Theology of Advocacy

Evangelical Advocacy: A Response to Global Poverty

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A Theology of Advocacy

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Sometimes when I think about heaven, I wonder what it will be like: will we live in houses and hold jobs; will time be recognizable or will one moment float into the next without the rising and setting of the sun to differentiate; will we vividly remember the past—wrought with mistakes and heartache—or will the pain of the former some how find congruency in the face of righteousness and in the presence of God; will we have closer relationships with some people than other or will we have an endless capacity to be intimately known by everyone; how will we come to know new things—will we just wonder and be enlightened or will there be a process of acquiring information and maturing? In light of all of these queries, I remain confident about one thing: for all eternity, the facets and glories of God will never be exhausted. God’s character has depth I cannot fathom. God’s heart has no limit. God’s love and unity, God’s power and perfection have no boundaries and can be searched out and explored for the rest of time. However, as faithful seekers of God, Christians spend their minimal time on earth pressing into the Scriptures, waking early a the sun rises listening, and meeting together in common spaces for revelation and intimate encounter with God. Sometimes the characteristics of the Divine appear contradictory… or perhaps the interpretation of God as revealed in the human history of God’s people has presented God in seemingly irreconcilable ways. Therefore, the task of the contemporary church emerges in a haze often ripe with disagreement, confusion, and tension. We already recognize that we have embraced a life of delicate balance between the already and not yet Kingdom, between serving a God who has dominion over all powers including death and yet battling the powers that still wreak havoc on earth, between contemplation and action, between loving and rebuking, between integrating and separating. Thus, as a development worker and a theologian, the relevance and importance of articulating a theology of advocacy emerges as necessary to further exploring the nature of God, to articulating my vocation, to understanding the Church, and to engaging the world God loves and intends to redeem by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us. Therefore, this paper will outline my present understanding of my theology of advocacy.

**God’s Character: Foundation for Advocacy**

Surveying the biblical text, certain characteristics of God emerge as central to the nature of the Divine. Some traits that immediately come to mind include holiness, righteousness, eternity, creativity, power, faithfulness, and loving-kindness. However, for the purpose of developing a theology of advocacy, a few additional characteristics emerge as critical considerations.

First, God is just. Justice therefore, finds its definition for the Christian in the very being of the Divine, as most fully known in the Person of Jesus Christ. As we look to God for life and breath, we find also a perfect balance of mercy and wrath, justice and forgiveness. Jesus demonstrates for his follower’s a social norm that allows us to discern right from wrong and to locate our action within the given socio-historical reality in which we find ourselves. Jesus’ very political nature, as defined by John Howard Yoder in *The Politics of Jesus*, \(^1\) infuses the Christian life with mandates to political engagement, social relevancy, communal participation, and civic responsibility as guided and directed by a life wholly, radically dependent on the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the fellowship of the saints in local congregations. Further, while the Old and New Testament alike are sprinkled with the sage Wisdom of God, Jesus, the Incarnate God, lives more than a model existence but defines a new way to be human. He creates a standard by which humanity reconnects with its intended redeemed nature while still immersed in a broken,

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persecuting, fallen world. Throughout both Testaments God affirms that perfect ability to discern and judge makes God alone adequate for the task of perfect jurisprudence. Jesus’ teaching also stresses that justice in God’s economy belongs to God alone, and therefore, while Christians do not stake claim to a monopoly on sound judgment or wisdom, they seek to live justice through social ethics informed by Jesus’ radical Kingdom teaching, prayerful discernment and critique the executors of authority. These implications of the call of justice on the life of the Christian will be further explicated in a later section of the paper.

Secondly, more than any other characteristic, God throughout redemptive history is communicating. God speaks all throughout the entire biblical narrative. God reveals, instructs, dons affection, teaches, reconciles through relationship, conversation, and interaction. In addition, God as Word made flesh, God who spoke creation into existence, God who holds all things together through his very breath demonstrates the importance of speech. For the purposes of advocacy this gives high priority to the role of speaking. In addition, Jesus as Incarnate God brought the redemption of God and the message of God’s love to the earth by translating the good news into living form through his life, speech, death, and resurrection. Thus, the act of translating remains vital for the Christian advocate to render the wisdom of God and the social imperatives of the Christian ethic into language that the world, and especially those with power, can understand. Helping to decipher truth is part of the communication of God and the role of the Christian ambassador.

Thirdly, another biblical image of God consistently arises throughout redemptive history: God as King. The Kingdom of God is a central message of the gospel writers and the Kingdom of God is a prominent theme of the first Testament. God’s sovereign rule holds the universe in place and has dominion over all the powers in the world as demonstrated through Christ’s death and resurrection, which proved his Kingship even over the grave, sin, and systems of oppression and injustice. The Reign of God then extends over all areas of life, seen and unseen, including people’s hearts, relationships, systems, and structures. Jesus’ teachings on the Kingdom are extensive throughout the gospels. Jesus’ miraculous acts not only substantiate his messianic identity but also demonstrate that the Kingdom of God has come to earth. Examining the Kingdom of heaven and the Kingship of God unveil the wider implications of Jesus’ ministry: He has come to restore all of creation to its God-designed purpose; He has come to conquer sin through his own blood sacrifice and through the restoration of society through inaugurating the coming of the Kingdom. The Kingship of Christ and the teachings of Jesus also substantiate the existence and role of oppositional forces seeking havoc on human relationships, in institutions, and through violent and inequitable structures. While God’s rule has been established through the Incarnation and ultimately won through the death and resurrection of the Messiah, Satan, sin, and other powers continue to exercise dominion, lead rebellion, work devastation, and oppose God’s redemptive work. Thus, until Christ returns and the Kingdom of God fully inhabits all of creation, the Church lives the reality of the “already, but not yet” Kingdom.

**God’s Community: The Identity of the Church**

What does it mean to serve a God who is Justice, Word, and King? How does the identity of the God we serve inform the way we live? What does it mean to be Christian? These remain the central questions for theologian John Howard Yoder, the Mennonite theologian known worldwide for his engagement in social ethics, his commitment to the centrality of Scripture, his historical genius in interpreting the Mennonite faith from the 16th century for a meaningful contemporary approach, and his commitment to pacifism. An avid league of followers and
colleagues interested in the political identity of the Church have continued to journey with Yoder to ask, how do we live life first and foremost as Christians, and what does the community of Christ-followers look like as the manifestation of the witness of Christ’s reign in this world?

John Howard Yoder excels at keeping first things first and reminding his readers that being Christian, obedience to Scripture, and the Reign of Christ must be fixed centers of every believer’s framework. When these cornerstones to the Christian identity become confused with a political alignment, cause, citizenship to a nation-state, or any other agenda, Yoder argues that Christians have become something other than Christian. Author Mark Thiessen Nation in his essay “Yoder’s Pacifism of the Messianic Community” presents Yoder’s conviction that his central passion is not, in fact pacifism, but in the centrality of Jesus in ethics and theology. As one reads the New Testament, from Matthew to Revelation, and retrospectively, the Old Testament, the careful reader can see that the call of God sounds a serious call to discipleship, committing to Christian community, and living community as a witness to the world. Jesus must remain normative for the way Christians shape their lives. This emerges as Yoder’s central and driving passion.

Therefore, ethics must integrate into theology. If we say Jesus is Lord, there comes with such a claim moral, ethical implications. For Yoder, the venue of this ethic is the Church. For as Hauerwas, a contemporary scholar devoted to Yoder’s project, writes about the people of God: 

It is very public, very political, very social in that it depicts the public form by which the colony shall witness to the world that God really is busy redeeming humanity, reconciling the world to himself in Christ. All Christian ethical issues are therefore social, political, communal issues.

Saying that we are embodied, means that our bodies, our physical and present lives are good and important. Saying that we are fallen says that now our world is affected by sin. Being made new in Christ means we are witnesses to what God has and is doing in Christ. All of these have moral implications. Theology and ethics are completely integrated.

Through Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus* many Christians came face to face with the implications of the gospel message which prioritize peace, social justice, and a social conscience. Yoder’s theological project makes it mandatory that Christianity is more than just “saving souls.” Yoder is fundamentally saying that a primitive salvific understanding of simply giving people tickets into heaven is not enough. According to Yoder, a Messianic community with a transformed way of living which integrates faith with the social, political and communal is what it means to be Christian. We worship a particular God, One who has centrally revealed Self through Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus’ followers must be re-made into His character. Believers care about the poor, not because they are Democrats, but because they are Christians who necessarily care about the poor and care about how they use their money because these are concrete ways to love God and follow the way of the Messiah. Hauerwas writes in his book, *Resident Aliens*, “Right living is more the challenge than right thinking. The challenge is not the intellectual one but the political one—the creation of a new people who have aligned themselves with the seismic shift that has occurred in the world since Christ.”

Yoder and Hauerwas both teach a distinction between Church and world. Both are visible

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2 Mark Thiessen Nation, “Yoder’s Pacifism of the Messianic Community: A Brief Exposition of His Theology as It Relates to His Pacifism,” 18.
entities, but the identity of the Church cannot be confused with any single nation-state. In what Rodney Clapp calls Constantinian Christianity, one’s religious convictions become swallowed in one’s citizenship or ethnicity. Such distorted blending of Church and world begs the question, who then is meaningfully Christian? Whether or not you are distinctly separate depends on your neighbors. Christians are to be a certain species, specific and distinct on many issues. But the Church does not seek to be distinct; she seeks to be Christian.

Being a disciple of Christ and, therefore, distinct from the world does not give license to believers to neglect their duties to social engagement, but rather assumes that by definition of being the Church believers show the world the Reign of Christ in their midst. The Church by definition is \textit{polis}; therefore, the People of God are a social and political entity bearing social witness to the world. Yoder writes, “The Church is herself a society. Her very existence, the fraternal relations of her members, their ways of dealing with their differences and their needs are, or rather should be, a demonstration of what love mean in social relations.” Yoder does not mean, as critics have claimed, that by emphasizing the otherness or set-apartness of the Church that the Body assume a laissez-faire approach to the world outside the Church. On the contrary, he suggests that by embodying discipleship, the Church will suggest changes to society through its lifestyle, demonstrate the morals of Christ by both teaching them to their children and living them in witness of their communities, and also create social projects out of love and obedience which will serve the society around them and create a standard which the world will want to emulate. He does not however, idealistically assume that the Christian Church can somehow impose upon the larger society the moral imperatives of Christ to create a perfect world because Christian social ethics “cannot be transposed directly onto non-Christian society, for in the church it functions only on the basis of repentance and faith; yet by analogy certain of its aspects may be instructive as stimuli to the conscience of society.” Therefore, the Christian, living primarily with allegiance to Christ, active in the liturgy of her local congregation, and engaged in the political, social, and economic concerns of her neighbors, carries with her the leaven power of the gospel, which works its rising effect throughout the entire batch.

Further the Church is more than a model or an alternative society; the Church is a foretaste of eternity, of the fullness of God’s Reign, a beacon of hope beckoning the world to intimacy with God and heralding the state to a higher standard. Yoder writes that,

Jesus made it clear that the nationalized hope of Israel has been a misunderstanding, and that God’s true purpose was the creation of a new society, unidentifiable with any of the local, national, or ethnic solidarities of any time. This new body, the church, as aftertaste of God’s loving triumph on the cross and foretaste of His ultimate loving triumph in His kingdom has a task within history.

This differs dramatically from Yoder’s understanding of the state, which “has the ultimate purpose of preserving the fabric of human community as the context within which the church’s work can be carried on.” Therefore, the state exists for the church, not the other way around. The Church, despite the state’s monopoly on force, has the true monopoly on interpreting history. Thus, the Christian’s identity carries specific responsibilities and task which flow from relationship with God and the privilege of partnering with God in ushering in the fullness of the coming Kingdom.

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God’s Commission: A Call to Action

God has commissioned his Church as ambassadors to carry the good news of the Kingdom to the farthest corners of the globe. According to Tearfund, advocacy is part of the mission to bring the good news to the poor, motivated by the compassion of Christ, because it means, “seeking with and on behalf of the poor to address the underlying causes of poverty, bring justice and support good development through influencing the policies and practices of the powerful.”10 With this definition in mind, advocacy speaks to the powerful drawing attention to the needs, concern, and rights of the marginalized. If loving God and loving neighbor have through Jesus’ teaching become inseparable parts of one commitment of the Christian, then caring for the welfare of one’s neighbor remains essential to affection for God. Yoder writes that the Christian’s advocacy to the state is an essential part of the calling of discipleship: “This approach makes clear that the meaningfulness of the witness to the state is not dependent on the numeric strength of the Christian population nor on the state’s Christian profession or its willingness to listen… [rather it rests in] the very personal and very concrete concern which the Christian has for the welfare of his neighbor. The state may either threaten or further the welfare of its subjects.”11 Understanding advocacy as part of the moral imperative of Christ’s commissioning to the disciples demands that followers of God recognize the role of championing justice as part of the larger framework of “preaching the good news.” Thus, advocacy becomes integral to the very identity of the Church.

In addition, Yoder names instructing the “erring brother” as yet another reason for the Christian’s involvement in advocacy. Because a statesperson enforcing certain laws and policies and engaging in certain acts, whether just or unjust, cannot be cared for wholly by the Church without addressing his behavior in his vocation, the Christian community has a duty placed on them by God to gently but passionately seek to set right anyone who is falling away from God’s will.12 Yoder calls this a pastoral calling and emphasizes that the Christian’s concern for the correction of the statesperson affirms her dignity and personhood by dealing with her as an object of God’s affection and therefore, of the disciple’s care.13

As mentioned earlier, Yoder as a Mennonite theologian and scholar represents the Anabaptist tradition in his thinking and reasoning and thus, strongly argues for the primacy of one’s allegiance to Christ. In his treatise on the Christian Witness to the State, Yoder examines the threat in the history of Israel, whether through mixed marriage, weak faith, foreign conquest, or political alliances, of the people’s faithfulness to God by surrendering pieces of their hearts and affections to other nations or objects that claim their worship. While the term “idolatry” no longer has a prominent place in religious dialogue, it continues to be an issue in the life of the God’s people. The effects of competing allegiances remain stronger than ever; from corporate loyalty to avid nationalism, powers, structures, and systems continue to war for the devotion and homage of human hearts. Thus, another important part of Yoder’s theological project reminds the Church of her devotional tie to God alone and therefore, warns her of competing allegiances, even those sanctioned by God such as government and family.14

Based on Tearfund’s definition of advocacy above, a few other responsibilities of the Church emerge in relationship to advocacy as part of the gospel mandate. First, the Church must

11 Yoder, Christian Witness to the State, 14.
13 Yoder, Christian Witness to the State, 24.
pray for God’s Reign to be established and intercede for Divine intervention. In addition, the Church models for the world a community, depending on God’s forgiveness and love as they seek to rehearse alternative liturgies to speak of their desires, their beliefs, their priorities. Further, the Church is called by God to social action: to care for the needs of the poor, to feed the hungry, to visit the prisoner, to accept the foreigner, to protect the orphan and the widow, to help one another that there should be no needs among them. These social activities are not uniquely separate from the Church’s responsibilities to teach, worship, and gather, but spill over from her knowledge of God’s character, her ongoing transformation by the Holy Spirit, and her constant encounters with God as He showers love, mercy, forgiveness, and provision. Thus, the Church marries together her spiritual and social life. Moreover, the Church’s mission includes a responsibility to seek social justice through engaging those in power to work for peace and reconciliation. This involves a prophetic role to name injustice and to point toward righteousness, as well as to work to influence policies, laws, and culture. Lastly, the Church’s existence as a timeless, boundless union of all the saints across history, both now and to come, reminds them of the unseen nature of reality. Therefore, the Church must also confront the unseen powers, faithfully addressing them through prayer, fasting, advocacy, and other disciplines of both spirit and deed. As Kingdom ambassadors, Christians must first recognize the powers, institutions, and structures that they must face.

The State

God has ordained the institution of the state to hold and exercise power in the world. However, through the effect of sin on humans and on earthly structures, governments have a limited, fallen role in the world. Tearfund has examined Romans 13 as a key chapter in guiding the Christian Church in her relationship with the government.15 Paul’s instructions about how followers of Christ can live as good citizens includes a call to live in peace with others, bless enemies, not repay evil for evil, reject vengeance by leaving eternal retribution to God and entrusting the administration of earthly justice to the state. Through this passage the government clearly has a role in restraining evil and preserving peace. In addition, the state has a role to judge wrongs and punish them. Further, the government has a proactive role in promoting human welfare through the establishment and guarding of conditions favorable for the common good.

While Romans 13 and other teachings throughout the New Testament articulate God’s ordination of government and creation’s need for stewardship, including the necessity for government to keep order and promote peace, the effects of sin and evil on the system and the limits of the state remain powerful impetuses for the Church’s appropriate relationships with the government as prophet, ambassador, and advocate. The state is limited in its practical ability to change hearts. Thus, while the government can punish to control outward conduct, it can only go so far in mitigating further evil and transforming the inner person. The state’s limitations are further restricted by God’s sovereign rule. God has delegated some authority to the government on earth to protect peace. In a fallen world swarming with sinful beings, oppressive systems, and depraved institutions, the functions of the state are necessary to maintain social order. However, as fallen human beings are entrusted with the role of administering justice and simultaneously tempted by the allure of power and constrained by unredeemed systems of governance, statespeople employ sinful senses as they judge, govern, and regulate. Thus, the Church has an obligation to hold the state accountable to uphold justice and righteousness. Infused with a model of power counter to the upside-down Kingdom ethics of Jesus, the state is prone to corruption,

Kaminski 8

infected with both individual and institutional sin, and left unchecked can and will exploit others for its own ends and interest, seeking to serve itself rather than those it was created to serve. Thus, the power of the state remains a battleground between the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of heaven, able to be used for good or for ill, and included in God’s ultimate purposes for redemptive history. Political structures often fall subject to lust for power and glory by those high in the ranks, and therefore, remains a locus of potential for personal gain and abuse.

There are various options open for the Christian to interpret how he/she should be in relationship with the state in regards to degree of compliance and exercise of nonviolent resistance. However, there are others clearly not open to the Church. Aligning ourselves so closely to the state so that we lose the ability to be distinctive and to hold the state to account falls outside of the Christian’s scope. Another involves opting altogether out of the political system, wherein the church would not be able to fulfill its calling to engage powers, to hold authorities accountable for their actions, to herald a higher social norm, and to advocate for the concerns of her neighbor. The Church must instead seek local ways to influence the state for positive social change, as well as pray earnestly for those in authority that they may rule as God intends and against unjust structures and systemic violence and oppression.

In modern history, six basic models of church-state relations prominently emerge. Complete unity represents states where the church and the government function together, as historically in the Ethiopian context or in the Constantinian empire. Secondly, in states with an established religion, the Church has adopted an official religious stance and grants its followers special privileges or voice, as in England with the Anglican Church and with the Catholic Church in many Latin American contexts. In other countries, the state acknowledges religion through significant symbolism in its affairs, recognizes God in is foundational constitution, or with other commitments, as in Germany, the Bahamas, or Zambia’s declaration of itself as a Christian nation. Neutral cooperation represents another model popular in African nations, where the state recognizes the role of faith and therefore, seeks to work in cooperation with religious institutions in places where their cultural significance overlaps. Some nations enforce complete separation between Church and state by the power of the government, as in USSR or France in the eighteenth century. Lastly, in certain contexts the Church is named an illegitimate institution and falls under staunch persecution, as is the case with some Muslim states, such as Iran and the Maldives.

Yoder’s models in Christian Witness to the State particularly addresses the Church’s role in the North American context and thus, requires further consideration for other historical, political, social, and cultural settings, such as situations where the Church is outlawed or where there is a failed or illegitimate state. As a reformed theologian, I appreciate Yoder’s recognition that the Zwingli tradition rejected the classical dualistic model of separating the sacred from the secular. Reformed theology infuses all of life with the presence of God and the possibility of redemptive grace. In addition, moral norms apply to all of humanity in the Calvinist tradition, represented by Yoder with one Norm line in his diagram. This Norm is drawn from all of Scripture and rests above the position of “justice” (as defined by eye-for-an-eye retribution), because the true standard of God involves moments of grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love. However, in Yoder’s interpretation of Calvinist theology, the Norm is not “agape love,” for that standard can only be enacted by individuals, not collective peoples or states. The call of “agape

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16 These six models adapted from: Graham Gordon and Bryan Evans, “The mission of the Church and the role of advocacy: A discussion paper,” Tearfund (Middlesex, UK: Tearfund, 2002).
17 Yoder, Christian Witness to the State, 64-5.
love” is one of self-sacrifice, humility, downward mobility, love, forgiveness, unity, and peace. According to the Calvinist paradigm, the call of the state is not a call to “agape love”, but is a call greater than mere “justice”. I disagree with Yoder’s assessment that “it would...be wrong even for individuals to attempt to function in a higher or more loving way, for they would then be unfaithful to their common responsibility for the civil order.”[18] I think that Edwardian theology, Piper’s teachings, and other hallmarks of the present Reformed tradition emphasize the Church’s identity as a foretaste of the Kingdom and their commission to live an engaged life of witness inviting neighbors into God’s fullness as already but not fully known in the Church. This “new way to be human” life of regenerate living is modeled both through worship, community, transformation, and social ethics, as well as in liturgies of repentance, forgiveness, discipline, instruction, remembrance, and Eucharistic foreshadowing. Modern reformed theology no longer foresees a postmillennialist future where the Church can somehow establish the Kingdom in its fullness here on earth through obedience and conversion. This rare position has moved the margins if not to mere extinction. However, Yoder’s critique of this traditional position through his proposed formulation offers helpful instruction for how the Church can concretely witness to the state:[19]: through specific criticism, by addressing injustices in the particularity of the local church’s time and place, and with particular suggestions for improvement or to remedy abuses. Additionally, he instructs the Church to use the state’s language and their claimed norms to encourage Christian social ethics without apology for their differing presuppositions and within the state’s professed framework of justice. For instance, for states that declare compliance with human rights, the Church can call out the state in places where the government is not upholding the standard they have pledged. Yoder goes further to recognize that though this “middle axiom”, or common norm to which the Church can point may exist in some cases, the ultimate will of God in perfect agape love is always the true norm to which no human, institution, or state can ever fully attain without faith and repentance because of the effects of sin. The role of the Church involves beckoning to citizens and statespeople to cross over from a world where faith is not presupposed into the world agape love, where only repentance and faith can charter. This call could be to spring into small leaps of faith where the standard is only minutely raised or to leap fully into discipleship. This qualification helps expand Christian evangelism and discipleship beyond saving souls into constant acts of conversion, steps of deeper faith, and a continuum of change like a journey rather than a unattainable, fixed destination. Yoder charges the Christian to clothe this social critique in pagan or secular terminology that will allow the statesperson to understand it within his own metaphysical framework. Thus, Yoder goes deeper in his diagram and analysis to depict the function of the Church in social engagement as it is married to the process of salvation. This beautiful illustration ties soteriology into ethics. Yoder further notes that the Church is not just about being a source of moral stimulus, but is actually giving meaning to history through the ongoing co-creation with God of redemption through the work of the Holy Spirit in and through God’s people.

In Yoder’s theological project, he also names confrontation and conflict transformation as another activity of the Church in making peace in the world. He introduces the call of Christ on the community of believers to use humble confrontation and nonviolent peacemaking to handle conflict openly as a model for the world and as a method to keep the church at peace with one

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another. Yoder shies away from using the term *social responsibility* as the definition has developed to “signif[y] a commitment to consider the survival, the interest, or the power of one’s own nation, state, or class as taking priority over the survival, interest, or power of other persons or groups, of all of humanity, of the “enemy,” or of the church.” Such an approach does not form cohesion with the Christian social ethic where love for one’s neighbor and one’s enemy remains the mandate from Christ Himself. However, Yoder does not, in avoiding the dangerous dichotomous language of responsibility deserve the title *socially irresponsible*, though critics may prefer in their black and white categories to slap on such a label. Both J. Lawrence Burkholder and Rodney Sawatsky claim that Yoder encourages “the virtue of irresponsibility.” The contemporary Mennonite context of embodied Christianity and Yoder’s particular emphasis on the historical-social-political nature of Christ and the Christian story demands a closer look. Yoder does in fact reject the classic norms which drip with violence, self-interest, and worldly categorical imperatives, not because he does not believe there exists a responsibility for the Christian in social order, but because he must define that ethical norm by finding the role of the disciple of Christ in society. In the Yoder theological framework, the foundation of every question remains being truly obedient to the mandates of Christ and to the values and norms of the Kingdom of God.

**Other Powers**

In addition, to the power of the state, other forms of power exist which the Christian Church has a responsibility to address and confront in obedience to the calling of Christ. In this age of transnational globalization, businesses, especially in the form of multinational corporations (MNCs), continue to gain increasing power and influence. Government power in many places now shares a bed with multinational corporations who create jobs, secure investments, and dictate policy. Thus, the governments have agreed to ignore certain stipulations and international regulations in order to keep relationships. The secrecy, corruption, and monopoly of power builds a locus of power in the hands of a few, distant businesspeople, divesting the local authorities of influence, control, checks and balances, and ownership. In some places, businesses have even taken on responsibilities of the state, providing healthcare, education, and infrastructure. The American Christian in this age has a particularly strong responsibility to address the power of the corporation by drawing awareness of the significant power of MNCs, to make thoughtful decisions about their own complicit role and/or ability to influence positive change, and to critically engage with injustices in businesses through patronizing local alternatives and lobbying for legislative change.

International institutions have also accumulated a significant amount of influence. IMF, the World Bank, the WTO all claim to operate by allocating decision-making power among a democracy of member states. However, the US continues to hold vetoing power over the IMF and World Bank. Certain powerbrokers control the majority of decisions donned in democratic garb. While the WTO elicits one vote per member state, alliances of world power often meet beforehand to agree on a unified position to ensure the vote swings toward their own interests. As these systems described here begin to take form, the powers begin to intertwine with certain states holding more supremacy and sway in international institutions than most others combined and as certain businesses lobby the international bodies for favorable environments for their own

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22 Ibid., 152.
growth and sustainability. Developing nations often yield far less power despite their majority in numbers than the few rich nations who also house the owners of most of the world’s MNCs.

In addition, global, national, and local media continue to gain access and influence through the proliferation of satellite television, telecommunications, and internet. The power of broadcasting bears its marks through setting the values of recent generation, globalizing trends, and brokering deals through relationships political, economic, and otherwise. The media vies for control over society’s thoughts, behavior, and norms. Since this form of power like the others can be used for good or ill, the Christian must consider how to navigate the increasingly complex web of forces influencing modern history.

**Conclusion**

God has called the Church to be a new society and commissioned God’s people to work with God in redeeming all of creation through the building of God’s Kingdom. The Kingdom message of the ‘good news’ preached and incarnated by Jesus Christ includes vital strands of social justice, reconciliation, and peace established through witness, worship, and work. The church has many roles through which it fulfills the mission, and a number of them intimately relate to advocacy, which needs to be seen as an integral piece of ecclesiology. Praying, practicing spiritual disciplines, and rehearsing important liturgies, modeling an alternative way of living that can invite others through a sweet foretaste of heaven, seeking social justice through influencing those in power, bringing peace and reconciliation, speaking prophetically against injustice, and confronting the unseen powers include some of the critical advocacy activity integral to the picture of faithful and engaged Church. While the state also has a significant purpose in God’s plan, the Church must remain involved with the state as an ambassador of the Kingdom and an advocate for neighbor. Ultimately, the role of the Christian in relationship to the state, to creation, to self, to neighbor, and to other powers, systems, and structures are defined by obedience to God, which require intimacy and attentiveness to the Spirit. Perhaps deeper lives of spiritual engagement both individually and corporately will flow into more engaged, critical, and powerful witness in the world.

While the Church’s definition of justice, love, compassion, rights for the poor, alien, and marginalized and their simultaneous call to give up, sacrifice, and lay down for others all derive from the Incarnation of Christ, we cannot expect a world without a presuppositions of faith and repentance to abide by such standards. However, our foundational beliefs about humanity and about the dignity of humanity, the definition of justice, the duty of social contract with neighbor, and the obligations of the state as the keeper of order and law call us together with our neighbors to forge principles into laws which can be carried into different societies and enacted in different social settings through localized social contracts. Christians can serve a particularly helpful role in their society of continuing to call ruling powers and systems into balance by measuring the current law against the truest definition of justice found in God. In addition, the mandate of God on Christ’s Body to care particularly for the poor, oppressed, and marginalized insists that she not only engage these issues but prioritize them and lead the way for a watching world.

However, these idealistic principles do not come close to the reality of living in a broken and fallen community of followers of Christ. For this reason, the People of God continue to rehearse symbolic acts of repentance, dependence, and reconciliation while seeking God’s wisdom and discernment to apply the standard of God’s holiness, justice, love, compassion, and mercy to complex situations. In fairness to the state, the standard of Christ raised the bar closer to God’s ideal from the Law, saying that the Law was powerless to truly transform or save. The Messiah redefined certain aspects of the Law saying, “You have heard it said…but I say to
you…” Thus, Jesus aimed at leading His disciples closer to the heart of God in their lifestyles and actions by introducing a way above the letter of the law that is closer to the heart of Justice, Love, and Righteousness. Like Christ, Yoder does not lower the bar to a list of commands for the Church, but instead leaves the disciple with the straightforward, ambiguous but Biblical reference: take up your cross and follow Me.