the imperialist ambitions of the rich (Caesar, Napoleon, George Bush etc)—once let loose, the forces to which these appeal are too strong to be controlled. The Constantinian pattern can be seen both prior to and after the emperor who gave it its name. Whether it was the Israelites' desire to have a king 'like all the other nations' (Deut. 17:14) or the Sadducean alliance with the Roman occupiers, history has made one thing clear—when God's People ally themselves with the Powers they move into a position which is 'from above'. The inevitable result of such a shift is the loss of communion with the poor and downtrodden and the subsequent loss of a credible witness in the world. Prior to Constantine, writes Yoder,

> Christians had known as a fact of experience that the church existed but had to believe against appearances that Christ ruled over the world. After Constantine one knew as a fact of experience that Christ was ruling over the world but had to believe against the evidence that there existed "a believing church" (Yoder 1994:57).

In concluding this section I want to briefly look at Yoder's treatment of Romans 13 since this text is usually seen to stand in tension with Matthew 5-7. At the end of the debate, says Yoder, the one who argues for the social ethics of the Sermon on the Mount is said to give precedence to Jesus over Paul or to eschatology over social responsibility (1972:213). As I have tried to argue thus far, there is really no need to choose.

Within the realm of Christendom (Europe and North America) the traditional interpretation of Romans 13 prior to the crisis of Nazism was that God has divinely instituted government and it is the Christian's duty to obey. Several points are worth keeping in mind. First, according to Yoder, Romans 13 is *not* the centre of the NT teaching concerning the state. There are other strands which see secular government as under the power of Satan (Jesus temptation in Luke 4 and Rev. 13). Some of the OT writers interpret the wars of foreign powers against Israel as YHWH's judgment, yet report at the same time that YHWH judges these nations for their brutality against the Chosen People.[62] Second, chapters 12 and

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[62] Cf. for example the prophet Obadiah's pronouncement of YHWH's judgment against the Edomites (1:10-16).

13 in Romans need to be understood as one literary unit; chapter 12 begins with a call to non-conformity expressed in a new quality of relationships within the Christian community, particularly in regard to ones enemies—"Do not take vengeance; leave it to God" (1972:197). This makes it clear that *this* governmental function is not one that is to be exercised by Christians.

> The subordination that is called for recognizes whatever power exists, accepts whatever structure of sovereignty happens to prevail. The text does not affirm, as the tradition has it, a divine act of institution or ordination of a particular government (1972:200).

To summarize a long discussion, Yoder maintains that Romans 13 does not paint a picture of the ideal state, and while God *orders* the state, he does not *ordain* it. Romans 13 is not a text which calls Christians to do military or police service (1972:205). "The function of bearing the sword to which Christians are called to be subject is the judicial and police function; it does not refer to the death penalty or to war" (1972:205). "The doctrine of the 'just war' is an effort to extend into the realm of war the logic of the limited violence of police authority" (1972:207). Yoder grants that there may be some legitimacy to the just war theory, but that all real wars today do not qualify.

Subordination, says Yoder, is something very different than obedience. "[…] the Christian who refuses to worship Caesar but still permits Caesar to put him to death, is being subordinate even though he is not obeying" (1972:212). The authority of government is not self-justifying. Whatever government exists *is ordered* by God; but the text does not say that whatever the government does or asks of its citizens is good (1972:207). Why then should the Christian submit to the state?

> 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 his creation. We subject ourselves to government because it was in so doing that Jesus revealed and achieved God's victory (1972: 213).

This discussion of Yoder's understanding of the Powers has been an attempt to demonstrate that "[t]he part of the gospel world view which we had been unable to read was found to speak precisely to those questions which we had earlier been taught the gospel did not speak to" (1972:141). Paul does not say that the gospel deals only with personal ethics and not with social structures. Paul does not say that the only way to change structures is to change the heart of an individual man. Paul *does* say that the primary social structure through which the gospel works to change other structures is that of the Christian community.

4.2.4 Body Politics – Five Christian Practices Before the Watching World

Part of what it means that the church is as an alternative polis is that like any other social body, the church is *structured*. It has ways of making decisions, defining membership and carrying out common tasks. These activities make the church political. It is not as if the 'wordly regiment' is political while the 'spiritual regiment' is not. Nor is it right to say that one church tradition is disposed to being political while another sees itself as a-political. The differences, says Yoder, are in the *ways* all are political (1992:ix). Now I want to look at how Yoder's vision of the way in which the church is a reflection of the 'politics of Jesus'. Church and world are not two compartments under separate legislation or two institutions with contradictory assignments but two levels of the pertinence of the same Lordship. (1992:ix).

According to Douglas Harink, a Canadian Reformed theologian, most of the major church traditions believe that the Christendom model of the church is the way things should be, since that is the way it has been for most of the church's history (2003:255). As we found in the brief history of diakonia in chapter 3, this is a pattern where the church finds itself in a position of being established and accepted within the dominant order. However, this acceptance has been predicated on the church's assumption that its identity is *not* defined by the social ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. For Yoder (and Paul), Christendom is *not* a normative picture of the church since, as Harink says, "the wisdom, power and riches of God revealed in the cross are fundamentally irreconcilable with the wisdom, power and riches by which the 'principalities and powers', society and empires rule the world" (2003:255).

The Early Church, says Yoder, developed as a movement within Judaism and is best understood as a continuation and parallel to the Jewish diaspora tradition. This tradition had established an ethos of not being in charge and not considering any local government to be the primary bearer of history (Harink 2003:186). Both Jesus and Paul's stance of 'revolutionary subordination' was inherited from this tradition which had learned how to maintain a sense of Jewish identity while living together with different peoples and under foreign governments.[63] The diaspora tradition, says Yoder produced a number of social innovations which formed the Jewish, and thereby the emerging Christian, identity (Yoder 2003:187). In *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, Yoder names the following: 1) the synagogue as a decentralized and non-sacramental 'ecclesiology' which can function with only a few households, 2) the community gathers around a 'book' (Torah) which can be copied and read anywhere, and

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[63] Following the Exile (586 B.C.) the Jewish people needed to learn how to live without their own land, king and Temple—political and religious structures, military might and cultural homogeneity (Rasmusson 2007:181). In such a setting we see the development of the eschatological perspective and the hope of the return of the messianic age.

which does not have one 'authorized' interpretation, 3) the rabbinate as community leadership which is non-sacral, non-hierarchical and non-violent, 4) Jewish 'peoplehood' as universal, recognizing no national borders; its unity is sustained by intervisitation, intermarriage, commerce and rabbinic consultation, and 5) core identity is based not a system of belief or an accredited dogma, but upon a common life called "the walk" (*halakah*) and the shared remembering of the story behind it (2003:187). Commenting on Yoder, Rasmusson says that the Early Church's reformulation of this diaspora praxis saw the meaning of history as being borne by the church, and not by the various empires of this world. The Jewish-Christian *halakah* is discipleship; the church as a distinct people follows the crucified and risen Jesus towards the eschatological fulfillment at the end of time. Diaspora praxis thus establishes the social model underlying Pauline theology as Yoder interprets it (Rasmusson 2007:181).

Yoder also draws a link between the '*ecclesia notae*' which characterized rabbinic Judaism and the Early Church, and those marks which were important to the Anabaptists of the 16th century. Each of these three different '*polis*' were, at times at least, persecuted minorities within the broader societies in which they lived. The Jewish marks included: 1) the opposition of radical monotheism to superstition and idolatry, 2) missionary vigor derived from the conviction that a new messianic age is dawning, 3) courage to stand as a minority in a hostile environment (the destruction of the religious homogeneity of culture), 4) the rejection of violence based upon trust in God's protection and provision, and 5) the People of God as a supra-national 'body' more universal than the Roman Empire (Yoder 1994:347).

I want now to briefly summarize Yoder's case for the *social foundation* of those liturgical practices which the church has seen as central to its life as a worshipping community. As the subtitle of his book *Body Politics – Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* suggests, Yoder sees these practices as central to the church's witness. These include (though not limited to): baptism, the Lord's Supper, 'binding and loosing', 'the fullness of Christ', and the 'Rule of Paul'. For Yoder, these practices are 'sacramental'.[64]

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[64] "What we may call the "sacramentalist" view of a sign says that by a distinct divine act of definition, a specific set of practices is pulled up out of daily life and given, by gracious decree, a distinctive meaning, one best served by accentuating the distance between the special meaning and the ordinary one. A separate "theology of sacraments" then develops a corpus of dogma about that special realm. The bread no longer looks or tastes like the bread one shares with children and guests or that is owed to cousins and to the beggar. It is not broken nor (classically) even put into the mouth the same way as ordinary, real-world food. Its most important meaning is the one that forces us to debate in what sense the bread has now become the body of the Lord and in what sense our eating it mediates to us the grace of salvation [...] What I propose, for present purposes, to call the sacramental (as distinct from the sacramentalistic) view spares us those abstracted definitions and articulations of how the sign signifies. When the family head feeds you at his or her table, the bread for which he or she has given thanks, you are part of the family. To take the floor in a community dialogue does not mean that you are part of the group; it *is* operational group membership. To be immersed and to rise from the waters of the *mikvah*

Each is a way God acts. Each can be clarified by theological reflection. Each is mandatory and involves both divine and human action. For each, it makes a difference whether it is done rightly or wrongly (1992:71). As activities of the 'alternative *polis*', Yoder draws out the *social* character of each of these practices, a dimension which he maintains was primary and original in the earliest Christian congregations. The following is a brief summary:

'Binding and Loosing'[65]— "To be human," says Yoder, "is to be in conflict. To be human in light of the gospel is to face conflict in redemptive dialogue. When we do that, it is God who does it" (1992:13). Matthew 18 describes a process for dealing with conflict and wrongdoing that involves truth-telling, repentance and forgiveness. The process begins at the point of a concrete offense/problem by going directly to the person in question before drawing in others. The goal is restoration to the community.[66] This practice assumes that the *shape* of the church is important in a way that it is not in Lutheran ecclesiology (Yoder 1992:10).

Baptism – A rite of initiation into the new community in which identity is no longer defined by race, gender, status, or wealth—in short, all the marks by which we maintain an identity of 'us' and 'them'. Such an understanding stands in contrast to the focus on the individual in those traditions which see baptism as mediating salvific grace. "There is a new inter-ethnic social reality into which the individual is inducted [the 'new humanity' in Eph. 2] rather than the social reality being the sum of the individuals" (1992:30).

Eucharist – Sharing real food together as a picture of tangible and economic sharing seen throughout the NT. In Acts it is said of the Christian fellowship: "There was not a needy person among them." To share the bread and the wine is to remember Jesus' death; to 're-*member*' his Body points to a reconciliation in all directions—to God, to one another, and to creation. "We are *members* one of another", says Paul (Romans 12:5). The jubilee leveling practice is reflected in the fact that each one around the Lord's table has enough. To drink the body and blood of the Lord 'unworthily' (1 Cor. 11:27) means to deny responsibility for the one sitting next to me, thereby turning the Lord's meal into a private 'ceremony'.

'The Fullness of Christ' – Ephesians 4 describes "a new mode of group relationships, in which every member of the body has a distinctly identifiable, divinely validated and empowered role (1992:47). Since each has a gift which has been given for the sake of the life and witness of the Body, it is especially important to give greater value to the less honored

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may be said to symbolize death and resurrection, but really it makes you a member of the historical community of the new age. This was the case, not only for Jesus, but also for John and for the other Jewish proselytizers and revivalists who used the baptism of repentance before him (Yoder 1994:366).

[65] This expression comes from Matt 18:18 where Jesus says: "What you bind on earth is bound in heaven."

[66] In some church traditions (e.g. Catholic Church) this practice is associated with the sacrament of confession.

members. This would be Paul's equivalent of the 'preferential option for the poor'. The radical egalitarianism present in Paul's view that everyone has been given a gift is the foundation for the model of 'servant leadership'.[67] By starting a movement of fishermen, zealots, publicans and women, Jesus relativized the leadership status of the Temple. This was part of the revolutionary impact the Christian movement had within a rigid class society, a fact which is reflected in the fact that Paul needed to help some congregations retain order in their meetings (Yoder 1992:56). In succeeding centuries Paul's sweeping vision was lost.[68]

'The Rule of Paul' In 1 Cor. 14 Paul "instructs his readers about how to hold a meeting in the power of the Holy Spirit. The wider context of this guidance is his vision of the unity of the Body [Ch. 12]" (1992:61). Everyone with something that is 'given by the spirit' can take the floor. This process is seen in Acts 15 where problems in the relationship between Jews and Gentiles within the new churches required a decision. After a process in which all who had something to say presented their views, a decision was reached. Of this decision James, the senior elder in the congregation, could say that "it seemed good to us and to the Holy Spirit…" (Acts 15:28). The decision arrived at on earth is understood as binding in heaven.

All these practices, says Yoder, do not have their *locus theologicus* in an esoteric realm of religious ritual; they require no special insight in order to understand. Building on the social ethics of Jesus and of Paul, these practices are a witness to the world, and are in fact easily 'translatable' into current vernacular. They can be defined sociologically and have meaning without *needing* to be explained theologically. Since these practices are in tune with the 'grain of the cosmos', as Yoder puts it, for the world to practice them, even to a limited degree, brings with it a blessing. Yet to *fully* practice them requires the gift of the Holy Spirit as well as the support and discipline of a community.

Having now provided an overview of Yoder's thinking and demonstrating the ways in which his ecclesiology is related to his views on social ethics it now remains to ask in what ways these can speak into the context of the Church of Norway and its understanding and praxis of diakonia.

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[67] "The eldership, in the early church as in the synagogue, seems to have been plural, shared with a team of colleagues, a role for which one is not qualified without long and successful experience in family life" (Yoder 1992:54). This characterizes the understanding of leadership in the Anabaptist vision; the praxis of leadership is, as in all traditions, another matter. That this thought pattern was not original to Paul but a possession of the early Christian communities in general can be seen in the fact that it can be found in 1 Peter 4:9ff (Yoder 1992:48).

[68] When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the 4th century, this process accelerated and developed according to the form of the empires administrative system. Yoder notes that it is important to remember that since the Early Church had no centralized authority, it is very likely that were churches which had never heard of the Pauline message. Others that had, rejected his authority. Still others that accepted his authority may not have really understood his message (Yoder 1992:87). "We often forget that what we call the NT canon was not that for two centuries" (1992:57).

5 Challenges to Diaconal Praxis in the CoN

In chapter 3 I looked at the CoN's Plan for Diakonia and both the theological basis for how diakonia is understood as well as some of the history which has shaped that understanding. This survey led to the conclusion that there has been a paradigm-shift from '*ordo salutis*' to seeing diakonia as the gospel in action, but that this shift presents challenges to Lutheran theology, particularly the doctrines of Justification by Faith and the Two Kingdoms. These doctrines tend to focus on the individual rather than communal dimensions of faith and therefore have not been able to fill the vacuum which Charles Taylor's self-realization/collective polarity describes. Chapter 4 was an attempt to present those elements in Yoder's work which I believe are related to these challenges. The conclusion reached was that Yoder's major contribution is an ecclesiology which places the People of God at the center of history. The church—and more specifically the *local* church—is a visible and eschatological fellowship, an alternative *polis* whose corporate life and practices are a witness to what the 'wider world' is destined to become. This is the primary way in which the church 'takes responsibility' for society.

We are now ready to look at how Yoder's 'sectarian' theology can help to strengthen the understanding and practice of diakonia within a social context in which the CoN, though historically a nominal majority-church, appears to be becoming a functional minority. In the first part of this chapter I want to look closer at several of the elements in this transition. The first is secularization, a sociological description which requires further definition. Secularization is in turn paralleled by a decline in the CoN's moral authority. This in turn is reflected in the CoN's reduced credibility in terms of its witness and relevance within Norwegian society. In the second part of this chapter I will try to spell out some of the benefits of *accepting* the move towards a minority or 'sectarian' status. An emphasis on mission—and the eschatological perspective which such an emphasis presupposes—seems to be largely missing in the new PFD. It does not operate with a clear distinction between church and society; these two spheres are largely overlapping since most Norwegian citizens continue to be members of the CoN. How then is the PFD's very general call to diaconal praxis—which is, in effect, addressed to 'everyone'—linked to the question of Christian identity and witness? This is a question which is not explicitly identified or addressed in the new PFD, but one which I shall look at now.

5.1 The Church of Norway as Majority Tradition

In connection with its general call to diakonia, the PFD refers to the need for "instruction in the Christian faith" (CoNNC 2007:5). Yet in light of Grace Davie's 'believing without belonging' thesis, what does the double identity implicit in the Two Kingdoms doctrine imply for the *content* of believing? That the addressee of the PFD's challenge to diaconal praxis is 'everyone' is a reflection of the CoN's *theological location* in the Christendom tradition. I believe that to a great extent, the platform for the new PFD's four-fold diaconal challenge—building as it does on an empowerment model—is best described by Yoder's normative and minority-based ecclesiology and social ethics.

I further believe that the PFD is a document which reflects the contradictions implicit in a diaconal paradigm-shift still very much in process. The very recent decision (March 2010) by the CoN's bishops *not* to pursue opening for the ordination of deacons, is a case in point.[69] If diakonia is indeed the gospel in action, then preaching the Word of God (priests) and 'doing' the Word of God (deacons) must surely be seen as two sides of the same coin. To reserve ordination to priests cannot be understood as other than a reinforcement of the *ordo salutis* pattern, as if the stuff of systematic theology takes precedence over social ethics.

I believe that one factor which helps to understand the PFD paradigm-shift is the CoN's transition from majority to minority status. In order to define more clearly what is meant by this assertion, I want to begin with some general observations. The secularization of Norwegian society, and the CoN's loss of moral authority and witness, need to be seen in light of the hermeneutical assumptions underlying the key Lutheran doctrines of Justification and the Two Kingdoms.[70] Charles Taylor's observation of the two contradictory tendencies in the post-modern world puts these challenges facing the CoN in a wider perspective. Translating Taylor's sociological observation into the language of Lutheran theology, we could say that secularism has resulted in the privatization of religion understood as a focus on the individual's salvation within the *spiritual regiment*. Faith in 'collective solutions' to wide-scale social problems like economic globalization, reflects the autonomy of politics and economics in the *worldly regiment*. Between the micro and macro extremes in Taylor's polarity there is a growing vacuum.[71] Davie's phrase 'believing without belonging' describes

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[69] Cf. the CoN's Council of Bishops' statement entitled ""Diakontjenesten i kirkens tjenestemønster" (CoNCB 2009).

[70] It is important to note that these hermeneutical assumptions are not the sole prerogative of Lutheranism. They are in fact shared by the majority of church confessions within Protestantism.

[71] The interest in alternative spiritualities in Western societies is clear evidence of this vacuum. The fact that many search for meaning and belonging in such a wide variety of spiritualities outside the Christian 'tradition'

a central quality of this vacuum—the loss of human community as the locus for identity and a sense of belonging. I believe that what the CoN needs is a vision for an inclusive fellowship where belonging and diaconal doing in the way that Yoder describes are seen as basic elements of ordinary discipleship. Before considering the shape of such a vision I want to describe in greater detail the shape of the specifically Norwegian 'vacuum'. In so doing it is hoped that the outlines of a *contextualized* ecclesiology which fits the CoN today will emerge.

5.1.1 Secularization – From nominal majority to functional minority status

The CoN's transition from majority to minority status can, at one level, be illustrated statistically. According to Ole Gunnar Winsnes' research, while church membership in the CoN remains high (88%), church attendance continues to decline (2004:146). The decline in active church membership during the past decades is a pattern which Davie has documented throughout Europe (1994:11).[72] On any given Sunday in the year—with the exception of Christmas—the gathering of 'believing Christians' in the local church is visibly a small minority.[73] Still, the majority of Norwegians wish to retain the state-church as a folk church, a form which Davie defines as 'common religion' (1994:77). In an increasingly multi-cultural society, this form of religion identifies what it means to be a Christian with what it means to be Norwegian. Davie's study further concludes that the *content* of 'common religion' is becoming less and less orthodox (1994:76).[74] It seems safe to say that traditional Christian theology—not to mention Yoder's radical version—is much less significant than cultural tradition in defining what it means to be 'Christian'.

Europe has entered into a post-Christendom era. In recent decades the CoN's ideological influence on society has been weakened. This trend can be seen in new legislation related to abortion, religious instruction in schools, marriage/homosexuality and bio-ethics. People's relationship to the church is significantly weakened. Nordstokke maintains that in time this will result in a weakened sense of belonging, not only in relation to the church as a fellowship, but also to the church's message and value-base (2002:89). One explanation is

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can be understood as a judgment concerning the failure of that tradition to be the bearer of meaning and a place of belonging.

[72] As Davie points out, despite the fact that the majority of Europeans still 'believe in God', most of these "see no need to participate with even minimal regularity in their religious institutions" (1994:2).

[73] In a recent article in Vårt Land (Friday, April 23, 2010) Erling Rimehaug used the expression 'believing Christians' (*troende kristne*). This has become a common way of distinguishing between 'non-practicing' and 'practicing' CoN members. To speak of 'believing Christians' implies that there are also 'non-believing Christians', a distinction borne out by Norwegian sociological studies similar to that of Davie. Cf. for example Hegstad's study which showed that in 1996, 53% of CoN members did not consider themselves 'believing' Christians' (1999:150).

[74] That Davie's findings are applicable in the Norwegian context is supported by the European Values Study, "a cross-cultural analysis of European values covering a wide variety of subjects" (1994:11).

that a major part of society expresses increasing resistance to the moral guidance of the church which for centuries has been exercised 'from above'.[75] Just how significant social location is for how Christian moral counsel is received can be seen in the way the Salvation Army, for example, is perceived. Their theological location must be said to be at the periphery of mainstream society. Yet the fact that their diaconal praxis is solidly anchored 'from below' means that, despite holding to a conservative view on the question of homosexuality, most popular recording artists gladly lend their support to producing a Christmas-music album. When the church's message comes from above, it denies to the world the right of unbelief which, as Yoder says, the non-resistance of God has given to humanity (1994:109). As the history of the church shows, the price to be paid for this form of coercion is often high. This is yet another fruit of the Constantinian heritage in one of its Scandinavian different variations.[76]

While the majority of Norwegians have long since abandoned orthodox Christianity, a minority of conservative (and church- going) Christians fear that Norway is 'losing its Christian heritage'. As Davie's study points out, the church is less and less seen as a place for 'belonging'. The elderly who still attend church are becoming fewer. Fewer active members means fewer hands to carry diaconal work. Much of the parish priest's time and energy is taken up with the civic *casualia* of common religion. These consist of the rites of passage for the majority of Norwegian citizens—infant baptism, confirmation, marriage, and burial (CoNNC 2007:11).[77] Often there is little time and energy left over for the work of building the congregation itself.

Parallel to the decline in the orthodox content of faith is an increase in the CoN's radical rhetoric. This comes through particularly clearly in the two new strategic areas within the PFD—'care for creation' and 'struggle for justice'. Charlotte Engel's sociological study of the Church of Sweden revealed that while church leaders' *rhetoric* presented diakonia as ministry to the poorest and weakest, the local congregations' diaconal *practice* was directed

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[75] This could be one of the factors which explains the bitter hatred and resentment against everything Christian which one encounters, for example, in Satanist and Black Metal sub-cultures.

[76] Yoder calls the identification of particular provincial or national churches with local governments (since 1648) as 'neo-Constantinianism'. After the century of political revolutions (1776-1848), "society begins to withdraw from the church-state alliance" (1994:195). The church, as in Scandinavia, loses the support of the common people, yet formally continues to bless the nation. This form Yoder calls 'neo-neo-Constantinianism'. Some forms of Protestant thought in the 60's and 70's sought to ally itself with non-Christian philosophies like Marxism (East Germany, Czechoslovakia) transposing the gospel into non-religious language. Such alliances, says Yoder, could be called 'neo-neo-neo-Constantinianism'. Still another variation is the willingness of some theologies of liberation to give their support to the political revolutions in Latin America (70's and 80's). Such "advance approval of an order that does not yet exist, tending to be linked with approval of any means to which people resort that hope to achieve it, we would call 'neo-neo-neo-neo-Constantinianism' (1994:197).

[77] The Grorud parish church is described within the CoN as a 'ceremonial church' since the great majority of marriages performed there are for couples who do not belong to the parish.

primarily towards the middle class (2006:31). Engel observes that unlike politicians, church leaders do not need to take responsibility for actually implementing their radical viewpoints (2006:53). Using secularization theory Engel argues that "the radicalism of the Christian elite can be interpreted as expressive of the marginalization of the church and a true loss of power" (2006:264). She concludes that the gap between theory and praxis will inevitably have serious consequences for the credibility of the church's witness.

The statement by one of the City Mission's local leaders concerning 'traditional church activities' suggests that local CoN congregations are less and less perceived as having the potential to be agents of social change. What relevance the church is perceived to have is linked to the local City Mission leader's exercise of his 'calling' within the worldly regiment; the locus for diakonia—understood as action for *social* change—is the 'wider society'. The gathered congregation on Sunday is perceived as being taken up with the practice of an inner and private faith related to 'traditional church activities'.

As Yoder points out, Protestantism in general does not see the norms for the Christian's engagement in society as being derived from the gospel ethic of enemy-love and jubilee economics. Rather, these are drawn from what Yoder calls the 'wider wisdom' (1994:113). From Martin Luther to John Rawls (and Tor Aukrust), this 'wider wisdom' seeks a consensus at some meta-level which avoids what Yoder calls the 'embarrassment of particularity'. By this he means sorting through the ethical issues one at a time with this and that 'neighbor', believing that the life and teaching, not to mention *death* of one particular Jew from Nazareth has something to contribute to the discussion, *regardless of the subject*.

5.1.2   How doctrine's social function changes when hermeneutical location changes

I want now to pick up the question as to how the process of 'doing theology' both influences and is influenced by changes in *hermeneutic* location. The 'Constantinian-shift' in the 4th century was revolutionary since it was the first significant shift of social location *for the Christian church.* A similar shift had occurred earlier in the history of ancient Israel. After the prophetic leadership of Moses and the charismatic leadership of the Judges, the Israelite's desire for a king led to the establishment of the Davidic monarchy. From that point until the Exile in 586 B.C. the writers of the OT found themselves reflecting on the history of Israel from within a new hermeneutical context. Israel went from being slaves in Egypt to having a king, army and temple 'like all the other nations'. Gradually the reference point for theological reflection shifted from 'periphery' to 'centre'; the perspective for theological reflection changed from 'below' to 'above'. The same kinds of change occurred when the

church in the 4th century went from being a persecuted minority to becoming the state religion for the Roman Empire. This shift broke a continuity which had existed from post-exilic Judaism through the Apostolic era and into the 4th century. Yoder sees the Constantinian-shift as a paradigm which, though modified in different historical contexts, has persisted into the modern age. Even liberation theology—whose 'preferential option for the poor' reflects a social location 'from below'—has defended the expediency of the Constantinian logic of power. Instead of allying itself with the power of the Emperor, king, prince or national state, it has allied itself with the power of a *social class*, defending the necessity of using the 'sword' in order to assure the success of the project of liberation. The Constantinian-shift is therefore fundamental in the development of the *ordo salutis* pattern established by medieval Catholicism and inherited, reformulated, and reinforced by the Reformation. In seeking to address the abuses of the medieval Catholic Church, Luther's two key doctrines unintentionally laid the theological groundwork for the privatization of faith. With a focus on the *individual* dimensions of justification, sin and the meaning of the cross, succeeding generations used these doctrines to legitimate an often conservative social praxis. Lutheran theologians today struggle with this legacy in meeting new challenges raised by ecumenism and by the often prophetic voice of churches from the global South.

Bonino interprets Luther as developing his theology within a functionalist understanding of the workings of society. This view sees society as an organism that must function harmoniously, a view which goes back to the Greco-Roman *pax romanum* tradition which saw social order as natural and a reflection of the divine order (1983:83). Rooted in a 'social location' which relegated menial work to slaves, the Roman upper class was optimistic concerning what politics could achieve. This optimism is a red thread running through both ideologies and theologies whose social location combines with the *will* to power to give them access to social influence. According to Bonino, Luther's support of the princes during the Peasant Revolt demonstrates the ultimate subordination of *justice* to *order* which goes back to Augustine. If injustices are to be corrected in the earthly city, they must be corrected *without endangering order and peace.* Should the struggle for justice become disruptive, it should be avoided (Bonino 1983:83). In asserting the priority of order over justice, Augustine—says Bonino—introduces a qualification which has steered Christian social thinking in a conservative direction ever since. For both Augustine and Luther, the social context for their theologizing was *corpus Christianum*. It took place, says Bonino, within a framework in which the church accepted the role of supporting, sustaining, and guiding the state. Christianity became a 'political religion'; its theology became a 'political theology'.

> Ultimately the church takes responsibility for the existing order, and hence it will not undertake to foster or accept radical change […] Theologically, justice and love are supreme but historically both are subordinated to order (1983:83).

Most models of political ethics within the majority-church traditions—including the Lutheran—have operated within the framework of this subordination.

One example of how deeply the hermeneutical assumptions implicit in one's theological location are entrenched can be seen in Kjell Nordstokke's treatment of the tension between what he calls the 'periphery' and the 'center' in the Old Testament. Nordstokke—who otherwise consistently brings a 'from below' perspective to bear on his articulation of Lutheran theology—sees a tension between the tradition of the Exodus and the covenant of Sinai. The former represents God's liberating action, the latter the need for law and order.

> It belongs to the eschatological nature of Israel, and later of the Church, to find a sound relation between breaking up and maintaining tradition, between prophetic protest and religious establishment, between evangelical liberty and dogmatic tradition (Nordstokke 2000:114).

The social ethic implicit in the above statement *assumes a position of responsibility* for the existing social order. The purpose of the law was indeed to define a social order in all its dimensions, thereby functioning as a basis for a sustainable common life. Yet in assuming that there is a tension between Exodus and Sinai I believe that Nordstokke loses sight of the fact that *YHWH's covenant with Israel defines a communal lifestyle and identity which is in itself radically prophetic*. That is to say, the *totality* of Israel's life—their agriculture, warfare, trade, foreign policy, social welfare, sexual norms etc.—is a visible witness to the one God, an alternative to the idolatries of the surrounding nations. Israel's political ethic—which according to the law left no room for a king or standing army—was not sustainable apart from ongoing trust in YHWH's provision. There were no institutional guarantees for the continuity of the existing order, an order which was *constitutionally* prophetic. There were only the promises which had been made, first to the Patriarchs, then to Israel. The church's track-record since Constantine shows just how challenging enemy-love and jubilee economics are. Israel's radical social ethic was no less demanding. The failure of this historically and geo-politically insignificant People to bear the purpose of chosenness is most understandable.

Israel was by definition sectarian; Paul speaks in terms of their 'election' (Rom. 11:7,28). This is what Yoder calls this an example of the scandal of *particularity*, that God has chosen some people—Abraham and Jesus—more than others. As the history of both Israel and the church reveals, there are several ways of being sectarian. For Israel the temptation was to use the law to build a wall around themselves in order the keep out the

Gentiles. For the Essenes it meant a retreat to the caves of Qumran. For the Mennonites it often meant living in separate villages or communes. Yet this is not the biblical vision of sectarianism. YHWH's purpose in choosing *one man*, Abraham, was that his faithfulness would be a blessing for 'all the nations of the world' (Gen. 12:3). The vision of Isaiah is that one day all the nations will flow in to Jerusalem, bringing their tribute and acknowledging YHWH as the one God over all other gods (Isa. 60:4-5;66:12-21). Like the church, Israel is not the bearer of YHWH's universal message to the nations; *the continuity of a radical and permanently prophetic community is itself the message*. That such an identity implies a minority position in society is taken for granted prior to Constantine.

As Nordstokke acknowledges, there is always a tendency to give the institutions which ensure social continuity a more central place than the prophet on the margins. Therefore, he says, the 'centre' should not criminalize the prophetic periphery, nor monopolize political (or theological) power (2000:114). Yet whether we look at the history of Israel following the establishment of the monarchy, the church after Constantine, or the Reformation after the Peasants Revolt, the picture is the same. *Power tends in the direction of being self-sustaining and socially conservative*. YHWH knew that within the geo-politics of the Semitic world, Israel's kings would not be able to resist the temptation to engage in an arms build-up or enter into strategic marriages or political alliances.[78] As Yoder's discussion of the principalities and powers demonstrates, the fact that they are fallen means that it is in their very nature to be self-aggrandizing and self-perpetuating. On the teeter-totter of the continuity/discontinuity continuum, the presence of the Powers implies a permanent imbalance, suggesting limits as to how much one can expect from the exercise of political power.

5.1.3 Legitimating the state – When the church takes responsibility for society

Charles Taylor's formulation regarding post-modernity shows that Protestantism's optimism concerning how much justice politics can deliver dies hard. Yet a brief look at what has happened to the various brands of Communism during the past century reveals just how grossly this pseudo-Christian vision underestimated the power of the Powers. In theory, Communist leadership—the 'vanguard of the people'—was to disappear once the revolution established the rule of the proletariat. Yet the persistence of the communist elites in China and the countries of the former Soviet Union indicate that Christians do not have a monopoly on the gap between vision and praxis. Moreover the optimistic expectations of the possibilities of

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[78] Trade in gold and silver and horses with Egypt was forbidden by Mosaic Law (Deut 17:16-17). Horses and chariots were the top of the technological armaments pyramid, equivalent to today's leopard tanks or cruise missiles.

the 'historical projects' of armed revolution in Latin America during the 1970's and 80's have had to be modified following a critical analysis of what has happened to these various revolutions. Whether it is Castro's Cuba or Lula's Brazil, the FMLN in El Salvador or the Sandanistas in Nicaragua, the politics of power reveals itself to be far more seductive and conservative than their own theories of revolution promised. Is it ever possible to play the power 'game' without being co-opted by the Powers?

Yoder shares a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' which is at the periphery with Liberation Theology and Feminism. Yet both the Old and New Testament witness, says Yoder, is that the meaning of history is located not in the supposed universality of the Roman Empire— symbol of the 'wider world'—but in the scandalous particularity of the people of God; it is "carried first of all, and on behalf of all others, by the believing community" (1994:118). Earlier in this study we noted that the Reformers' uniform desire was to re-establish a visible and faithful church. Yet in turning to the state, the Reformers appealed to autonomous forces which, once let loose, were too strong to be controlled. In his survey of the various Christian social ethics—including the Two Kingdoms—Bonino concludes: "Politics reveals an autonomy that has to be recognized and respected unless one is willing to forgo efficacy altogether" (1983:36). The means by which power is exercised by the 'rulers of this world' (I Cor. 2:8, Luke 22:25) stands in tension with the 'politics of Jesus'. Yet the judgment of the NT is that Jesus' 'strategy' of servanthood, suffering and finally death is ultimately the only politics that is *effective*, *sustainable*, and truly *revolutionary*. Of this the church—in which the dividing walls of hostility have been broken down—is the visible evidence.

Standing within a church tradition that is used to helping to steer society, Tor Aukrust can—at the theoretical level at least—talk about church and society as two separate arenas. His discussion of the Sermon on the Mount concludes that this ethic represents the ultimate will of God for humanity. Yet given its enemy-love and jubilee economics, Aukrust sees such an ethic as un-useable, since his location 'from above'—because it assumes a responsibility for steering society—demands of a social ethic that it be universally applicable. Since it is unrealistic to expect of those who do not confess Jesus as Lord a standard of behavior only possible by 1) the resources of the Holy Spirit, 2) an eschatological perspective, and 3) the encouragement of others who make the same confession, the locus of Christian engagement in the realm of money and power is, per definition, placed into the 'wordly regiment'. On the other hand, Aukrust is well aware that the ethical compromises needed to function in this realm tend to reinforce a socially conservative praxis. He acknowledges three major areas in which the CoN resisted changes which occurred during the 18th and 19th century: science,

democracy (as over against monarchy) and the labor movement (1965:187ff). Yet statistically speaking, these same scientists, republicans and socialists were (and continue to be) functionally *within* the church.[79] This anomaly raises the question of *identity* for today's Christian bio-engineer who experiences a kind of 'ethical schizophrenia' depending on which of the two regiments he perceives himself to be operating in.

It is hard to understand how Aukrust can at one and the same time maintain the church's right, indeed duty, to hold fast its eschatological message and view of history, and to deliver a radical challenge to society, and *at the same time* relativize the social ethics of Jesus. This is the challenge which the legacy of Constantine presents to the church trying to bear witness to a society that is, statistically speaking, within itself. The conclusion is thus that in separating ecclesiology from ethics, the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms replaces one dichotomy with another, thereby reinforcing the autonomous claims of the state. Bonino, like Yoder, has been part of a biblical and theological scholarship which during the past fifty years has argued that dichotomies between the spiritual and the material, public and private, the individual and the communal, between theology and ethics are all foreign to the basic outlook of the Old and New Testaments (Bonino 1983:80).

Closer to home we need to ask: Is the optimism implicit in the PFD's general challenge to the overlapping spheres of church and society warranted? If the meaning of history is, as Yoder says, born by the people of God, should we not be concentrating more of our efforts on rediscovering what it means for the *local* church, to be salt and light in the midst a society from which it is distinguishable?

5.1.4 The majority traditions' history of social conservatism

In his book *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Setting*, Bonino argues that European and American theology lack a coherent and all-embracing method of sociopolitical analysis (1975:147). Such an analysis is needed, says Bonino, because since Constantine the Christian faith has in various ways been co-opted into a variety of political projects.[80] He reminds us of the importance of asking whose interests any given ideology serve. In this section I am asking whose interests are served by any given *theology*. As evidence of the tendency toward social conservatism we have already mentioned Medieval Catholicism in its institutional form as well as Luther's ambivalent relationship to the German princes both before and after the Peasants Revolt. Gunnar Heiene's discussion of the Two Kingdoms doctrine points out that,

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[79] As Aukrust himself acknowledges, cf. p. 192.
[80] The history of the Catholic Church's symbiotic relationship with Spanish imperialism in Latin America is the immediate context for Bonino's analysis. Cf chapter 4, "From Authoritarianism to Democracy", pp. 54-64.

though unintended, the doctrines of Justification by Faith and the Two Kingdoms would later lend themselves to legitimating the nation-building ambitions of the Scandinavian monarchies and the German nationalism of Adolph Hitler (Heiene and Thorbjørnsen 2001:274).[81] In Norway the Two Regiments doctrine was used to *oppose* the Nazi occupation. Unfortunately, this resulted, in Lutherans killing Lutherans, a fact which ought to prompt reflection around the kind of theology which could make such a travesty of the gospel possible.

Altmann and Bonino note the conservative positions taken by Lutheran immigrants to Latin America, while Nürnberger comments on the reticence of the Lutherans in South Africa to criticize the apartheid regime. Yet what they say about Lutheran immigrants can also be said about Mennonite immigrants to Russia in the late 18th century and later to Canada and the U.S. in the early 20th century. When they became established and prosperous, and integrated into mainstream society, the greater majority became both politically and socially conservative (Yoder 1984:8). Many abandoned their pacifism and communal lifestyle and adopted *passivism* instead. The pattern we once again can discern is that changed social location produced a theological reflection which legitimated their new status.[82] The following lengthy quotation is taken from Yoder's essay entitled "The Otherness of the Church" and will serve as a commentary on the above reflection of historical praxis..

> The attempt to reverse the New Testament relationship of church and world, making faith invisible and the Christianization of the world a historic achievement with the institutional forms, was undertaken in good faith but has backfired, having had the sole effect of raising the autonomy of unbelief to a higher power. Islam, Marxism, secular Humanism, and Fascism—in short all the major adversaries of the Christian faith in the Occident and the strongest adversaries in the Orient as well—are not nature- or culture-religions but bastard faiths, all of them the progeny of Christianity's infidelity, the spiritual miscegenation involved in trying to make a culture-religion out of faith in Jesus Christ. As religious adversaries in our day, these hybrid faiths are more formidable than any of the pagan alternatives faced by Paul, by Francis Xavier, or by Livingstone. Those who have refused to learn from the New Testament must now learn from history; *the church's responsibility to and for the world is first and always to be the church*. The short-circuited means used to "Christianize" "responsibly" the world in some easier way than by the gospel have had the effect of de-Christianizing the Occident and demonizing paganism (Yoder 1994:61, emphasis mine).

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[81] Rasmusson's essay "Historicizing the Historicist. Ernst Troeltsch and Recent Mennonite Theology" (2009) is a thorough analysis of the German Lutheran church's theological support for German nationalism leading up to World War I and the development of National Socialism during the pre-World War II period, and through to Adolph Hitler's war of annexation.

[82] Some groups adopted liberal theology while others moved in the exact opposite direction, being greatly influenced by a host of conservative Protestant variations on the general theme of 'privatized religion': Dispensationalism, Fundamentalism, Pietism and most recently Evangelicalism.

I will return later to the diaconal challenges the PFD identifies connected with Muslim immigration to Norway. My point here is that Protestantism's many variations of the Constantinian compromise have resulted in the loss of the church's credibility, catholicity and witness. The judgment of the 'watching world' has been to pronounce the church irrelevant and to demand that when it wishes to direct a message to society concerning money, sex or power, it should restrict itself to the private realm of the 'spiritual'.[83]

Before turning to look at what possibilities moving towards a minority position might hold for the CoN's practice of diakonia, I want briefly to consider one of the major challenges facing the CoN identified in the PFD.

5.1.5 Between globalization and self-realization – The triumph of mammon

The PFD identifies globalization—both in terms of the environmental crisis and the growing economic gap between North and South—as a special challenge for diakonia today (2007:5). The response to the local and trans-national dimensions of globalization can be seen as the focus for *both* the new strategic areas in the PFD—'struggle for justice' and 'care for creation'. In my mind, Yoder's analysis of the Pauline language of the Powers provides a highly realistic conceptual framework for understanding not only the political and economic, but also the ideological dimensions of the triumph of free-market capitalism. Driven by neo-liberalism, economic globalization represents a system in which the majority of the world's poor pay a very high price so that a small minority in the North can maintain a grossly inflated standard of living. The triumph of neo-liberalism has left in its wake the carnage of war, environmental destruction, poverty, institutionalized injustice,[84] and cultural humiliation, all these Yoderian definitions of 'sin'. A common denominator in the current hegemony of the western world is that it is 'Christian'. Though beyond the scope of this study it would be interesting to pursue the question as to what degree the 'from above' theologies of the Christendom church traditions have both enabled and legitimated this hegemony.

On a more positive note, Yoder notes another dimension of globalization. The following observation grows out of his life-long commitment to Christian mission:

> It is as much the missionary movement as the commercial and political imperialisms of the same age that created for us today the possibility of seeing our one world as a

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[83] This was the response of most Norwegian politicians to the CoN's recent demand for a five-year moratorium on granting further concessions for oil exploration in the North Sea. Bishop Tor B. Jørgensens prophetic call for the government to reflect on the inter-relationship between climate change and its oil and gas policy is a good example of Engel's thesis that radical church rhetoric is a symptom of the church's marginalization (2006:53).

[84] For an excellent analysis of the role of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade in reinforcing the hegemony of market liberalism in economic globalization, see the CoN's Council on Ecumenical and International Relationships' KISP 2007 report, "*The Church and Economic Globalization*".

cultural family. Christian unity is the true internationalism, for it posits and proclaims a unification of humankind whose basis is not some as yet unachieved restructuring of political sovereignties but an already achieved transformation of vision and community (1994:180).

This vision represents an opportunity for the church to break out of its Christendom form, a form which has very often been associated with Lutherans fighting Lutherans, Catholics fighting Catholics, Christians from the North fighting Christians from the South.

Now I want to look at the effects of mammon's triumph closer to home, since it is the challenges facing diakonia at the local level which are of particular interest here. Consumerism in the countries of the North—which has been a major factor in the impoverishment of the global South—defines human identity in terms of the things one *possesses* or can *produce*. Yet the very processes which have contributed to the affluence of the few, have also eroded this global minority's sense of 'belonging'. What belonging remains is often strictly limited to being *Norwegian*. Social welfare benefits, for example, are only available to the privileged few who manage to climb aboard the affluent 'lifeboat' whose size is defined by territorial borders. The vast majority of humankind—adrift on a vast ocean of poverty—receives mere 'crumbs' from the nations of the Christian North.[85] This is a travesty of the universal nature of the church and evidence that the legacy of Christendom is anything but Christian. The wealthy elderly person, sentenced to ending life in a retirement 'home', often develops a closer relationship to the immigrant care-giver than to his/her own children who rarely come to visit. This is a stark picture of the malaise of our society.

I want to return briefly to the two dominant and contradictory tendencies which Charles Taylor sees in post-modern society—the emphasis on self-realization and a strong faith in collective solutions. I believe that Yoder's ecclesiology, with its emphasis on the local congregation, fills the vacuum between the realm of the individual and that of politics. Called together by their Lord, the community of disciples in any given area is an open fellowship in whom enemy-love and jubilee economics have started to become visible. Of course in the long run, it costs you your life. Jesus never minced words: 'If anyone wants to be with me, they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). This community of gathered disciples creates a common 'space' for belonging. This belonging does not imply a 'sectarian' withdrawal from the world. It is rather a fellowship which takes for granted the diaconal identity of every member living out their 'calling' in their various

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[85] It is well-known that the development budgets of the 'Christian' countries of the West are less than 1% of their GNP.

vocations, not by standards established by mainstream society, but by the ethical reflection of the Christian community gathered around 'the book'.

Where self-realization in wider society is focused on the individual, self-realization in community focuses on 'the other'. All of life is the stuff of this belonging. Belonging comes first as a core of disciples live the gospel as an open invitation which is entered into voluntarily. For some, belonging will lead to believing. However, the content of this believing is quite different from that of common religion's belief in the 'ordinary God'. In common religion, 'salvation' is transmuted into self-realization for the individual; the paradox is that this is considered 'autonomy' or 'freedom'. The result, however, is that such freedom is also freedom from commitment—to spouse, to the weak and poor, but also to the wealthy and the 'strong'. For the disciple of Christ, 'self-realization' takes place in discovering and testing the gift that each has been given, learning what it means to lay down one's life for the other (John 15:13). Each one is needed, and diakonia, rather than being the activity of a few 'volunteers', reveals itself as an identity which each member of God's people bears for the others (I. Cor. 12;12ff). Both diaconal leadership and institutions are still needed and valued. Yet now they flow out of and are nourished by the life of the alternative *polis* 'set on a hill' (Matt. 5:14).

This brief discussion has sought to place the CoN's transition to becoming a functional minority within a context described by the two poles of Taylor's polarity. As we have seen, within post-modern society it is very often 'mammon' which fills the vacuum between these two poles. With the previous chapter's presentation of Yoder in mind, I now turn to discuss new visions for how the church might fill this vacuum. If a change in social location produces a new context for theological reflection and brings new theological subjects to centre of the table, then perhaps we can expect (and hope!) that the CoN's transition to being a functional minority will call forth new interpretations of the doctrines as Justification by Faith and the Two Kingdoms. Reformulations of these doctrines could shed new light on how diakonia is understood. But more importantly, these could also lead to new diaconal *praxis*. This in turn could further strengthen the shift in the *locus theologicus* discernible in the new PFD. This shift represents a return to that pattern which was normative from the time of Jeremianic Exile through the Apostolic era until the 4th century Constantinian-shift. What these histories share in common is that God's people are not, nor do they seek to be, in control of the world.

5.2 The Church as a Minority Community

According to Nordstokke though the Reformers strongly criticized the ecclesiastical power of the Catholic Church, their alternative structures did not necessarily create more

space for the majority of persons who were poor. "So far, the churches of the Reformation are in the same need of reformulating their relation to the periphery and of establishing a ministry of prophecy and transformation" (2000:117). This statement is pregnant with possibility and reflects a clear voice within the CoN's debate concerning diakonia's identity. This debate has led the writers of the PFD to articulate a new paradigm for diakonia. As we have noted, such a paradigm-shift has far-reaching consequences. It requires a continuous and painful *kenosis* for those used to being in control; it means moving from 'above' to 'below'; it means setting up shop permanently on the periphery, moving away from Rome or Jerusalem (or Washington D.C.) to Nazareth, the Bronx or Holmlia. This move re-shapes the church's identity and raises the question as to whether there might not be *positive* aspects to the CoN's embracing its new identity closer to the margins of Norwegian society. With the PFD as a backdrop, the balance of this chapter will outline Yoder's vision for the church as a voluntary, non-violent, catholic, accountable, discerning, hermeneutical and witnessing community.

5.2.1 The church as a voluntary and non-violent community

Yoder, Bonino and Aukrust all agree that the church has a responsibility to shape society. They differ, however, in their visions for *how* society is to be transformed. Like Bonino and Aukrust, the PFD is silent concerning the powerful witness the church's commitment to jubilee economic and non-violence would be. It seems that Yoder's social ethics are, from the very outset, judged to be irresponsible, ineffective and unrealistic as tools for promoting the 'historical project of liberation'. Bonino sees no way around the hard issue of power. In Bonino's discussion of strategies for liberation he begins by referring to the OT scholar Severino Croatto's analysis of the radical change in *Weltanschauung* which took place in Israel. The existence and action of God and man are transposed from cosmos to history. In the culture's surrounding Israel, time was viewed as a cycle in which action today reinforced the pattern of yesterday. With YHWH's choice of a particular People in history, this pattern is broken and 'communal praxis and values' are given a privileged place in the interpretation of 'cosmic symbols and myths' (Bonino 1983:103). Here Croatto identifies one of the great distinctives and strengths of the Judeo-Christian tradition—a *linear view of history* in which human action and its counterpart divine action are decisive. At the same time this great strength opens for a great weakness. Jesus understood this. Throughout his life, as we saw in Yoder's discussion of the wilderness temptations, Jesus needed to make choices about how to effect the 'historical project of liberation'. Since the action required was concrete and critical, and since his choices would have such a profound effect not only human history, but—as it

turned out—on the whole *cosmos* as well, the question of power and *how* it is exercised became absolutely critical for Jesus' 'historical project'.

The Christian community, says Yoder, is the only community whose social hope does not require that the church 'rule' by allying itself with power. It was on the cross that Jesus began to rule. That his ethic of non-violence is not a normative vision shared by the majority of the Christian traditions demonstrates that the cross continues to be a scandal for both Christians and non-Christians (I Cor. 1:23). Yet the social ethic of non-violent enemy-love continues to be the only effective way of breaking the power of the Powers. Until the 4th century it was this ethic which undergirded what the PFD calls the church's 'struggle for justice'. The way the church takes responsibility for society is by being faithful, serving and suffering. However, as Yoder says, the relationship between the church's faithfulness and the triumph of God in human history is not a relationship of cause and effect. In light of the church's eschatological hope, the strategy of the 'Lamb that was slain' (Rev. 5:12) *does* prove to be effective, not only in the life to come but in this life, though—as Yoder says—this strategy's effectiveness will not be proved right until beyond the end of history (1994:113).

For Yoder, as for the Early Church, Jesus of Nazareth—crucified on a cross on charges of political sedition—became the cosmic Christ of the later NT epistles. In the book of Revelation, the centrality of the church in God's purposes is stated in a figurative way. The meaning of history is represented to the seer in the form of a sealed scroll.

> When it is announced that the Lamb that was slain is worthy to open the seals and unroll the meaning of history, the 'new song' in which all the heavenly creatures join proclaims that the meaning of the sacrifice of the Lamb is that he has "purchased" "for God" a priestly kingdom out of "every tribe and language and people and nation" [Rev.] 5:9f (Yoder 1994:74).

Together with the Lamb, this 'new humanity' is called 'to serve our God and to rule the world'.[86]

Yoder's ecclesiology sees the church as a visible community, living in the midst of society in a way which is radically different. The collective life of the local congregation seeks to incarnate in a historically and culturally specific way the radical social practices which Jesus taught (and commanded) in the Sermon on the Mount, and which he lived out together with the community of disciples which he had called into being. In the Anabaptist vision, salvation and social ethics are one and the same thing. There is no *ordo salutis*; the church's being is its doing and its doing is its being. In speaking of the appointment of seven

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[86] This was the title of Yoder's presidential address to the Annual Meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics at Duke University in 1988.

new leaders in the Jerusalem Church (Acts 6:1-7), Nordstokke sounds a lot like Yoder: "[T]he marginalization of the Greek widows challenged the church's inclusive nature" (2006:5).

> The political novelty that God brings into the world is a community of those who serve instead of ruling, who suffer instead of inflicting suffering, whose fellowship crosses social lines instead of reinforcing them. This new Christian community in which the walls are broken down not by human idealism or democratic legalism but by the work of Christ is not only a vehicle of the gospel or only a fruit of the gospel; it is the good news (Yoder 1994:91).

These practices are lived out before a watching world. To hold on to such a vision implies neither that the church needs to retreat from the world—the *spiritualist* tendency—nor that the church assumes responsibility for world—the *theocratic* tendency. To be the bearer of an eschatological message is only possible in a social context in which 'church' and 'world' are distinct from one another.[87] The church, says Yoder, should be that 'society' whose call to jubilee justice grows out of its own disciplined praxis. "Many bloody revolutions would have been avoided if the Christian church had shown herself more respectful than Israel was of the jubilee dispositions contained in the law of Moses" (Yoder 1972:89).

Practicing the *one* social ethic which defines God's will for human life does not necessarily mean abandoning effectiveness. Practicing the jubilee even partially would go to the heart of a structural response to economic injustice in the post-modern world. One example is the global movement to cancel the foreign debt of many of the world's poorest countries. The pressure of this movement, initiated by Christians, on world leaders at the G-8 summits in 1999 and again in 2005 led to the cancellation of billions of dollars of debt owed to Western banks. These monies could then be used to fund social services.

The social practice which defines entry into the visible community is baptism. For Anabaptists this marks the beginning of a life of discipleship.[88] The most recent Norwegian translation of the 'Great Commission' in Matthew 28 moves the link between baptism and discipleship in a new direction. Whereas the 1978 translation speaks of making disciples *by baptizing* (infants),[89] the new translation speaks of making disciples and *then* baptizing.

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[87] Trygve Wyller is the Norwegian theologian who more than any other has argued for a universal understanding of diakonia as a dimension which all people participate in. His ecclesiology has some commonalities with those Liberation theologians who see all of humanity as a 'latent' church (Bonino 1975:160). Cf. also Yoder's discussion in *The Priestly Kingdom – Social Ethics as Gospel* pp.93ff.

[88] In many ways the churches which practice adult baptism face the same challenges as those who practice infant baptism. Baptism of young people between 12 and 15 years of age in many Mennonite churches shares much in common with the 'rite of passage' character of confirmation in the CoN.

[89] In Norwegian: "…gjør alle folkeslag til disipler, idet dere døper dem…" (Matt. 28:19). Making disciples by baptizing is perhaps the evangelization strategy which Harald Hegstad had in mind when, in commenting on the fact that a majority of CoN members do not describe themselves as 'practicing Christians', he writes: "The church must in each generation win its own for the gospel" (1999:147 my translation).

Commenting on the practice of infant baptism within the majority-church traditions, the Lima Document produced by the World Council of Churches states,

> In many of the European and North American majority-churches, infant baptism is practiced in a seemingly uncritical manner. This serves to strengthen resistance to accepting infant baptism in churches which practice believers' baptism (CoNNC 1996:24).

Yoder would say that whether one practices infant or adult baptism is perhaps less important than "teaching them [disciples] to observe *all* which I have commanded you" (28:20). This could open for bringing the social ethics of the Sermon on the Mount into the catechesis for confirmation candidates.

Accepting a minority position could also make it easier for the church's call to holy living in the areas of money, sex and power to be heard in a new way. With 'belonging' to a visible fellowship strengthened, 'believing' receives new content and becomes visible in diaconal 'doing'. Rather than being a consequence of believing (*ordo salutis*), diakonia defines the identity of every believer. To continue to use the language of diaconal 'volunteers'[90] reinforces that diakonia is optional. The LWF document, "For the Healing of the World" states: "Diakonia is not an option, but an essential part of discipleship" (cited in Nordstokke 2006:3). Emphasizing the social dimensions of justification, not only for the individual but for the church as a people, is important if the 'deaconhood of all believers' is to be restored. The subtitle to one of Nordstokke's many articles on diakonia emphasizes this point biblically and clearly: '*We are ordinary servants; we have only done our duty*' (Luke 17:10), (2000:107). When disciples break bread together and share money with each other and with their neighbor, when they maintain open and reconciled relationships and pray and practice doing good not only to one another, but also to their 'enemies', then their concrete praxis before the 'watching world' becomes a powerful and credible witness.

5.2.2   The church as a catholic community

Central to Yoder's ecclesiology is the catholicity of the church which the cross establishes. Once again, the verbalizations by which the church communicates this catholicity to the world around it are simply explications of the fact of its existence (1994:75). Such an ecclesiology has something important to say in a social context like Norway which, until quite recently, has been a relatively homogeneous culture. Since immigration began following World War II, Norwegian society has become increasingly multi-cultural. One of the major diaconal challenges for the CoN domestically is that Islam has gone from being something that is 'out there', to something that has moved 'next door', (depending of course on one's

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[90] Norwegian: *frivillige medarbeidere*

geographical location). To varying degrees, Muslim immigrants and refugees—living on the periphery of Norwegian society—bring with them the history of the Muslim-Christian relationship from the past centuries. For many Muslims, the legacy of the crusades and colonialism, as well as the sometimes uncritical support of the secular state of Israel, are some of the 'bad fruits' of the Christendom model. These have helped to make the Muslim-Christian relationship today at least as hostile as the Jew-Gentile relationship was in the NT. For devout Muslims, sexual promiscuity is another area in which the praxis of the Christian nations of the West evokes contempt. What some call post-modernity's 'clash of civilizations'[91] is once again mostly about the money, sex and power trilogy.[92]

The PFD mentions the reconciliation work which has taken place in relation to the Sami people and, more recently, the *tatere*.[93] This is cause for gratitude. Yet in relation to people from other faiths, the PFD speaks in terms of 'religious dialogue' (CoNNC 2007:17). I would suggest that in relation to Muslims, diakonia needs to speak in terms of peace and reconciliation work.[94] Can we imagine how different the situation would be today had the church continued the practice of jubilee economics and enemy-love, not as *consequences,* but as constitutive elements of the gospel? Without these, the "suppers, cultural evenings and international festivals" mentioned in the PFD (CoNNC 2007:17) will have a tendency to be built on sand. *With* such a foundation in place, these occasions can become opportunities to listen to the stories of refugees desperately look to 'belong' in our local churches.[95] Coming from the periphery, these people are bearers of vital gifts for the Body of Christ, acting as mirrors for those accustomed to looking at things 'from above'. Their stories could be the Spirit's prophetic voice calling the Christian community to repentance—and to taking

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[91] *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* is the title of a book by political scientist Samuel P. Huntington. In it he argues that people's cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world.

[92] It is interesting to note that the three traditional monastic vows—poverty, chastity and obedience—correspond to this Sermon-on-the-Mount trilogy.

[93] The *tatere*, or 'romani people' are a distinct people in Norway, related to, but not the same as the *rom* people.

[94] A source of great joy and encouragement is the reconciliation process which has been taking place between Mennonites and Lutherans. A process which began in 1980 has now resulted in a statement which is to be adopted at the forthcoming LWF world conference in the summer of 2010. "The statement expresses "deep regret and sorrow" for the legacy of violent persecution of Anabaptists and especially for the ways in which Lutheran reformers supported this persecution with theological arguments. It asks forgiveness, "from God and from our Mennonite sisters and brothers," for these past wrongs and also for the ways in which later Lutherans have forgotten or ignored this persecution, continuing to describe Anabaptists in misleading and damaging ways" (Ecclesia 2009)

[95] According to an unpublished study by Kristent Interkulturelt Arbeid, three of five immigrants come from countries with a Christian majority. Only one in four come from countries with a Muslim majority (KIA) 2009. This study corrects the common belief that most immigrants to Norway are Muslim. But to come from a country dominated by Christianity, which is all KIA's study indicates, does not indicate how many consider themselves Christian. According to Statistisk sentralbyrå (SSB), there are no statistics for the religious background of immigrants in Norway.

responsibility, and not necessarily by a simple referral to the nearest welfare office. We can ask: "What can *we* do *with* you (not for you)?" Does our vision for the church as an 'inclusive fellowship' have room for the minority and the enemy? If the answer is no, then for Jesus and Paul and Yoder, that church is not living and preaching the pure 'Word of God' (CA7), and has therefore not yet become the 'new humanity (Eph. 2:15).

5.2.3   The church as a disciplined, accountable and discerning community

How can the moral authority needed to live a life of costly discipleship be born and nourished so that local congregations become empowered to live prophetically, peaceably, gently (within creation), yet powerfully and fearlessly in the face of injustice? To 'take up the cross' and follow Jesus is not easy. Whether it is practicing enemy-love or jubilee economics, whether it is forgiving seventy times seven or risking confronting a brother or sister, the demands of Jesus make clear that, as Yoder says, Christian ethics is for Christians (1984:40).

The specific types of behavior called for by Jesus would most often be impossible apart from the particular resources given to the disciple. Of those Yoder mentions, I want to highlight two: the gift of the Holy Spirit and the "mutual consolation of brothers and sisters" (1994:116). Against the backdrop of Pietistic (Europe) and Puritan (North America) legalism, to talk about church discipline within a folk-church context is unheard of and largely meaningless. Within Catholicism a vestige of this practice is preserved in the sacrament of confession, though the focus is existential and individual without communal reconciliation or restitution necessarily being a part of the process. Yet is there no third way between the all or nothing approach? Yoder argues that 'the Rule of Christ' can unite "substantial moral concern with redemptive confidential admonition […] It can challenge both making forgiveness an automatic routine […] and making it too dear, as among the second-century Christians who would permit it only once" (1992:11).

For Yoder the 'Rule of Christ' also describes the church as a discerning community. At the broadest level, the focus of discernment takes place in relationship to trends and developments within wider society. Yoder writes:

> The context of the covenant community represents a radical alternative to both the theocratic and the spiritualist views of historical movement, first of all, because the community is a discerning community. The promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit is clearly correlated in the New Testament with the need for the church prophetically to discern right and wrong in the events of the age. Not all visible events are God at work, not all 'action' is divine, not every spirit is of Christ (I Cor. 12:3; I John 4:1). We cannot 'go where the action is' until we know which action should be blessed and joined and which should be denounced. Precisely because a community of faith is distinct from the

wider society not only in membership but also in decision-making structures and values, it can be the agent of responsible moral discernment (1994:94).

In the following section I will further develop the way in which the church represents an alternative hermeneutical community. Here I want to briefly focus on a concrete practice of discernment which represents a variation on the Catholic monastic vow of obedience. This practice shares much in common with the one found in Ignatian spirituality (Loyola Press 2010), though its practice beyond the monastic context has, as might be expected, often lacked the communal context. It builds on Yoder's discussion of the 'fullness of Christ' which emphasizes the interdependence and giftedness of every member of the Body, and the potential of every member for being the means by which the Spirit can speak to the community. Often the alternatives are set up in terms of two polarities: either each individual discerns the will of God in ways that are unrelated to or take priority over the wider fellowship. "God told me to move to Larvik and start working as a deacon"—no further questions asked. The other extreme is to see God's will as known in the 'orders of creation' or revealed in the givenness of vocation, making listening to the Spirit in order to hear something *specific* more or less unnecessary. Both of these means of discernment do not address the vacuum Taylor's polarity describes.

A communal practice of discernment sees the mutual trust and commitment of long-term stable relationships within the fellowship as a resource for reflecting on specific important decisions—affirming a call to a particular job, education, life's partner, geographical re-location etc. In the context of a fellowship in which the themes of money, sex and power are not excluded from ethical reflection and accountability, the individual requesting discernment becomes known both in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. To invite discernment can be one way of avoiding the pitfalls of one's own compulsions or 'blind spots'. The goal is to be able to conclude: "It seemed good to us and to the Holy Spirit…" Since the process is not infallible it allows the community to take part more directly in owning both the successes and failures which result. It is also interesting to note that the decision arrived at the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15 comes within the concrete particularities of a cultural debate concerning what should be done with meat offered to idols. Believing that their decision was also 'bound in heaven', their conclusion made no claim to be 'above' or beyond' or 'against' culture, but precisely *within* the culture.[96] To accept the 'embarrassment of particularity', as Yoder puts it, opens for the possibility of engaging with

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[96] Much of Yoder's social ethics needs to be understood as a dialogue with the two of the towering figures within North American theology in the 20th century, the brothers Niebuhr, particularly Richard. References to the latter's social ethics typology in *Christ and Culture* appear throughout Yoder's writings.

joy and confidence the post-modern world in which Christendom has been deconstructed. Trust in the Holy Spirit significantly reduces dependence on the 'timeless truth' systems of systematic theology. Reliance on the Spirit for 'new truth'[97] is balanced by the need for mutual submission in a communal discernment process. The process of 'discerning the spirits' (I Cor. 12:3, I John 4:1) is a corrective to the potential abuse of power on the part of charismatic leaders, and provides protection against purely personalistic interpretations of the Holy Spirits' message.[98]

5.2.4   The church as a witnessing community

Throughout this study I have shown how Yoder's ecclesiology sees the church as a distinct 'society' which lives as the 'new creation' within the world. Hence there is little need to repeat at length the argument that the church's witness is seen before it is heard. A Believer's Church Conference in Louisville, Kentucky in 1967 issued a statement concerning their understanding of the church's mission:

> We have found ourselves agreed that the mission of the church in the world is to work out her being as a covenant community in the midst of the world. The visible community is the organ of missionary proclamation. Integration into its fellowship and style of life is the goal of the evangelistic call to individuals (cited in Kärkkäinen 2002:66).

When the CoN's bishops call upon the government to implement a moratorium on oil exploration in ecologically vulnerable areas, their prophetic and diaconal witness stands or falls on to what extent the congregations which they represent have taken up the challenge to 'care for creation' in terms of their own consumption of petroleum. As the response of a number of politicians to this appeal suggested, for the CoN to recover its moral authority in speaking to the wider society, it would do well to "sweep in front of its own door" first. It is conceivable that in time, the CoN's minority status would make it possible to gain a hearing which was previously impossible given the legacy of its 'from above' position in society.

I believe that Yoder's 'from below' vision of the church contains new possibilities for seeing the challenges facing society from a different vantage point. From below the church is a sign. Without needing to control, a sign can be a powerful expression of what OT scholar Walter Brueggemann calls the prophetic imagination (Nordstokke 2000:110). Like the Anabaptists of the 16th century, Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi in our day are

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[97] Yoder was fond of quoting from Puritan John Robinson's farewell sermon to the pilgrims leaving for the New World: "The Lord has much more light and truth to break forth from His holy Word" (1994:39).

[98] This whole area represents one of the areas of great vulnerability in those branches of the Radical Reformation which are designated as 'Spritualists'. Sometimes the results of their revelations were catastrophic, as in the case of Thomas Münster who justified the use of violence in his attempts to establish the Kingdom of God on earth (Kärkkäinen 2002:61, Rasmusson 1994:17).

examples of the power of the non-violent prophetic 'sign'. Referring to the five practices before the watching world Yoder writes:

> The multiplicity of gifts is a model for the empowerment of the humble and the end of hierarchy in social process. Dialogue under the Holy Spirit is the ground floor of the notion of democracy. Admonition to bind or loose at the point of offense is the foundation for conflict resolution and consciousness-raising. Baptism enacts interethnic social acceptance, and breaking bread celebrates economic solidarity (1984:72).

As noted earlier, Yoder argues that the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist originally had a social content in the life of NT congregations. Would granting such a conclusion perhaps provide a wider foundation for Lutheran dogma concerning the sacraments? Perhaps such new interpretations would strengthen the paradigm-shift reflected in the new PFD. In some future revision of the PFD these sacraments might also be described as 'the gospel in action'.

5.2.5   The church as a hermeneutical community

Being in a minority position opens up for seeing the local church as a hermeneutical community which interprets the Bible and 'reads' human history *from below*. This pattern can be seen in the experience of the Base Christian Communities in Latin America (Yoder 1992:87). Like rabbinic Judaism, Anabaptists were 'people of the book'. Their radically egalitarian praxis did not set limits on who was authorized to sit around the table and interpret the Bible and 'tradition'. Rasmusson sees Yoder's position in sharp contrast to the one found in the Christendom traditions, whether Catholic or Protestant. In these the text is controlled by a professional elite. Throughout much of the CoN's history, this praxis was supported by the power of the state. This meant that the Bible often lost much of its critical function (Rasmusson 2007:188).

Comparing Yoder and Nürnberger on the question of leadership reveals some of the differences in the way their respective hermeneutical traditions approach the question of leadership within the church. Where Yoder would begin with Christology, Nürnberger begins by looking at leadership patterns in the OT, perhaps because he assumes that Jesus' leadership was not 'political'. Political realities in Canaan, particularly the military threat represented by the Philistines, says Nürnberger, necessitated the establishment of the monarchy (2005:153). For Yoder, the understanding of the king as representative of God on earth is a *pagan* conception, yet one which has persisted in both political and ecclesial history well into the 19th century. Initially the monarchy was specifically forbidden by Yahweh (Deut. 17:14; 1 Sam. 8:7). Once the Israelites had made their choice, however, YHWH sought to give kingship a content and praxis which could still be a witness, an alternative 'politics'. Jesus

further re-defines leadership in terms of suffering and serving. Yet this model was as ill-suited to the Zealot/Maccabbean who hoped the Messiah would lead them in a revolution to throw out the Romans, as they were to the later Constantinian church which had assumed responsibility for the entire Roman Empire. At the same time, the religious and political establishments of the day found Jesus' kingship—which he did not deny—so threatening that they executed him on charges of political sedition.

The question is really how much hierarchy is enough, and how much is too much? The Protestant Reformation clearly led to less hierarchy than was found in the medieval Catholic Church—or today's, for that matter.[99] In past decades the CoN has moved away from the king-bishop-priest-layman hierarchy and has established a more democratic *rådsstruktur* for decision making. Yet despite the fact that the CoN's understanding has changed dramatically, the underlying dichotomy between clergy and laity lives on. The issue seems to be control, and who is allowed to have it. As recently as February 2010 the CoN's Council of Bishops proposed that the clergy-laity language be abandoned, though the distinction between ordained and non-ordained was still retained (CoNCB 2010).

The consequences of leadership as hierarchy are also reflected in the ecumenical dialogue. Those Christian traditions which are able to send delegations which are authorized to speak on behalf of their traditions (or who have veto right over…?) are those who sit at the 'centre' and have the power to set the agenda. Commenting on the Faith and Order discussions within the WCC, Yoder observes the prior commitment to the 'high church' over the non-hierarchical church traditions reflected in the Lima Document. He writes:

> The strongest alternative perspectives were excluded not by dialogue but on procedural grounds. The requirements that would obtain for a negotiated ecclesiastical unity are thereby given priority over the normal ground rules of an open ecumenical debate […] The effect of the decision is to exclude from the conversational process one set of interlocutors (1994:288).

This represents a process which has not managed to capture the Freierian empowerment potential implicit in the 'Rule of Paul'—where everyone who has something to say is given the floor. As a result the WCC has not succeeded in bringing to the 'table' the largest single category in Protestantism, the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches (Kärkkäinen 2002:69).[100]

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[99] Only a few pages after affirming kingship in the OT, Nürnberger can turn around and deliver a realistic assessment of some of the major results of the Constantinian synthesis: "The development of an ecclesial hierarchy and a feudal society was not based on the biblical trajectory, but on neo-Platonic metaphysics." (Nürnberger 2005:158).

[100] These churches have, for the most part a predominantly 'Believer's Church' ecclesiology. This leads Finnish theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen to conclude that "today's global developments seem to imply that Protestant Christendom of the future will exhibit largely a Free [Church] form" (2002:59).

The major church traditions have generally placed more emphasis on the place of systematic theology in relation to biblical theology. I would suggest that this reflects the tradition of doing theology in a context where the 'hermeneutical community' is in the driver's seat. By contrast, the Anabaptist tradition feels less need to transcend the vagaries of particularity—YHWH, a People, a specific Jew, a specific book etc. Douglas Harink maintains that the major church traditions "have had a three hundred year love affair with modernity" (2003:256). This comes to expression in many forms: universal reason and rational argument as the basis for Christian belief; the search for universal human experience or a common religious subject in defending the Christian faith, and

> […]the love of general theological or religious themes like God (of no particular people) as naming the transcendent, or faith, love, grace, freedom, justice and peace as naming the shape of the general, universal relationship of transcendence and imminence (Harink 2003:256).

These are the assumptions of modernity and help to understand the following statement in Yoder's preface to *The Politics of Jesus*:

> On the deepest level [this book] represents an exercise in fundamental philosophical hermeneutics, trying to apply in the area of the life of the Christian community the insights with regard to the distinct biblical world view which have previously been promoted under the name of 'biblical realism' (Yoder 1972:5).

Furthermore, where the systematic theology of many of the major church traditions sometimes have difficulty meeting the post-modern deconstructionist critique, Yoder's approach to hermeneutics sees no need to find a reference point other than the specific story of "*den lieben Gott und die Menschenkinder*".[101] Yoder's ecclesiology places greater faith in the Holy Spirit as the one whose responsibility it is to provide continuity within the relativity of the particular. The compulsion to establish social ethics on some meta-level is rooted in the desire to maintain control. Control is a necessity for those who see it as their responsibility to make history come out right. This would also include Bonino and the non-negotiability of the historical project for the liberation of the poor. As right as this end is, it falls short of the strategy of the 'war of the Lamb', a strategy which according to the witness of the NT has already re-established the cosmic order. This fact is reflected in the presence of the church as an alternative *polis*. In its own social practices it bears witness to what the world is one day destined to become.

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[101] My maternal grandfather was a lay minister in a Mennonite church in Kitchener, Ontario. One Sunday he noticed that my mother had not been paying attention to his sermon. When asked later around the Sunday dinner table what the sermon was about, she replied, "Es war um den lieben Gott und die Menschenkinder"—" It was about God and humanity".

6 Conclusion

Given the breadth of Yoder's work, it now remains to ask in what ways the most important elements identified in this study answer the question with which we began. The CoN today finds itself in a very different situation sociologically than it did when its theology was first hammered out in the fires of the Reformation. Like many other European majority-churches, the CoN finds itself needing to adapt both organizationally and theologically to the fact that its core of practicing believers has become a functional minority. For Yoder, this transition should be welcomed as bearing the hope of a renewed witness. Both Jewish and Christian history prior to Constantine show that it is possible to be God's People without being in control of the society in which one lives. Minority status is not incommensurate with being the bearer of a powerful, responsible and ultimately effective witness. As we have seen, this witness rests on a hope in the eschatological promises of God and the 'foolishness of the cross' which has overcome the world (I Cor. 1:18).

As we have seen Yoder's thinking also helps to describe the ways in which the church's theology and praxis have contributed to creating the vacuum described by Charles Taylors's self-realization/collective solutions polarity. In my estimation, one of the major findings of this study has been that since Constantine, the context for theological reflection has been a social location 'from above'. Doing theology in a context which assumes responsibility for steering society has, in different ways, produced a series of dualisms whose net effect has been to legitimize the established order. These have had the effect of relativizing the social ethics of Jesus and thereby reinforcing a conservative social praxis. At different points, this study has presented an historical analysis which has confirmed Bonino's assertion: churches whose social location is or becomes 'from above'—whether they be Catholic, Lutheran or Mennonite—are very often become co-opted in support of the various 'historical projects' of the established order.

As we saw in chapter 3, the Lutheran doctrines of Justification and the Two Kingdoms represent a continuity with the Christendom tradition in terms of social location. They reflect a re-formulation of inherited dualisms in response to the historical context of the Reformation. Gospel/law and spiritual/wordly distinctions replace the distinctions between clergy/laity and justification/sanctification. Yet all end up being used to reinforce *ordo salutis*. Not only the poor and weak, but also the rich and powerful, and indeed creation itself has had to pay a high price for these dualisms. In addition to denying an impoverished majority the possibility of

justice/shalom, relativizing the Sermon on the Mount has allowed mammon to enslave the rich minority in the name of an interiorized gospel unrelated to enemy-love or jubilee economics. It has also provided the ideological legitimation for the pillage and plunder of the planet itself. As Yoder says, those who will not learn from the NT must now learn from history. There are signs that the church in the North (or West) is starting to awaken. The new PFD is evidence of this fact. This can be seen in its call to 'care for creations' and struggle for justice'. It can also be seen in its clear emphasis on empowerment, suggesting a movement from 'above' to 'below', from the 'centre' to the 'periphery'.

In chapter 4 we saw how Yoder's reading of the NT concludes that Jesus' social ethics are fundamentally political, and that they define not only the *individual's* social praxis, but that of the church as an alternative *polis*—a community of those who serve instead of ruling, share instead of 'storing up', give up their lives instead of taking life, and who cross social and cultural lines instead of making borders out of them. Yoder also demonstrates the continuity between the social ethics contained in the gospels and the rest of the NT, between Jesus and Paul. A case in point is Paul's understanding of the state in Romans 13. Paul's view assumes that the church's social location is 'from below', a stance which Yoder calls 'revolutionary subordination'. Drawing on a pattern established within post-exilic Judaism, 'revolutionary subordination' is a way God's People can live as a minority within a society over which they do not have, nor do they seek to have, either present or future control. As Yoder's discussion of the politics of Jesus shows, this does not mean that the church's message is socially and politically irrelevant.

One of the arguments we looked at was that the *haustafeln* which are said to demonstrate the Early Church's need to borrow a 'realistic' social ethic from the wider wisdom of Greek thought. In the post-Constantinian church the pattern of borrowing continued, locating the standards for one's social duties in natural law, the 'orders of creation', moral reason etc. In Lutheranism, these define the Christian's social responsibility within the 'wordly regiment'. A radical NT ethic is relevant—if at all—only within what today has become the private sphere of personalized religion. Yoder draws a line between the 'revolutionary subordination' expressed in the *haustafeln* and Paul's understanding of the cross. The cross was the logical result of Jesus' moral clash with the political and religious powers ruling his society. Paul's understanding of these powers has a cosmic dimension; 'principalities and powers' are the NT language for power. Jesus' submission to these Powers, freely chosen, is the wisdom of God refusing to be drawn into the game of power. Rather than launching a frontal attack on the Powers, Jesus replaces servanthood with dominion. Forgiveness absorbs hostility. Ultimately

the death of God, rather than destroying the Powers, 'puts them in their place'. On the cross there is no contradiction between means and ends. 'Revolutionary subordination' becomes God's way of 'taking responsibility' for 'transforming society'. It becomes a pattern for the Early Church's life within the Roman Empire.

Since the Powers are fallen, they tend to reinforce their own autonomy, a fact which Bonino's review of the various 'historical projects' from Machiavelli to the Latin American national security state makes clear. Bonino's 'grammar of power'—the autonomy of politics and the fact of raw power—helps to 'read' the history of the church's alliance with power. Whether it be Luther's support of the German princes during the Peasants Revolt, the nation-building projects of the Scandinavian monarchies or the German Lutheran churches' support for Adolph Hitler's German nationalism—all of these are tragic demonstrations of what can happen when the power of the Powers is underestimated.

The main conclusion of chapter 4 was that the church's call, according to Yoder, is to embody the politics of Jesus, and in its own life continue to unmask the Powers in the different forms they take in every age.

> From this perspective, one of the great tragedies of history is the fact that the church, instead of exposing the Powers […] has sacralized them and made them into God's direct and primary instruments in history (Rasmusson 2002:48).

In light of this history, it becomes extremely important to reflect on the *means* by which the new PFD now calls the CoN to 'care for creation' and 'struggle for justice'. The traditional answer—read off the face of church history since Constantine—has been to go the route of politics, a choice described by Taylor as a "faith in collective solutions". However, the new PFD contains a paradigm-shift, defining diakonia not in terms of *ordo salutis*, but as the gospel in action. For the CoN, the task ahead will be to take a fresh look at what the gospel is and how that definition shapes the action envisioned.

As this study has tried to demonstrate, I believe that Yoder (and Jesus) have something to say about what this action should be, and the way in which it is political. The 'collective solution' proposed by Yoder (and the NT) is the new community itself, the church as an 'inclusive fellowship'. The meaning of history has always been borne by God's People; the church bears it for the sake of the world by being a visible demonstration of the new creation. As Yoder says, the church is today what the whole world will one day become. This social reality lies at the heart of the mystery which the church celebrates in the Eucharist—that in his own flesh Jesus has destroyed the 'enmity' which exists between former enemies: God and man/woman, Jew and Gentile, Mennonite and Lutheran, mankind and creation. To be justified

by faith is to realize that in Christ we have been put right in relationship to all of these—simultaneously and ontologically. This reconciliation is an accomplished fact. There is no *ordo salutis*. In addition to the Lord's Supper, the other five practices which Yoder highlights, together represent an understandable, relevant and clear witness to the 'watching world' since they address the fundamental issues of money, sex and power.

I want now to reach back to the methodological point with which this study began. It is summarized succinctly in Bonino's chapter title: "From Praxis to Theory and Back". We began by asking how Yoder's thought could contribute to the CoN's *reflection* on diakonia. What has been presented thus far fits under this heading. The praxis which was the point of departure for reflection was the history of diakonia within the wider context of church history in Europe. The purpose of this socio-historical analysis was to illuminate the current situation in which the CoN finds itself—in transition from majority to minority. In presenting *Yoder* it has been necessary and useful, hermeneutically, to say something about the history of the Mennonites which is a significant part of the context for Yoder's thought.

But as Bonino suggests, *the point of reflection is to inform further praxis*. This means looking towards the future. It seems likely that in the coming decade the CoN will formally be separated from the state.[102] The open question is what the form and vision of this church will be. This question in turn opens for asking what Yoder's thinking might contribute to the CoN's diaconal *praxis*. The following is an attempt to present in point form several specific suggestions related to some of the practical and theoretical aspects within the current diakonia debate:

1. Diakonia – 'humble service' or prophetic

The new PFD's call to 'struggle for justice' is sometimes perceived as a move away from an earlier understanding of diakonia as 'humble service'. This debate sees the two emphases in tension with one another rather than as an organic unity; if the service is humble then it cannot be effective in the harsh world of politics. Yoder's concept of 'revolutionary subordination' suggests that the two are not incompatible. In light of Jesus' victory *on the cross* we need not choose between the two.

For the CoN to accept its minority status opens up for 'doing theology' from a different perspective and bringing new theological subjects to the table for discussion. The ultimate goal of God's household, says Letty Russell, is to do away with the margin and the center" (1993:26). God invites both to join Jesus who is at the centre of the church's life but who

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[102] There may be some formal ties that remain, including special legislation and the religion of the King.

continues to dwell on the margins where he lived and died (1993:27). For the CoN to embrace—in faith and trust—its being freed from state tutelage could also lead to a clearer witness; the economic consequences could further help the move towards the margin. It could also mean a feeling of greater equality around an ecumenical table which includes other 'free' churches.

2. Political diakonia – minority status

Though not mentioned in the new PFD, political diakonia will likely become an increasingly important form for the CoN's struggle for justice. Its history of helping to do the 'steering' in Norway suggests that there will continue to be significant faith in the potential of politics to establish justice. Here I can only note that, as we have seen, there are theological reasons to review investing in this important lobbying function without a *diaconal praxis at the congregational level* which can back up the radical rhetoric of the CoN's official bodies. There is little point in proposing legislation that the alternative *polis* itself has not experimented with. If the CoN is to contribute something which other civic organizations cannot (given the gift of the Holy Spirit, fraternal admonition, etc.), then surely part of this will be linked to a deepened socio-ethical credibility. As the CoN is 'led into the wilderness' (by the Spirit?) prior to its new public ministry as a minority-church, perhaps it would be good to reflect on those habits developed through centuries of looking at things 'from above'—concerning 'effectiveness', 'social responsibility', 'the ends justify the means' etc. As Yoder points out, it is worth re-looking at these in light of the Cross'.

Separating from the state calls for Sermon-on-the-Mount type trust on the part of the CoN. Does the way of the Cross really work? Is the Lamb that was slain really reigning? "So therefore, do not be worried how you will pay the bills, or where the money for the church budget will come from… But seek first the Kingdom and all these other things will be added (Matt. 6:25-34, my translation).To be quit the 'addiction' to power, it needs to be said, is an ecumenical agenda. Yet the 'fruit' will surely be good since the stance of 'revolutionary subordination' arising out of a radical social praxis is a powerful and prophetic combination whose witness will surely have an effect.

3. Diaconal education and diaconal spirituality

On balance Yoder's thought gives biblical theology significantly greater weight than systematic theology. Diaconal reflection needs to think through the link between the dominance of the latter and social/theological location as linked to the question of control. Since the CoN is still a nominal majority in terms of 'believing without belonging', to go into

a dialogue with the post-Christian, post-liberal theology could result in a modified content for the CoN's catechetical reform as well as it preaching on any given Sunday. Once again, small but vital doses of Anabaptism could make important contributions in other ecumenical contexts as well.

Apropos ecumenical concerns… With or without *ordo salutis* the question remains: What can actually move the justified disciple—Lutheran or Mennonite-- to live out the gospel diaconally? Challenges associated with diaconal praxis *in all church traditions* remind us that we all are, as Luther rightly put it, *simul justus et peccator*. That the latter is a reality across the board is why the church in every generation is in need of reform— *ecclesia semper reformanda.* For this reason diaconal education does well to recognize the importance of spiritual formation, pastoral counselling, as well as the practicum dimension. Bonino, Yoder would say, got his praxis-reflection-praxis dialectic from the Jew from Nazareth who said, "Come follow me and [*then*] I will make you…" (Mark 1:17). The disciple's obedience (action) leads to an experience upon which to reflect theologically, sociologically etc. This in turn can re-form 'believing' and sustain further action. The first disciples didn't 'get it straight' until after Pentecost, and even then Paul needed to admonish Peter on his inconsistent praxis (Gal. 2:11-21).

4. **Church structure**

Yoder's Free Church ecclesiology suggests that perhaps one useful structure which would serve a minority identity is the house fellowship. This form allows for *koinonia*—work, meal, prayer, diakonia fellowship—at the neighborhood level. Well functioning house fellowships groups are places of 'belonging'. Their evangelizing potential is that belonging can lead to believing (as in Alpha groups). They are also well suited to Bible study and the practice of the hermeneutical community's discernment since "the Lord hath yet much more light to reveal…".[103] House fellowships also provide an arena for testing gifts and leadership in different areas.

The 'deaconhood of all believers' puts the current debate concerning ministry into a broader perspective. Yoder challenges those church traditions which place more emphasis on the sacramental dimensions of baptism/Eucharist and 'authorization' in terms of church leadership, to further explore their social and egalitarian dimensions. The current debate

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[103] See footnote 101 above.

concerning whether the deacon is entitled to wear the stola[104] warrants hearing Peter's exhortation: "Clothe yourselves with humility towards one another…." (1 Peter 5:7).

5. Ecumenical dialogue/diakonia

The work for Christian unity is surely one of the most important developments during the past century, and part of the focus for this unity has been *diakonia*. The other has been *koinonia*. Yet church history, as we have seen, also bears witness to conflict between Christians across national, cultural and confessional borders. At some point ecumenism needs to have the courage to walk into these histories and talk about what happened. The Mennonite/Lutheran reconciliation process mentioned above is a good example; [105] the fruit of such open dialogue builds trust in way that can also strengthen mutual diaconal work.

On the more theoretical level, cross-fertilization in the Body of Christ—instead of mutual distrust—is essential if the church's unity and witness are to be strengthened.

> Theology has to be, at all times, critical of the traditions from which it derives its subject matter and methodology […] We must expose our respective heritages to mutual scrutiny and critique […Yet] if we discard our distinctive traditions altogether, we may throw out the baby with the bath water and lose something fundamental (Nürnberger 2005:9).

6. Prophetic diakonia – justice, peace and reconciliation

Norway has had a significant role in (UN) peacemaking and reconciliation work; the CoN has played a vital role in the ecumenical dialogue. These are things to be grateful for. At the same time, increasing pluralism domestically reveals that there is a great deal of what Paul called 'enmity' between peoples. Does the Christian/Muslim relationship today not resemble the Jew/Gentile relationship in the first century? The history of warfare within the Body of Christ is in itself a great shame. Yet even more damaging have been the wars between Christians and Muslims. Within the interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims, it would be one thing to say: "Our Lord calls us to eschew violence and to love you as *he* loves you. We want to apologize for the atrocities committed in the name of Jesus by our forbearers. We want to be reconciled to you?"[106] Yet historically Bonino's identification of

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[104] Norwegian: *skråstola*.

[105] Cf. discussion above, p. 65. Mennonites need to do this in Canada in relation to the Native/Aboriginal people's whose land they were given when they themselves came as refugees from Russia in the early 1900's.

[106] was the message of an inter-Christian movement called the Reconciliation Walk. Thousands of people retraced the routes of the crusaders over a 4-year period of time, bearing with them an apology to Muslims and Jews along the route to the 'Holy Land'. The following is the text of that apology: "Nine hundred years ago, our forefathers carried the name of Jesus Christ in battle across the Middle East. Fuelled by fear, greed and hatred, they betrayed the name of Christ by conducting themselves in a manner contrary to His wishes and character. The Crusaders lifted the banner of the Cross above your people. By this act, they corrupted its true meaning of

what has actually happened. The majority of Christian confessions' *a priori* rejection of Jesus' social ethic has led to war, war and more war. As Christians we have not even been able to agree that we are called to enemy-love, and that we desire to say 'yes' to that call. As Yoder points out, we and our children are now paying a terrible price for this infidelity to the gospel! In the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, the media quoted leaders, both Christian and non-Christian, expressing their horror at the deaths of so many innocent people. Yet Matthew 25 tells us that whenever we turn aside from the beggar or the prisoner or the HIV/AIDS victim, we miss Jesus and lose our innocence. For Yoder, as for the Anabaptists, the revelation of Jesus distinguishes itself from those of all others because on the Cross God loves God's enemies. Hanging naked God is willing to give his life instead of taking life. The disciple of Jesus is called to do no less.

Is it possible to envision local CoN congregations gathering in Grorud or Grønland for a 'barnraising'[107] to help local Muslims build their mosque. Such an action would incarnate the gospel—that in Jesus the dividing walls of hostility have been torn down, that the 'enmity' has been destroyed, and that God in Christ is still gathering into one people those who previously were enemies? Would this be not merely a symbolic response, but a real enactment of Jesus' commandment: "Love your enemies, *do good to those who hate you…*? (Luke 6:27). As a concrete act of peacemaking such a form for prophetic diakonia would hold promise of developing relationships established by sweating together. Over time these relationships might establish trust and create the conditions which make for peace rather than war. They would bear witness to not just an 'ordinary God', but a God whose death has created a whole new creation. Could such a stance of enemy-love, including unilateral repentance, also be envisioned in relation to humanists or Muslim fundamentalists? Could the church's prophetic imagination envision such a stance towards Satanists, black metal or neo-Nazi subcultures? And would not such initiatives then warrant being called 'the gospel in action'?

It is my hope that this study will 'provoke' further reflections on accepted dogmas. Perhaps it can in a small way serve to further strengthen the CoN's Plan for Diakonia so that

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reconciliation, forgiveness and selfless love. On the anniversary of the first Crusade, we also carry the name of Christ. We wish to retrace the footsteps of the Crusaders in apology for their deeds and in demonstration of the true meaning of the Cross. We deeply regret the atrocities committed in the name of Christ by our predecessors. We renounce greed, hatred and fear, and condemn all violence done in the name of Jesus Christ. Where they were motivated by hatred and prejudice, we offer love and brotherhood. Jesus the Messiah came to give life. Forgive us for allowing His name to be associated with death. Please accept again the true meaning of the Messiah's words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." As we go, we bless you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.
[107] Norwegian: *dugnad*

its vision of the gospel—understood as love of neighbor, inclusive fellowship, care for creation, and struggle for justice—can be sustained and lived by a renewed *ecclesia* to the end that the world, observing the 'good works' of diakonia, will give praise to the Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

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Appendix 1: Biography – John Howard Yoder

- born in 1927, died in 1997.
- 1949 - 1954 Administered 2 children's homes in Basel run by the French Mennonites
- 1950 -1957 Began studies at the University of Basel, studied under Oscar Cullman (NT), Karl Barth (Dogmatics), Karl Jaspers (Philosophy) and Walter Eichrodt (OT) Wrote his doctorate on the Anabaptists disputations with the Reformers in Switzerland (1523-1538)
- 1952 – Married Anne Marie Guth (French)
- 1955 – Administered the Mennonite Central Committee's relief program in Algiers (equivalent to Kirkens Nødhjelp)
- 1959 - 1965 Worked as the administrative assistant for overseas missions in the Mennonite Mission Board
- 1959 – 1984 Began to teach at the Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkart, Indiana, first part time and later full-time.
- 1977 – 1994 Professor at Notre Dame Catholic University
- Beginning in the 1960's Yoder was involved in the World Council of Churches in various capacities, including as adjunct staff.