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Advocacy Part III Christian Witness to the State

Evangelical Advocacy: A Response to Global Poverty

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David A. Gribble, "The Christian Witness to the State" Identity as Advocates

Christian Witness to the State

If we return to the definition of advocacy in this series that, among all the concepts, certain ones are central to the identification of advocacy against this injustice; a speaking to those who, in one way or another, are speaking about the injustice; there is a speaking and a speaking about the speaking is speaking about

In this section I would like to begin to explore what it be done "Christianly" title of this series suggests that I would like to draw on John Howard Yoder's Witness to the State (TCWTS) and examine how Yoder addressed the concept of advocacy in his Witness to the State. I want to be clear that in my Witness to the State I understand of how followers of Jesus should advocate did not use the concept of "advocacy," Yoder's Witness to the State comments to the particular is advocacy and advocacy extend the discussion of the principles and practices Christianly beyond the state in future parts of this series.

Despite these caveats I believe that Yoder provides a Christians might engage in advocacy. Taking advocacy we can then explore various points in more detail later value of and limits to advocacy before like to briefly advocate concerning advocacy (speaking to the state), advocacy (church) and advocacy should note that Yoder did not take up "with and by" and, at least for this section we are going

about advocacy that is "for" those who are suffering from injustice. That his ideas could be expanded to include advocacy for the oppressed is not in doubt but I will not deal with that here.

Yoder is clear at the very beginning of his book (see footnote 1) that it was written in 1964. Anabaptist (Mennonite to be precise) and, thanks in large part to the writing of Reinhold Niebuhr, a pacifist engagement with the state is a contribution to serving or correcting public policy. Yoder put it this way (numbers in parentheses from here on refer to pages in TCWTS): "My interpretation of this problem in contemporary American society is that a consistent Christian pacifist must accept the verdict of the state's position." (and in the footnote following that line add a more convincing formulation of the current interpretation to be found in the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr.") (7)

Yoder used TCWTS as an argument against this formulation of the project this way:

Our purpose is to analyze whether it is practical if the case position rooted not in pragmatic or psychological but in moral considerations is thereby irrelevant to the social order. Our attempt to ascertain on what grounds, according to the Christian tradition, what hope of success is not only possible but necessary for the Christian should witness to the social order in

I do not think it is necessary to accept Yoder's pacifist arguments and benefit from them. It is attempted to say that if a pacifist Mennonite made the statement above, it is worth examining his arguments because he clearly is (intellectually and theologically) a serious thinker. Since he was from within the Anabaptist tradition, Yoder could not have been (largely Mennonite) readers would agree that Christian

social order. He was writing from within a tradition that valued both the validity and necessity of doing so. (see Joire's good historical overview)

In the midst of these questions and pressures, Yoder asks the Christian can and should witness to this witness be done in a way that allowed the church to be the church. One way of reading his book is as a treatise on ecclesiology of the state, a kind of "checkbook of the centuries old confessions" (Yoder) about the role of the church with an articulation of how the church can engage the state on the basis of the c

With this background, let us turn to Yoder's key proposition relation to the themes outlined above.

Injustice/Justice: An Eschatological Vision of the Kingdom

Yoder begins his discussion of witness with a section on witness to the state and a discussion of "Christ's Lordship." The section deals with the challenge of the already-embodied Christ's reign in the resurrection and its meaning over the "powers" (more on this in the actual workings of fallen and rebellious powers). The point of this section is to lay out the resurrection as the basis for the church's work in the world. "The church points forward as to the ultimate fulfillment of the redemptive work of God's (10) Christ's "lordship" not ascribed status (dependent on "believers" claiming his lordship) but as a distortion of the biblical meaning of a just rat

He goes on to explore the meaning of this status in relation to the cross and underlines the fact that the church embodies both "an already-embodied triumph on the cross and a foretaste of His ultimate lo

Kingdom.." (10) This dual reality gives the church a "task with respect to the coming of the kingdom in this sense the church seeks to live in the present reality. We shall see more of Yoder's view of the essential nature of the church below but the important point here is that it is possible for the church to embody God's ultimate redemptive purposes. We shall see below about justice in ways that challenge the state in the here and now.

In a recent book *Called to Stand* the Anglican N.T. Wright argues that the church's mission is to be a sign and foretaste of the kingdom of God in the present.

What you do in the present—planting, preaching, singing, serving, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, advocating for the poor and oppressed—is God's future. These activities are not simply ways of making the present a little less beastly, a little more bearable, until the kingdom comes altogether... They are part of what we may call building the kingdom now. (Wright 2006, emphasis in original)

Elsewhere Yoder develops the idea that Christ's teaching that the kingdom of God is at hand proclaimed a coming of the kingdom. For example, he argues that Jesus' teaching about his mission in Luke 4 (applying it to himself), particularly the phrase "the kingdom of God is at hand," should be understood to his hearers as the message of economic justice. The concept of "jubilee" (Yoder 1994: 29 & 60ff)

Thus, the "future hope" is brought into the here and now. The church's living into or "building for" the kingdom is to be based on the expected final redemptive reality of the kingdom. In this sense the identification of and speaking out in relation to the church's living out of justice in all the ways it is spoken of in the Bible—feeding the hungry, releasing the captive, providing sight for the blind, reforming economic systems, living peace, reconciling broken relationships, providing food for the hungry, "living out" of these things provide Christian witness to the state. (Wright 2006, emphasis in original)

Speaking: Witness to the Kingdom

It should already be clear that Yoder holds a central place of the church in God's development more on this below. It is difficult to not bring it into every element of Yoder's work. In a section of the book on "the form of the church's witness" its very existence as a "society" that follows the law of love. This is before a word is uttered the church is speaking through its life is grounded in repentance. Yoder sees this in decision making structures within the church undermining admonition leads to accountability and discernment. His models operate as a reality. Many congregations do not live these ideals but to the extent that they do their communication about how things could be done differently.

In addition to these community practices that are made a making body, Yoder points to the "tentative" vision of the church as critical. He writes that followers of Jesus live just like everyone else the church has a presence in the world. In this sense the church provides a model for what is accomplished. All of this, again, is based on the living risen Christ.

Beyond these points Yoder lays out three criteria that should be a verbal witness of the church. He quotes him at length as to provide a critical way of thinking about the church in this way:

Even when we move beyond the implicit witness which is an example of the church, by her own inner life and her witness, we come to speak of particular concerns and criticisms. This approach starts with the church's own experience in

witness should remain clear and definitely distinguish
of which we here speak from traditional "lobbying"
interchurch agencies (2 added)

Thus Yoder is clearly witness that moves beyond lived
actual speech should still be based on the lived day and
explicitly, the three criteria.

1. The witness to the state must be representative of
convictions and executives have plenty to do with
spokesmen who actually do not speak for their con-
does it seem unlikely that such representations to
effective when they do not truly express a view
doubtful whether they are honest.
2. The witness of the church consistent with her own be-
if she herself is demonstrably and ethically working
does the church have the right to speak to the state?
church has nothing to say to the state about integ-
3. The church should speak only when there is a clear
be no sense of responsibility with a view to the
statements on every occasion of any moral sig-
Only such matters as can be clearly identified by a
clear moral challenge or abuse can justify their be-
perfunctory attention. (22, 23 emphasis added)

In laying these three criteria Yoder narrows greatly the
witness efforts but grounds them in the lived reality of
These points typically raise two questions: how can we
know what Yoder means by a "local" level of witness?
national, international? It would seem clear in the way that Yoder
overall sense of witness here that it is best understood
congregation or church of service in a narrow
scale of the witness effort and raises the question of
"justice is local", in my view, does not deal with this question
that speaking "locally" based on lived reality is the way to

would present the most straightforward way to engage question concerns whether this way of being and speaking world. This question is born out of a deep sense about whether the church is really like that. Yoder assumes that God has provided what the church needs. The purpose of writing this series is to challenge the church in the world that God has gifted the church with a variety of God's Holy Spirit to lead it into truth provides a foundation and speaking in the way Yoder suggests.

Yoder does link the concept of witness to the state to the speaking to the individual statesperson and makes it a point of witness as a genuine challenge. A historical discipline point for those who tend to divide the church from the world. Yoder this distinction is meaningless and his explanation of the separation demonstrate that witness to the statesperson is, indeed, not a discipline. The use of these terms in the Gospels, "...it is clear that the world has to do with the reign of God among men in all relations, and not solely with the forgiveness of sins individuals." (23)

Further, and this is critical to his overall argument of witness goes on to say "On whatever level we find a man in the world we ask of him is that he accept the gospel. What we call the gospel by virtue of the fact that we relate it to his world." (25) Here Yoder is laying out a key understanding of the witness of a follower of Jesus addresses her situation where she is and, as Yoder says, the language that she uses below that Yoder argues that witness is often a corrective action we ask the statesperson. It is clear throughout that the correction should be based on what the statesperson has already said. As Yoder reminds us, this witness should not cease to be gospel because it challenges the status quo. "available as a witness in this form of witness we are calling upon the statesperson to take a step of faith based on where she is at the point of witness."

These points provide a core understanding, I believe, look like for the advocacy is done based on what the church and flows from that engagement with the Holy Spirit's work the witness is what draws the statesperson to repentance live up to his own commitments that are consistent with the reign of God, and, ultimately, towards discipleship.

Powers: The Identity of the State

While the state is only one "power" to whom we might (advocacy efforts), it is not the only one. To fully understand the sense in which the state (or the church itself) is a "power" in a biblical sense will require us to undertake that in a more detailed fashion. This concept of "principalities and powers" is very important for our work exactly with "whom" and "what" we are dealing in a more modern sense. To provide a review of Yoder's work is in God's economy as introduced in TCWTS are developed at least two other works. Discipleship as Political Responsibility: Politics of the Church. The essence is provided here.

Yoder argues according to the early church and the apostles are "the bearers of political authority" and "are in special divine economy, being used whether in rebellion or submission" (1.2). As implied above, Yoder argues that the church is not the state but rather that the state makes its political work to be carried out on earth through the people who explore later how this American view of the state compares to other Christian traditions but Yoder's high ecclesiology that the state not be elevated to a place in which it is "meaningful history's" view of the state is that it has an essential role in God's plan but that this task is distinct from the church's.

Obviously this will influence the way in which the church while it might seem that this vision would be led to the church, Yoder develops the idea that witness, because people must be done with "an awareness of our of this statesman (24). The point here is that the church, to the state is merely calling the state to obey what God this implies that the church understands what this role describes elsewhere that "the state exists for the purpose." "The more a state aspires to a religious mission, and seeks to control world history... the more the Christian will respect to the state." (Medals, 2003: 45) edges in the same that The New Testament does not deal with the state in school systems, building roads, administering social services, and all the other things that we also think of state. (Yoder 2003: 19)

None of this implies that the church should not speak but it should provide a word of caution to those Christians should or should not provide certain services and actions. would seem to imply is that while Christians are free array of issues it should be careful about what, we will examine how different Christians have to do in their own "theologies of the state" However the point is to acknowledge state does have a role in keeping evil at bay while the church can challenge the state (via just as a based on) its own commitments (The Sabbath) being a view of the state's role carefully circumscribed conflated with the state's own mean that the church will speak to the state only about example. Rather it means that the church will approach understanding that the state is not the "savior" of human role to play in ensuring that God's plan of redemption state fails and has proclivities to overstep its bounds must also be willing to call the state to "repent" of its worship. The state would like us to believe that it is independent human thing but we understand (according to Yoder) that a role to play in what God is about in the world, that

specifically, that its role is not to bring about redemption for humanity.

Speakers: Church's Identity ("Polis" in Solidarity)

Yoder had a strong conviction of the central role of the church in the redemptive process. This is brought into even greater relief when we consider the attendant view of the state in his work (Body politics: five practices of the Christian community). Yoder develops further his views of the church in this work and it is here we draw an initial analysis of the church's identity. Yoder notes in the introduction:

The Christian community, like any community held together by a common faith, to important sociological reality, the church has the character of a polis (the Greek word for city or community), namely, a structured social body. (Yoder 2001: viii)

He goes on to define further the identity of this community:

Stated very formally, the pattern we shall discover in the human social order is prefigured by the shape to which Christ is called. Church and world are not two compartments of legislation or two institutions with contradictory aims. The church is called to the same end as the world is called to today what the world is called to (Yoder 2001: viii)

There is no "hubris" in this reality as some might think. It merely acknowledges that the church is called to the same end as the world is called to.

reconciliation and redemption that ~~Such a plan~~ ~~before~~ ~~can~~ ~~then~~ ~~be~~ ~~carried~~ ~~out~~ ~~in~~ ~~humility~~ ~~and~~ ~~Yoder,~~ ~~in~~ ~~exegeting~~ ~~the~~ ~~TCWTS,~~ ~~concludes~~ ~~that~~ ~~the~~ ~~"beast"~~ ~~is~~ ~~a~~ ~~practical~~ ~~liturgical~~ ~~figure~~ ~~of~~ ~~a~~ ~~church~~ ~~that~~ ~~relates~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~state~~ ~~in~~ ~~an~~ ~~"idolatrous~~ ~~and~~ ~~that~~ ~~Yoder~~ ~~insists~~ ~~on~~ ~~this~~ ~~central~~ ~~role~~ ~~for~~ ~~the~~ ~~church~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~seriousness~~ ~~with~~ ~~which~~ ~~it~~ ~~is~~ ~~involved~~ ~~in~~ ~~its~~ ~~mission~~ ~~is~~ ~~a~~ ~~reminder~~ ~~that~~ ~~its~~ ~~speaking-~~ ~~its~~ ~~was~~ ~~for~~ ~~its~~ ~~mission~~ ~~tasks~~ ~~embodying~~ ~~the~~ ~~reign~~ ~~of~~ ~~God.~~

Scripture provides some helpful imagery concerning the church which would appear to be ~~directly~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~apostle~~ ~~Paul~~ ~~in~~ ~~1~~ ~~Corinthians~~ ~~12~~ ~~or~~ ~~a~~ ~~figure~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~church~~ ~~(this~~ ~~section~~ ~~adapted~~ ~~from~~ ~~David~~ ~~David~~ ~~2009)~~ ~~the~~ ~~two~~ ~~extremely~~ ~~images~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~identity~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~follower~~ ~~of~~ ~~Jesus.~~ ~~One~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~same~~ ~~coin~~ ~~constitute~~ ~~our~~ ~~identity:~~ ~~in~~ ~~1~~ ~~Corinthians~~ ~~12~~ ~~12~~

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who created the heavens and earth, who has made himself known to you by his deeds, who is our Savior and Lord. Before he created the world, you were already his people, who were doing good works, which he created for you to do. He chose you in Christ before the world began, that you would be holy and blameless in his sight. He predestined you for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, his Son, in accordance with his purpose and grace, which he bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before the world began, that we should present ourselves to him as a people who are zealous of good works. (Ephesians 1:3-6, emphasis added)

The writer to the Hebrews uses the same language and imagery as the apostle Paul in Chapter 11 explicitly in terms of their "ambassadors" in Hebrews 3:1-6. In 1 Corinthians 5:1-11 Paul uses the word "ambassadors" to describe the church as "ambassadors of Christ." The verb he uses: "represent" (ambassador) means to be "elder" or "first in rank." In the New Testament, an ambassador was someone who represented the emperor. This ambassadorship moves far beyond merely seeking reconciliation between human and God. This is made clear in how Paul describes the church's mission in Christ in Colossians 1:13

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,

kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have passed from death to life because of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, by whom all things were created, both things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers, all these things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also the head of the church, which is His body, of which He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He might bring it to Himself first place in everything. For it was the Father's will that in Him the fullness should dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by the blood of His cross; through Him we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins.

This identity places the follower of Christ in a critical position as an ambassador of a sovereign carrying out the sovereign's wishes in the nations of this world in which he lives. This passage indicates that God's reconciliation project is the unwinding of the restoration of the creation of peace with God.

French sociologist Jacques Ellul (whose work we will discuss later) provides a useful summary of this dual identity and, in his view, the Christian's solidarity with the world and his identity might be both a rationale for engaging in advocacy and how we should engage.

The first condition of the Christian is a well known one: she must be sufficiently understood in its totality within the world. She is in the world, she has a social life. She is a citizen of the world, she has a place in a family, she has a job and must work to earn her living. She lives according to the same rules as other men and women. She is of the same natural state and lives in the same conditions as others. She does in the world she must do seriously, because she is responsible to others and cannot neglect the responsibilities of a citizen. She is like all the others. But, on the other hand, she cannot be totally identified with the world. This world is only ever a provisional tent (2 Corinthians 5:1) in which she is an alien and a traveler (Hebrews 11:13). This whole situation, even if it is extremely unpleasant, belongs to a transient city. Her family tree (her identity) is elsewhere and she must live in a way that reflects that identity.

from outside. She has another lord... She is an ambassador
earth, which is to say that she must represent that the
establishes a relationship between the two, BUT she
on the interests of this world: she defends the interests
ambassador who represents and defends the interests
46, author translation)

Thus even as the ecumenical members' solidarity with other
provides a strong rationale for walking with and speaking
understand their plight because it is our own. And yet
use our understanding of the human plight to speak another
way. We represent the desires of our sovereign. We of
our residence but we dare not defend (or uncritically
policies) instead we speak to the powers of the countries
perspective of our sovereign. Space does not permit a
implications of our alienness but that piece of our identity
issue of solidarity with the suffering of the many and less
stateless people of our world.

Change: Ideal Society or Narrow "Correctives"

Any advocacy work, as we have seen, is political, and
attitude that reduces injustice and allows the question of
what is the nature of the change we are requesting within
statespersons in this area that Yoder has some very useful
church especially the "empowered" church of the global
privileged existence that assumes what will be explored
later section the limits of advocacy and the extent to
has gone far in trusting its ability to influence change
an analysis of James Davison Hunter's world: the irony
and possibility of Christianity in the late modern world
out a generation concerning the change we seek by quoting

Since we cannot say that God has any "proper" pattern of behavior, unbelief should be the Christian witness to the state will be guided by an imagined pattern. An ideal society in a fallen world is by the Christian witness to the state of how to describe, and the to seek to create the ideal state can best fulfill its responsibilities in a fallen world.

The Christian witness will therefore express itself in criticisms, addressed to given injustices in a particular and specific suggestions for improvements to remedy abuses. This does not mean that if the criticisms were heeded and suggestions put into practice, the Christian would have a more demanding set of criticisms to throw at the government to which a society could which the Christian could have nothing more to ask; such an ideal level is the kingdom of God. (32 added)

Throughout his book Yoder uses the idea of the church as a way and its work is actually an ongoing social institution as "critical witness" (136) is consistent with the idea that does not seek to "cover the field" in its witness but rather which it has practiced.

And what of "results" of "impracticable" or "impossible" these points the final part of this series in examining the role of our advocacy. For Yoder, the results of our witness are

(W)e cannot calculate how obedience and success are in the long run the right way is the most effective measured by its conformity to the command and to by its success in specific results. (44)

While such a view may seem unacceptable to those with a "results oriented" world, there is much wisdom in this greater detail in the final part of this series.

Summing Up

John Howard Yoder has laid out some important principle guideposts for the way followers of Jesus think. The source of our speaking is grounded in an understanding of the world (an eschatological) and our identity in Christ's community. The church is a polis, a political community. However, the church is in solidarity with the world because it is a member of the world. Second, to the extent that the church faithfully lives its vision in its communal life it will identify ways in which it speaks up to its (the state's) authority. The church speaks in a correct way to the state not in hopes of installing an ideal society but because the state will change. Speaking it addresses the state as it understands and calling it to make relationships and a moral call, to the extent that it is consistent with God's plan. The church acts as a call to take a step of faith for the state because it recognizes that God is at work to accomplish God's plan and that the state's role is not determinant or "essential" (in the flow of history).

Advocacy to the state requires the church to live faithfully and to speak out of a lived experience of love for the state and a desire to see her live in justice. This advocacy is a modeling of the behavior of the disciples to in Luke 22:

And there arose also a dispute among them as to who should be regarded to be greater. He said to them, "The kings of the earth lord it over them; but among you it shall not be so. But whoever would be first among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant."

Yoder provides much useful counsel in his point later section that discusses a "modern" state but to anyone feel that these points do not help illustrate how to conduct advocacy and prayer, my experience has shown me that it is relatively rare advocacy to step back and consider things like a) the of justice the ultimate ends to which the advocacy and practice as followers of Jesus and its relation to role of the state in God's plan; d) how advocacy effort "good news of the Kingdom" that this section addresses issues for the Christian advocate in disagreement with Yoder's conviction that lies in the advocated be to at least attempt to lay out informed judgment of these issues.

With this background in place I would like to go back to explore some of the main points that I would like to take excursions into the themes of

- o "principalities and powers" and other institutions) to act as "fallen powers"
- o the church and the state in various traditions and discussion of "witness"
- o the need to go beyond witness to the state and the corporation as a power
- o the reality of structural sin in light of the concept "power of hope"
- o what it means to use the language of leadership as witness (a return to Yoder and the concept of "non-violence")

before returning to a succinct description of advocacy specifically

- o. what the church is in witness: "symbolic acts and testimony as a model of non-violent advocacy"
- o. assessing advocacy work that might think about change