

Participation, Perfection, and Political Discipleship: The Christological Bases of Mission

by

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I

I want to talk about some of the theological problems associated with the idea of “Christian mission.” That is, I am going to talk about mission at, at least, one remove and this will inevitably be unsatisfactory. I have suggested in my subtitle that I will be doing this by questioning what precisely are the *Christological* “bases” of mission. But for the most part, I will be spending a good deal of time just talking about *Jesus*, and what it means to follow him. This, too, I’m guessing, will inevitably register a certain amount of dissatisfaction. Of course, I think this is as it should be.

I am wholly in agreement in the end with the view that mission is the heart of the Christian life, that mission *is* the very matter of this thing we call “discipleship.” But what I want to say about this – and I’m not sure I will say it convincingly – is that if we are going to make serious sense of the idea that the Christian life is mission we are going to have to think more rigorously than ever mission as *action* rooted *in* and living *from* apocalyptic irruption of God’s reign in Jesus of Nazareth. All talk of “mission” is going to have to take its meaning and point from the “apocalyptic historicity” of Jesus Christ, the reality of which is the stark *concreteness* and *visibility* of that cruciform, suffering love which the Seer of Revelation refers us always back to in his talk of the resurrection of a slain lamb. To do this, we will have to resist the tendency so often present in Christological thinking to make Christ a cipher for some more general human relation to God. And we will have to disavow ourselves of the felt need to locate

and articulate “Christian mission” as secretly the heart of some larger or more universal scheme of human or religious meaning. We shall really have to get back to the whole basic thought pattern of the New Testament and the apocalyptic heart of the gospel itself: the vision of a living Lord whose glory is our participation “in Christ,” made visible as we follow the slain Lamb “wherever he goes” (14:4).

As to what this means for the problem of “Christian mission” I can only contribute the simple insight of John Howard Yoder that mission as such is a matter of “political discipleship,” which, as is so often the case with simple insights, turns the whole problem upside down very plainly.

II

We should begin by pointing up the extent to which Yoder believes the Christological bases of mission as such have been “compromised.”¹ Quite simply, Yoder indicts much of the modern and contemporary missionary “movement” for thinking it must contextualize the mission of the church in accordance with and in a manner relevant to the movement and processes of “the world” as a whole. This is of a piece with what Yoder calls the “Constantinian temptation”² to locate the mission of the church with respect to some more “universal” and “intra-worldly” derived goal or category – whether that category be “religion,” “politics,” “metaphysics,” “cosmology,” “history,” “humanity,” or, more likely, some specially devised amalgam of these.

The problem with such contextualization is that the church is placed in a position of conceiving its mission according to what it discerns as “proper” to itself as “Christian” relative to another categorized other conceived as at once “external” to itself as also “internal” to some shared transcendental term or reality. As a result, a fundamentally “strategic model” of Christian

mission is engendered. As Michel de Certeau says, “a strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* (*proper*) and thus serves as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it.”³ The negative upshot of such a strategic model of mission, for Yoder, is that it operates and thus leaves intact the normative criteria of “effectiveness,” “relevance,” and “efficacy” according to which modern socio-political movements are universally and objectively evaluated. And thus Christian mission and action too-easily function at the level of socio-political *ideology*: missional strategy favors that single focal point in the midst of a given course of history or a given set of human relations wherein we might contextualize and according to which we might relate our missionary activity.⁴

The point that Yoder wishes to stress here is that such “strategic” thinking only makes sense if a certain kind of immanent causative nexus is taken to be axiomatic. It assumes a systemic and metaphysic perspicuity about the way things work. On the one hand, the socio-political problem with this is obvious: it is inherently totalitarian. For to claim from any perspective the kind of historical and objective distance needed to proclaim that the world “works” in certain definable ways is already “to have chosen a particular provincial vantage point, whereby every power structure forms its own constituency and meaning system.”⁵ On the other hand, there is a more menacingly *theological* problem at work here: we have assumed this whole complex system as normative for how we live and work; we have assumed as normative, that is, what St. John means when he talks in his gospel about “the World,” or what St. Paul calls the “powers and principalities” and the structures they represent. The “church” or “mission” themselves come to mean a way of being together that people have worked out. “Church” itself refers to yet another kind of society we have achieved by our efforts. In fact, to be “Christian” itself arises as nothing less than a process of discerning what we make of ourselves in terms of

systemic connections and communications we have with this “world.” “Christianity” did not have to be; only as these structures are assumed as normative does “being a Christian” (as against being, say, a socialist, or a Hindu, or a pacifist) take on some kind of *necessary* function.

Now, if I am correct about this and we as “Christians” today remain beholden to a vision of the “world” that we have yet been able adequately to question and subvert, then what is needed is not so much another theology of “Christian mission.” It will not do simply to eschew the language of missionary “strategy” if we persist in thinking the *missio ecclesiae* as in symbiotic relation to some more generally ascertainable *missio humanitatis*. Nor will it do to merely to reinvigorate those theological and ecclesiological resources which help us persist in maintaining “Christianity,” or “the church,” or whatever we want to call it, in its own constituent system of meaning vis-à-vis “the world.” Retrenchment is not mission (though it may very well “fund” its perversion). Rather, we will need to question more seriously our assumptions about the very nature of “this world” – “this present age” – as a political concept, if you like, and of how this world is (politically) overcome by a revolution from *within* it: a death and resurrection. In other words, we will need to talk about Jesus Christ.

III

Let me be clear: In asking after the “Christological bases of mission,” I am not talking here of some more “speculative concern about the ontology of the incarnation,” but about the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the confession of the wisdom and power of God.⁶ The core rationale for Christology lies in the praise of the lordship of Christ, who happens to rule *not* as a regulate “ideal,” but as a concrete, historical human being, and who happens to be worshipped as God *not* as a culturally and intellectually celebrated “ontological mystery,” or as a cipher for

what it means to be “human,” but as one who is only ever *seen* as God precisely in the kenotic historicity of the life and death and rising of Jesus of Nazareth. The context within which Jesus must be recognized as God and Lord is thus fundamentally *doxological*.

To do Christology in this way, however, is to refuse to untie our mode of thinking about Jesus from the *Jewishness* of those first-century course of events that we celebrate as Advent, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. The confession of Jesus as God is what happens when people “apply the titles of *meschiach* and *kyrios* to a rebel rabbi whom the Sanhedrin had hounded and the Romans killed.”⁷ What I want to say about this then is that praise of Jesus Christ as Lord impinges upon us not primarily at the point of ontology, metaphysics, etc., but at the point of *politics*. To say that is to say that good Christology arises with respect to how what I am doing in the here and now embodies the same kind of concrete love which sent Jesus to the cross. Such love is alone that which ever made him worthy of praise. And this means that such love is the only means with which we have to praise him in his humanity as “truly God.” But what the New Testament tells us is that in the face of such love, the world will not so much recognize its own true “being”; it will not recognize in such love the basis for some more sanguine universal *humanum*, according to which ideal we might now all get along quite well, helping one another to live in unobtrusive friendliness, persuading one another not to be violent, and so on. In the face of such love, the world will go for its gun.

So I do not want to talk about Jesus in any kind of way that will be palatable and attractive to this world, and to humanity as a whole. I want to talk instead about what it means for human beings to have their lives transformed, and turned upside-down, *in Christ*. I think the best way to do this is not to expound a “thesis” as to what constitutes “the Christological bases of

mission.” It is better to simply to state baldly and to deal straightforwardly with two of the basic New Testament assumptions of what it means to participate “in Christ.”

The first we find throughout the New Testament and also the earliest writings on martyrdom, which is simply the recognition that our own reconciliatory participation in the love of Christ, inasmuch as by this love God reaches to the depths of a sinful and forsaken humanity, is a love that roots our own lives deeply within the wound of that love, the suffering of Christ’s cross. For the New Testament writers, this is a brute fact; but at the same time it is a mystery, a sacrament to be received in grace. By loving in Christ, we are operating at a depth in us at which our humanity transcends itself, transcends our control, that depth of humanity revealed in Christ’s passion, the cross. The second is the recognition that the nature of this suffering love is such that it is *itself* a threat to the established structures of this world, whether economic, political, or otherwise. Real love is a dangerous, disturbing, and subversive force. It “turns the world upside down,” as the authorities in the Book of Acts proclaim (Acts 17:6). If you receive this love in such a way as to be liberated in turn to offer it to the world then, as John has Jesus say, “The world will hate you” (John 15:18). To parlay this into language that Wesleyans should find themselves resonating with (and to use a terminology I will want to exploit in later work, if not necessarily in this paper): To love *perfectly* is to participate in that same kind of cruciform suffering which led Christians to affirm that Christ was *without sin*: to refuse to accept the presumed structural modalities of this world and the barriers it sets up between and against people, and so to be free and spontaneously at the disposal of others, to such an extent that this is recognized not only as “right,” but as the key to what redeemed human life is about. And this means that perfect love only takes forms that are recognized as immediately dangerous by the systemic structures of “the world.” If this kind of love is that by which one is rooted in what is

most genuinely human about us, viz., a suffering which marks our participation in the divine *kenosis* of Jesus Christ, it is equally a love that is going to get one first exploited and then destroyed. For the fact of the matter is that this is no world for love. This, at least, is what those all-too-ordinary first century Jewish disciples of Jesus take for granted, so it seems to me.

There is, of course, much more to be said about the relationship of love to suffering in the New Testament, especially concerning the triune God as constitutive of this relationship in his suffering for us on the cross. But I do not want too quickly systematically to theorize or to interpret this relationship. There is in the New Testament (and in its earliest readers) a certain stark and literal simplicity concerning the life of suffering to which the human being is called “in Christ,” as well as a startling frankness about the threat of this life to the political and religious status quo, and the death to which this life will inevitably lead, which our endless theories and interpretations too often run the risk of explaining away. So what I should like to do is to linger with this simplicity and try to look at it with something of the same simplicity and straightforwardness (even if all of what I say flows partly out of a whole lot of time spent looking askance at the complexities of textbooks and traditions – as well as doing my share of gluttonous “listening-in-on” the theological “gossip” of the day).

IV

There are few thinkers if any who have reflected upon the “politics of suffering love” as depicted in the New Testament with such simplicity of insight as John Howard Yoder. Undoubtedly, this simplicity is linked to the seriousness with which Yoder takes what he calls the “apocalyptic stance” of the New Testament.⁸ For Yoder, to say that the New Testament is shot through with an apocalyptic perspective is to say that the earliest Christians took it for granted that in the life,

death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ God's Kingdom had invaded the fallen world, thereby inaugurating the liberation of this world from enslavement to the dialectical sway of the cosmic powers and principalities of the "old aeon" (e.g., sin and death, but also other structural, political, economic powers, etc.), and freeing this world and humanity for the graced celebration of and participation in the coming reign of God. For the New Testament writers in all their diversity – from Mark and John, to Paul and the authors of the Petrine and Johannine epistles, to the Seer of Revelation – the Christian hope all comes down to this: that God has acted and is still acting decisively in the life, death, resurrection, and coming again of Jesus in such a way as to re-inscribe and to re-create the world *in Christ*. And this is the decisive point in Yoder's reading of the New Testament: the new-creative action of God by which we are made to participate in the eschatological kingdom on the one hand, and the very life-history of Jesus of Nazareth on the other, are inseparable; they are in fact both one and singular. Hence Yoder's constant riffing of 2 Cor. 5:17: "In Christ, creation is new" – the real world is that eschatological Kingdom whose coming is both present and whose presence is to come in Christ.

Now, let me state clearly that Yoder realizes (as do I), that to call attention to "apocalyptic" in this way brings up a whole host of issues with regard both to the ancient Jewish prophetic "apocalyptic imagination" (magisterially exegeted by John J. Collins), as well as to the contemporary prevalence of various apocalyptic perspectives in Western culture.⁹ Yoder has little interest in arbitrating these issues, though clearly he regards New Testament apocalyptic as a kind of transformative fulfillment of the former and a subversion of the latter. It is not apocalyptic or apocalypticism as such which interests Yoder. What interests Yoder is rather the very specific fact that something like this cosmic, apocalyptic perspective upon the person of Jesus Christ everywhere undergirds and accompanies the assumption at work throughout the

earliest followers of Jesus that real-life participation in the cruciform suffering love of Christ marks our way into the eschatological Kingdom of God.

So the point of retrieving the idiom of apostolic apocalyptic for Yoder is not to ask *a priori* how to play off a certain Christian metaphysic or cosmology against the whole of “reality” which the world takes for granted.¹⁰ Christian apocalyptic functions at a much more subversive level than that: it is a direct overturning of *this* world and of our assumptions about how we are to live in it. Apocalyptic, in other words, is simply a way of *naming* and *describing* (though, I think it is better to say *praising*) the interruptive and redemptive nature of God’s grace in a fallen world, as operative in the liberated life of those who find their histories inscribed within the history – the cross and resurrection – of Jesus Christ. Apocalyptic is about grace; and about the particular way in which God’s grace works when conceived as inseparable from the life-history of Jesus of Nazareth.

So what apocalyptic does, first of all, is to indicate a kind of living and active grace which cannot be understood by appealing to the system-immanent accounts of instrumentality and technique according to which we have learned to relate to our world.¹¹ The *apocalypsis Iesou Christou* ruptures our assumptions concerning causation and efficacy, by bringing the dialectics of this world and of history to a grinding halt.¹² As such, apocalyptic is a manifestly non-instrumental picture of the way the world works. Apocalyptic is a judgment laid across our visions and theories of how the world works, as also across our most sanguine attempts to create for ourselves a world that is always at least just a little bit better and a little more habitable than the one we’ve already got. “In Christ,” this world is clearly no longer “habitable,” as such.

But this is because apocalyptic names a way of life in which God in Christ himself gives up the assumption of being in control (and this is an important point: it is a *life*, and not simply

another turn of the cosmic dialectical screw itself, which brings this about!). And so, apocalyptic names a grace which *dispossesses* us of our “world,” as of the many “worlds” we have made unto ourselves.¹³ Jesus is perfectly human as freed, as only one who is fully divine can be, from the compulsiveness to manage the world and of finding ways to convince others of the rightness of one’s convictions concerning the course of direction the world and history and humanity as a whole should take.¹⁴ Jesus *is* God’s grace as the embodiment of vulnerability, of the refusal to seize control of one’s life; and as such his is a life of the perfect abandon with which God loves, without reserve. But here is the point I want to make: If we can conceive of God’s grace working in *this* way, then we might find that such grace performs a kind of kenotic uncoupling whereby “life” and “the world” themselves are stripped of their apparent “givenness” and is given by God only as ever-new and strange possibilities of the divine life irrupt our taken-for-granted world.

Such ever-newness is what we might rightly refer to as God’s *freedom*, which Yoder – following Barth, no doubt – recounts as a matter of *resurrection*. From an apocalyptic perspective, resurrection is not the reward received for a hard day’s night of pain and suffering. As Yoder puts it, “The cross is not a recipe for resurrection.”¹⁵ We cannot count on resurrection as itself a kind of “instrument” for getting from here to there. Resurrection does not *explain* the cross; it is not a *justification* for why Christ’s suffering has to happen. Resurrection is what happens when broken flesh and shed blood become the sign and promise of a *koinonia* entirely unexpected and incalculable. It is what happens when the temptation to turn suffering itself into a matter of self-preservation and the struggle for survival (as for Jesus in Gethsemane) is transformed into a wild and unpredictable mode of reception. Apocalyptic thus means, finally, that the life which is lived *in Christ* as *through* the crucifixion and *from* the resurrection (and yes,

I know, the “tenses” are all wrong here) is a life grounded finally not in manipulation but in *praise* – doxology.¹⁶ This was the real political challenge of early Christian suffering: it was that in singing about the resurrection of a slain lamb, the earliest Christians were *living* their suffering in a mode of celebratory performance, proclaiming it *already* to be a sign within the fallen world of a new world that is coming, a new Jerusalem descending, a new reign breaking in.¹⁷ Apocalyptic thus names a *life* that is suspended between the twin extremes of suffering and hope, of promise and fulfillment, of the passing away of “this present age” and of the inbreaking of the new age on its way. This *life* is *humanity* itself suspended by God’s grace within the kenotic, apocalyptic history that is Jesus Christ, a concrete life-history that defined as such can only now happen finally as a shared and corporate (ecclesial) sacrifice of praise, which praise inscribes the cosmos itself within Christ’s broken body and shed blood. (Another way to say this is to say that such life is humanity liberated for doxological participation in the triune God: divinization – as suspension by the Spirit into the image of Christ as from glory to glory [2 Cor. 3:18].)

If we should be able speak at all of “mission” it will be from out of this very suspense. For the earliest followers of Jesus understood their suffering straightforwardly to be a matter of just such suspense: the interruption of a world of mastery, possession, identity, and control by a singular history of abandoned love. As such, they found themselves caught up into the life of one whose love is always and everywhere a decision *for* powerlessness and suffering, and *against* the domination of the world by the manipulative fantasies of power and control. I can only insist that this is neither to valorize suffering in-itself, nor to seek to manipulate the social or political order in such a way as to bring an end to suffering as such. It is rather to say that such a life of love will always be met with contempt by a world designed for the purposes of controlling

it, and that the suffering entailed thereby is the surest sign that this life – and the death to which it leads – cannot be so controlled. It is this stance, this outstripping of the logic of manipulation and control, that apocalyptic is finally all about – as it liberates us for the free grace of the Father.

V

Having said all that, however, I should like now to suggest that a recovery of what I take to be the apocalyptic stance as internal to the logic of the doctrine of “Christian Perfection” is a key impetus for any Wesleyan contribution to the question of mission today. Put most basically, what I would say is that what John Wesley calls “Perfect Love” *names* and *describes* (as does apocalyptic for the earliest Christians) that interruptive grace of God by which we are drawn into a *koinonia* in which our lives and bodies are marked by and share in the same unconditional vulnerability and exposure that is God’s own trinitary life revealed in Christ’s cross and resurrection. At the heart of Wesley’s most pointed writings on Christian perfection, one finds an affirmation of just this kind of dispossessed life in which we lose control of ourselves under the great pressure of God’s *doxa*, a life which cannot but begin and end in praise insofar as it is a life that begins and ends only in Christ. I am thinking here of course of certain passages in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*¹⁸; but not only that – one finds this kind of life displayed all over Wesley’s writings: this is what drives Wesley’s eucharistic thought; it decisively informs his doctrines of creation and original sin; it is at the heart of how he talks about the “use of money”; it could be argued that it is the point of departure for his discussion of catholicity and of the visibility of the church in the world. This is it, for Wesley: An eschatological vision in which our sacrifice of love for one another is itself our common sacrifice of praise to God, and

this only because it is about *grace* all the way down, and about a love that is no longer, because it *never was*, our own. (And it is at *this* “Augustinian” point that we should really talk of a *Wesleyan* contribution to what it means to be “catholic” and “apostolic.”)

Such an eschatological vision is made possible in this world by just the kind of “apocalyptic stance” assumed so straightforwardly by the earliest disciples of Jesus and which Yoder has helped us to outline: a stance of suffering love in which we ourselves are dis-positioned, and the structures of this world itself are dis-configured, by an event and a hope that cannot be gotten hold of – participation in the Christ of God. This comes through most basically in Wesley’s numerous writings on the Sermon on the Mount, and upon the beatitudes in particular (which are also of central importance for Yoder as well¹⁹). Speaking of the poverty of spirit by which is given the kingdom of heaven, Wesley remarks on that poverty of life which is an “abhorrence of the praise of men,” insofar as it realizes that life itself is but a praise that can be given “unto God only.”²⁰ Furthermore, this exactly is the comfort and the joy of those who mourn: viz., a joy that “no man taketh from you,” insofar as it is the joy of hope and of the expectation of resurrection that resides within that “blessed mourning” which is yet, for Wesley as for the Gospels, always a eucharistic repetition of Christ’s passion.²¹ So our praise happens precisely as we weep with those who are weeping, and as we are disposed by such weeping to the point of absolute poverty (I think we should think of such “weeping” very much intertextually, in terms of the weeping of the Seer in Revelation over the scroll of history strewn with bloody bodies). Our being given over to be in solidarity with those on whom this world’s powers maintain their strongest grip, itself becomes a sign, a sacramental performance of, the one thing this world’s powers cannot get their hands around and control – the coming reign of God.

If we can say all of this – performatively, as a word of life – with the same kind of straightforward realism with which the Apostle Paul insisted that we carry around the death of Christ in our bodies so that the life of Christ might there be manifest (2 Cor. 4:10-11), or that our sufferings fill up the afflictions of Christ’s flesh for the sake of his body the church (Col. 1:24), or with which the Seer of Revelation proclaimed that the sufferers of persecution participate ultimately in the resurrection of the Slain Lamb who himself unlocks the scroll of history (Rev. 7:13-17), by refusing to “cling to life even in the face of death” (12:11), and by themselves “following the Lamb wherever he goes” (14:4), then we might just discover that in articulating the doctrine of Christian perfection we have articulated the very apocalyptic heart of the Gospel itself.

VI

So what, then, of this idea of mission as “political discipleship”? It is not so much an idea as a mode of action rooted in who we are “in Christ,” a mode of action that can only be described as making visible the “perfect love” which sent Jesus Christ to the Father. Yoder suggests to us that in choosing to love out of faithfulness to his mission, in choosing to “drink the cup” of worldly failure, to suffer and die, Jesus expressed recognition that his mission was *not his own* (just as, e.g., classical Christology insists that Jesus had no human “identity” of his own, no human “person,” and so no human *proprium*, as such), that he was *sent* by an other to himself, the Father, and that in giving himself to the cross he was handing everything over to the Father by handing his life over to the world in love. The world will reject such love, will make of it a failure; but precisely thereby the Kingdom comes, only as a gift. Jesus is Lord precisely in this

handing over of his life as gift to the world; and this life itself is the shape and posture of his own suffering love.

If I am right about this, then “participation” and “discipleship” come together *as* mission. We are “in Christ” as in his “political mission”: we are in a life that is not Christ’s own, but a life that is *sent*, and so is given as gift of life and of love, always from and to another. In Christ, we do not then *have* a mission; we are simply *sent* – sent to love in precisely those kinds of ways that Jesus said would get you killed. To love with the kind of love that in the face of ongoing economic failure, continues to forgive debts – but the capitalist, then, will make sure your own debt in turn kills you. To love with the kind of love that in the face of an increasingly violent world, refuses to continue to participate in forms of warfare to secure peace – but then when the good, solid democratic regime begins to crumble, don’t expect the state to protect you. To love with the kind of love that in the face of a Christian public that persists to view Christian faithfulness mainly in terms either of a certain subjective state of personal commitment or of institutional effectiveness, continues to bring its infants and its mentally handicapped to the baptistery, and to baptize single mothers and children dying of AIDS in Africa, and to offer the body and blood of Christ to those whom we can’t rightly and properly count among our “number” – but then the religious establishment will surely conspire against you. The disciple of Jesus Christ does these things for no other reason than the hope that in the face of their manifest ineffectiveness it may be given by the particular situation – in a way that is a surprise, an event, a miracle – that the watching world sees Jesus, and come to see themselves as sharing in the life of a people who sing about the resurrection of a slain lamb.

The question of mission faces the church today not as a question of whether it can viably and responsibly offer up some little insight on how to make the world a generally better place,

nor is it a question of how best to sustain its institutional or historical meaningfulness in the face of a world that increasingly wants to have nothing to do with it. The question of mission is thinkable only as a kind of action by which the “church” and “Christianity” themselves lose track of their own categorical efficacy and historical effectiveness under the great pressure of the *doxa* (*gravitas*) that is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. For mission after all, like Christology itself, must begin and end in praise.

Notes

¹ John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical* (Herald Press, 1998), 65-101.

² *Ibid.*, 198-203.

³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (University of California Press, 1984), xix.

⁴ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 1994), 234-35.

⁵ John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame Press, 1984), 130.

⁶ John Howard Yoder, “Confessing Jesus in Mission,” unpublished English draft of “Jezus belijden in de zending,” in *Wereld en Zending* 24 (1996):2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸ John Howard Yoder, “Armaments and Eschatology,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 1.1 (1988):47. Though the apocalyptic “stance” can be found to be at work to various nuanced degrees throughout Yoder’s oeuvre, it is in this essay, along with the piece “Ethics and Eschatology” and the final chapter of *The Politics of Jesus* entitled, “The War of the Lamb,” that Yoder outlines his own apocalyptic perspective most clearly. See *idem*, “Ethics and Eschatology,” *Ex Auditu* 6 (1990):119-28; *idem*, *The Politics of Jesus*, 228-47. It is these three pieces to which I will most often be referring in my explication of apocalyptic in Yoder.

⁹ See John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). The entire issue of *Ex Auditu* 6 (1990), in which Yoder’s essay “Ethics and Eschatology” is included, is devoted to a discussion of prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology and serves as a good starting point for investigating the connections between Christian eschatological and the Jewish apocalyptic prophetic literature. I have found Dale Aukerman’s *Reckoning With Apocalypse: Terminal Politics and Christian Hope* (New York: Crossroads, 1994) to be exemplary as a biblically based theological engagement with “apocalyptic” as it has pervaded our Western social and political culture.

¹⁰ Yoder, “Armaments and Eschatology,” 51.

¹¹ See especially Yoder, “Ethics and Eschatology,” 120-23; cf. *idem*, *Politics of Jesus*, 228-33.

¹² It would be interesting (and appropriate in light of Yoder’s late ongoing emphasis upon the Jewishness of Christianity) to read Yoder’s apocalypticism alongside Walter Benjamin’s anti-Hegelian messianism, which seeks to

articulate the ways in which a genuine messianism works “against the grain” of history. See Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Henry Zohn (Schoken Books, 1968), 253-64. I intend to take up such a reading in future work.

¹³ Though Yoder will deploy the term “dispossession,” he more often prefers the language of “powerlessness,” and of “kenosis.”

¹⁴ Herein lies the heart of Yoder’s interpretation of chapter four and five of the Book of Revelation. See Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 231-33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹⁶ Yoder puts it thus: “[T]he criterion most apt for validating a disposition, a decision, an action, is not the predictable success before it but the resurrection behind it, not manipulation but praise. Hope is not a reflex rebounding from defeat but a reflection of theophany.” Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 137-38.

¹⁷ “A community playing the victim role within a society needs first of all to know not what they would do differently if they were rulers, nor how to seize power, but that the present power constellation which oppresses them is not the last word. The first word in the reaffirmation of the human dignity of the oppressed is thus to constitute in their celebrative life the coming Rule of God and a new construal of the cosmos under God. To sing ‘The Lamb is Worthy to Receive Power’, as did the early communities whose hymnody is reflected in the first vision of John, is not mere poetry. It is performative proclamation.” Yoder, “Armaments and Eschatology,” 53.

¹⁸ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1966), see esp. 112ff.

¹⁹ See esp. John Howard Yoder, “The Political Axioms of the Sermon on the Mount,” in *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Herald Press, 1971), 34-51.

²⁰ John Wesley, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, I” (Sermon 21), *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984-), 1:482.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 486.