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The Believers Church and the Triune God:
How the Trinitarian Theology of Robert W. Jenson
Critiques and Supplements the Ecclesiology of John Howard Yoder

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Abstract

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John Howard Yoder and Robert W. Jenson are two of the most creative and influential American theologians of the second half of the 20th century. Each studied in Germany after World War II, during the last great peak of German theological scholarship; each met, engaged, and was influenced by the work of Karl Barth; each crossed disciplinary boundaries to labor in history, dogmatics, ethics, and biblical scholarship; and each participated in ecumenical efforts both institutionally and formally.

Moreover, Yoder and Jenson respectively created paradigm shifts, or at least seismic waves, in various fields of theological inquiry—namely, Christian pacifism and ecclesiology, in Yoder's case, and eschatology and trinitarian theology in Jenson's. Each of their names is liable to be found in liberal swathes within the indexes of any number of contemporary books being published today.

And yet: not only did Yoder and Jenson never engage each other's work, but further, no one has yet taken up the task after them of putting their work into conversation.

This project is, therefore, the first step in that direction. In particular, I focus on two important foci within each theologian's body of work, and ask how they might be fitted together.

On the one side, I laud the remarkable ecclesial vision of Yoder and submit it as the most complete, compelling, biblical, coherent, and practicable ecclesiology on offer—except, as it happens, for a single, curious omission: the specified identity of the church's God, in light of the history of the church's trinitarian controversies and decisions.

Thus, on the other side, I use the rich and energetically potent trinitarian theology of Jenson as, first, a supplement to Yoder's thin doctrine of God, and as, second, a way to critique the kind of bare bones approach of, if not Yoder, then those whom Yoder represents. This leads to a broader question about theological method and the role and authority of tradition in history, which accordingly helps to better understand the relationship between Yoder and Jenson and, finally, how that relationship illumines both the theological task and the witness of the church in the world over time.

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Chapter 1: Living Church, Missing God

Introduction

There are two perennial theological topics to which Christians return time and again in critical reflection and reformulation: the church, and the church's God. This seems commonsensical enough; there is God, and there is God's people, and to "nail down" each would be akin to seeing both sides of the same coin at once. If we could do *that*—if only the slippery currency of faith would sit still in our hands for but a moment—then the rest—creation, Scripture, mission, and so on—might fall accordingly into place.

The doctrines of church and of God—in their technical jargon, ecclesiology and theology proper—thus prove to be perpetually pliable and habitual hot topics. The former may at any one time concern itself with, for example, the church's proper hierarchical structure, or with its liturgical practices, or with its relationship to civil power, or with its constitutive evangelistic commission. The latter is fittingly more complex; as its name signifies, "theology" encompasses more or less anything the church takes time to think and talk about, in an ongoing process of relating every possible subject under heaven to its Lord and Creator. What quickly[1] becomes evident, however, is that the *form* of the Christian doctrine of God is explicitly triadic: the God under investigation is none other than the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are therefore able to be clearer about what, exactly, are the subjects of these theological loci: not just any God, but the Trinity; not just any church, but the church which confesses and worships the triune God. Christian doctrine is

[1] I intend this as a normative claim, but it also applies historically. The actual doctrine of the Trinity did not arrive for some centuries, but from the first, the earliest theologians and liturgies were working out the meaning of the intrinsically triple character of speech involved in telling and believing the gospel.

historically, internally, and unambiguously trinitarian in character and in activity. That which is not is notable precisely for its deviation from this pattern.

The 20th century saw a reinvigoration and even a cottage industry of works engaging both of these subjects, often in diverging ways and to surprising conclusions. Even to survey the breadth of thought available in this regard would be too large a task. I have no interest in analyzing or comparing the various offerings of these disciplines in general. Instead, my focus is much narrower: representative thinkers able to offer coherent and sustained critical explication of the topics at hand, as well as rich opportunity for dialogue across disciplinary boundaries. Specifically, I want to engage two formidable theological spokesmen whose work epitomizes the best critical reflection on each discipline, both ecclesiology and trinitarian theology.

The first such thinker is Mennonite theologian and Christian ethicist John Howard Yoder, whose penetrating work on ecclesiological matters spans more than four decades and has proved enormously influential around the world and across ecclesial divisions. As I will elaborate below, Yoder's ecclesial vision is richly complex and almost entirely compelling; its only substantial lack, which serves as the impetus for this project, is the odd and largely unstated ambiguity of the specific identity of his church's God.

The second thinker is Lutheran systematic theologian Robert W. Jenson, whose five decades (and still counting) of work in trinitarian theology constitute one of the most lively standouts in the recent renewal of interest in the Trinity. Though of course not perfect at every point, the force and vigor and overwhelming energy of Jenson's indefatigably trinitarian approach to Christian faith and theological reflection will serve as a fulsome and worthy counterbalance to the manifest absence in Yoder's otherwise brilliant ecclesiological proposals.

In this chapter I will begin to explore what each theologian brings to the table and how their contributions fit within their overall perspective. I will make clear what is thereby revealed as lacking, principally in Yoder's theology, with initial gestures toward how it might be supplemented. Finally, I will conclude with comparison between Yoder and Jenson, introducing the ways in which these two thinkers in particular are surprisingly ripe for cross-pollination, before going on to outline the rest of the work and its overall aim.

I. John Howard Yoder: Renewing God's Church, Missing the Church's God

The name of John Howard Yoder has in recent decades become so prominent, and in so many wide-ranging conversations, that it may at present be difficult to see the man's work as it stands, over against and independent from its hundredfold appropriations and interpretations. And while we must address ourselves first of all to the work itself, Yoder's subsequent influence and popularity have become in some way inextricable from his work's quality, for part of its peculiar force is the exhilarating attractiveness of his vision—a sober but radical return to the roots of the faith, realistic about sin but creative in response, traditional in conviction but revolutionary in practice. Here is a theologian both produced by and writing for a church faithful to its call.

I will take up the question of Yoder's ecclesiological vision in much greater detail and space in Chapter 2, but a brief sketch will help our purposes here. According to Yoder, the church is that communal social reality brought into being by the God of Israel through the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth. As the reconciled people of God sent among the nations with good news for all, the church is called, in its Spirit-empowered life together, to embody Jesus' normative pattern of life in and for the world. As a community set among larger communities, the church constitutes a concentrated

political alternative to the violence and sin that beset a fallen world. Moreover, this is no mere inverted mirror image of wider society, but rather a positive vision eschatologically brought into the present in the power of the Spirit, as a foretaste of the kingdom of God which Jesus preached and inaugurated, now lived concretely through the faithful obedience of confessing and committed discipleship.

Many implications follow from this understanding of the church. One is the explicitly ecclesial ethics of Christians: on the one hand, moral discernment has its first home in the local gathering of believers (both as subject of action and as discerning body);[2] on the other hand, "ethics" is not something done "in general" or universally, but names a particular set of convictions and practices that find their coherence in the church alone.[3] A related implication is the unavoidable distinction between "church" and "world." For all the overlap between communities, those who follow Jesus to the cross are distinguishable—indeed, must be so, and for the very reason of their cruciform-shaped life together—from those who do not.[4] Third is the church's refusal to be co-opted by any entity purporting to have authority or sway over it, or, conversely, by one which claims to be separate from the church yet ultimately its true provider (whether of existence or of significance) and therefore its most important object of service. The former suitor is exemplified in the medieval Holy Roman Empire, the latter in the modern nation-state; each is equally perilous to the mission and faithfulness of the church.[5]

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[2] See Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 15-45, 80-101.

[3] See Yoder, *Priestly*, 105-122, 135-147.

[4] See Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical* (ed. Michael G. Cartwright; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), 54-64; *Priestly*, 10-12.

[5] See Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1971), 107-124, 140-176.

Leaving the description there, it should be clear why Yoder's vision has found such a receptive audience. His is a call to renewal to a church that finds itself, by fits and gasps, emerging from a long-standing captivity—in heart and in fact—to Constantinianism *and* to the Enlightenment. As Mark Thiessen Nation puts it, his patience is Mennonite, his witness is evangelical, and his convictions are catholic.[6] It will be my contention not only that the church as envisaged by Yoder is fitting or timely or understandably influential, but that in truth it is the most cogent, biblical, practicable, compelling, and comprehensive ecclesial vision on offer, and that, accordingly, we ought to strive to realize it for the sake of obedience to the gospel.

However, there is one problem with Yoder's project, best expressed in the form of a question that captures the essential thrust and aim of this work: *Where is the Trinity?* One might respond that, in the brief sketch above, one would not expect to find mention of the Trinity. Furthermore, my brief description of the formation of the church—called by God in obedience to Christ in the power of the Spirit—is itself trinitarian.[7] What is missing?

A good deal, actually. The Trinity is close to absent across the enormous scope of Yoder's writings, except for one place of (posthumously published) direct engagement, and there he is decidedly neutral, if not negative.[8] Which is only to say, rather uncontroversially, that whatever he may have had to say in his writings about God, Jesus, or the Spirit in discussion of Scripture, ethics, or the church, *explicit mention or confession of the triune God plays little to no role in the theology of John Howard Yoder.*

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[6] See Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), xix-xxiii.

[7] In form if not in content.

[8] The work is Yoder's *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002), which I will explore in detail in Chapter 2.

Here is the problem, and at a second glance it is not removed from ecclesiological concerns. For the basic lack of the Trinity in Yoder's writings tells us something important about his understanding of the theological task, of the God of Scripture, of the proper role of the Bible, of the faith of the church, and of the nature of history and the authority of tradition. It tells us, in other words, that there exists in Yoder's corpus a serious lacuna which demands attention. If our desire and conviction remain concerning his ecclesial vision, then we had best attend to it.

It will be the task of the chapters that follow to explore and explain these matters; but why, it might be asked, is the question of the Trinity important to begin with? What is the problem if Yoder didn't deal much with trinitarian doctrine—why take this (undenied) lack as something larger than what it is, a simple consequence of a social ethicist happening not to address every theological subject with equal energy or expertise?

The answer is that the question of the Trinity matters because the question of the identity of God matters. Modern speech habits tend to think of "God" as a single, uncontested monolithic entity about which all religious traditions and theological language strive to speak in unison, whatever else they might disagree about or say descriptively. In reality, however, the identity of God *is* a contested matter, in the highest pitch and in every regard: historically, religiously, theologically, linguistically. Who or what is God? How does one name him/her/it?[9] How does one worship him/her/it rightly? What is the character, the personality, the form of this God? Does he/she/it have a particular disposition to human

[9] At this point I should make clear that I am aware of the problems raised by the use of gendered personal pronouns with reference to the Christian God. In the course of this work I will aim to avoid the need for pronouns at all—in this case uncalled for due to a generic point of reference—but on occasion I will opt to use the masculine pronoun for reasons of style and readability. This should only occur when engaging Yoder and Jenson on a descriptive basis, and because each of them also retains the traditional practice, it is consonant with their own use.

life, to human disorder or flourishing? How does this God relate to humanity and/or to the rest of reality? Finally, how can human beings know such things?

These are straightforward questions which centuries of philosophers, theologians, and ordinary individuals and communities have struggled with and sought to comprehend truthfully. They correspond to Yoder's project in this way: *Which God does Yoder's church worship?* An answer may again seem obvious: the God of Scripture! the God of Israel! the God of Jesus Christ! What confusion could there possibly be, when reading Yoder, which God it is he speaks of and adheres to and worships?

There is not so much confusion as *ambiguity*, because these questions have been asked before—in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries (and on). In the turmoil of those times the identity of God was under dispute, and by persons we would today call Bible-reading, church-going, self-identified believers. But it was recognized by all—and has continued to be so down through the centuries—that there simply is no biblical God *as such*, uninterpreted and bare on the page. Profound and pressing questions arise *in the reading of the texts* that call for disputation and discourse, and finally decisions concerning essential matters of the faith. One of these such is—as one might expect—the identity of God. Just who or what is it that Christians claim to worship? The historic formulations that arose and endured answered decisively that it is the *triune* God whom Christians worship, named and known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[10]

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[10] The question of the traditionally gendered names of the triune persons is related to but separable from the question of gendered pronouns. Because these are the biblically given names confirmed and passed down in both liturgy and trinitarian theological formulations, I will not raise the (important but nonetheless distinct) question of contemporary liturgical or catechetical reformulation of the trinitarian name, nor do I believe this latter question affects the present one, given that it presumes and maintains the trinitarian *claim*. For a position arguing for the need to retain the traditional names, see Jenson, " 'The Father, He . . .'," in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (ed. Alvin F. Kimel, Jr.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 95-109. For one arguing for openness to alternative formulations, see Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Christian Dogmatics of Disbelief* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 113-138.

The effective upshot of this claim is twofold: there remains a single God, the Holy One of Israel; but within this conception, God's Son/Word and God's Spirit are, respectively, ascribed with the Father to the "God" side of the ontological distinction between Creator and creature. Christians may truthfully and consistently say, therefore, that they worship Jesus Christ the Son as well as the One he called Father and the Spirit they share, *without* thereby worshiping a creature[11] or ceasing to worship the one God of Israel.

Returning to Yoder, the point is that, absent substantive engagement or affirmation of trinitarian confession, the specific relation of the God of his envisioned church to the triune God professed by the tradition remains indeterminate. There is a reason the church took so long and under such great pains to articulate trinitarian faith—it lies at the heart of a properly Christian theology, the church's decisive word concerning its God. A good deal more spins out from here, including both the reasons why Yoder (and many under his influence) might be disinclined to give much attention to the Trinity *and* the significant theological riches that follow from a trinitarian understanding of the God revealed in Jesus, Israel's Messiah.

Fortunately, we are not at a loss for voices which have an alternative word to supplement and critique Yoder's missing God. To that we now turn in the work of Robert W. Jenson.

II. Robert W. Jenson: Identifying the Church's God

Described by Wolfhart Pannenberg as "one of the most original and knowledgeable theologians of our time,"[12] Robert Jenson, though long esteemed in certain confessional and

[11] That is, a creature—in the case of Jesus—that is not also creator.
[12] Pannenberg, "A Trinitarian Synthesis," *First Things* 103 (2000): 49.

international circles, has entered the broader landscape of recognition and influence only in the last 15 years. While his reception may have been delayed, the bold brilliance of his thought has been present from the beginning, and continues today after five fecund decades of theological and academic labor. His engagement of the tradition has precluded very little, such that one can readily ascertain his position on any number of issues, but here I will focus primarily on his work on the doctrine of the Trinity, a subject to which he has devoted much of his career's efforts. We will discover in the process the ways in which Jenson poses stark challenges to Yoder's project.

Jenson belongs to a whole generation of theologians who carried forth an inherited trajectory of renewed attention given to trinitarian theology. This revival was largely—at least on the Protestant side—sparked by the work of Swiss theologian Karl Barth in the second quarter of the 20th century, and it is therefore fitting that Jenson studied in Germany, wrote his dissertation on Barth, and subsequently published two books on Barth's thought.[13] The latter works were some of the first unmediated, in-the-moment, fulsome articulations of Barth's theology in America, where understandings of Barth had so far been incomplete, if not outright incorrect.[14]

To begin, for Jenson the selfsame God confessed and worshiped by the one church[15] from Pentecost to the present day is none other than the *triune* God, revealed and known and so named as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Just as Israel felt so bold as to identify its God

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[13] *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963); *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future As Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1969, 2010).

[14] See, e.g., Jenson's comment in the late 1960s: "almost nothing of what people have spoken of in America or England as 'Barthianism' has much to do with the thought of the man from Basel" (*God After God*, 6).

[15] And not only by the one church, but by the one people of God, thus extending backward to old Israel.

by name (YHWH) and description ("Whoever rescued us from Egypt"[16])—for "Israel's salvation depended precisely on unambiguous identification of her God over against the generality of the numinous"[17]—the New Testament follows suit in nominal identification ("the Father of our Lord Jesus the Christ")[18] and narrative account ("Whoever raised Jesus from the dead").[19] Who, then, is the God of Israel, the Father of Jesus Christ? "[T]he one who rescued Israel from Egypt . . . as he thereupon rescued the Israelite Jesus from the dead."[20] Following discussion of the baptismal mandate and the role and person of the Spirit, Jenson summarizes his claim:

> Thus the phrase "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" is simultaneously a very compressed telling of the total narrative by which Scripture identifies God and a personal name for the God so specified; in it, name and narrative description not only appear together, as at the beginning of the Ten Commandments, but are identical. By virtue of this logic, *the triune phrase offers itself as the unique name for the Christian God*, and is then *dogmatically mandated for that function* by its constitutive place in the rite that establishes Christian identity. The church is the community and a Christian is someone who, when the identify of God is important, names him "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." *Those who do not or will not belong to some other community*.[21]

There are numerous reasons why Jenson feels the personal triune naming of God to be essential to Christian faith, but for our purposes two are especially pertinent. The first is the aforementioned need to "pick out" which real or supposed candidate for divinity the church is actually calling out and praying to and hoping will respond graciously. As Jenson says in his *Ezekiel* commentary:

> The notion that religion as such is a good thing could occur only to such religiously sheltered persons as Western inclusivist theorists or to those who are themselves captives of some religious nightmare. The decisive question is not "is there God?" The decisive question is "who is God?" We must hope that most answers historically on offer to the second question—that evoke the affectless God of the old Greeks or

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[16] *Systematic Theology: Volume 1: The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 44.
[17] *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1982), 5.
[18] *ST* I:45.
[19] *ST* I:44.
[20] Ibid.
[21] *ST* I:46 (emphasis mine).

> Molech or Astarte under whatever names or the distant high gods of animism and so on—are simply false.[22]

It will not do simply to assume that the use of the generic term "God" is sufficient to know or identify whatever or whomever is sought in praise or supplication. Rather, the specificity of language, of intimate knowledge—indeed, of a personal name—is required in order to call upon and relate to the God narrated in Scripture.

Second, there is the question of whether the biblical God is identified merely *by* certain events (exodus, resurrection), or actually *with* them. If the former, "the identification would be a revelation ontologically other than God himself. The revealing events would be our clues *to* God, but would not *be* God."[23] Taking his cue from Barth, Jenson wants nothing to do with a revealing God who nevertheless stays at arm's length, and everything to do with the *self-disclosing* God of Israel and Jesus, whose very revelatory acts unveil nothing less than God's own self: "For the space normal religion leaves between revelation and deity itself is exactly the space across which we make our idolatrous projections."[24] How does this distinction and preference relate to trinitarian theology? In typically economic precision, "the doctrine of the Trinity is but a conceptually developed and sustained insistence that God himself is identified by and with the particular plotted sequence of events that make the narrative of Israel and her Christ."[25]

These emphases make clear just how theologically distant Jenson is from Yoder, and begin also to raise difficulties for Yoder's lack of interest in the Trinity. As for the first point,

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[22] Jenson, *Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 130. See also a similar statement in a different context: "Nearly all religions are straightforwardly fictitious—there is, thank the true God, no Moloch or Great Goddess—and all religion, Jewish and Christian included, is used by its devotees to evade and drown out the word from God by which it is called. . . . But even those who cry, 'Lord Moloch . . .' cannot evade thereby confronting the Lord. They risk hearing, 'You called? I am the Lord. But my name is not Moloch and I do not savor the smoke of your children' " (*Systematic Theology: Volume 2: The Works of God* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1999], 83).

[23] *ST* I:59.

[24] Ibid.

[25] *ST* I:60.

Yoder might respond that the language, and perhaps even the logic, of Jenson's trinitarian naming remain consistent with his own patterns of speech, insofar as they are biblical and do not demand metaphysical gymnastics in order to be true or pure. And to an extent, Yoder (or his defender) would have a point. The rejoinder goes only so far, though, because (as I will seek below to demonstrate) the historical achievement of trinitarian confession is much more than merely highfalutin metaphysics, and cannot be reduced to a contingency of the past with no authority over the present—which claim in turn implicates the nature and character of the church's life over time, and so returns us to ecclesiology.

The second point drawn from Jenson's trinitarian "insistence" is as pressing as the first, though I must be clear that I am not taking Jenson's "revisionary metaphysics"[26] as far as he intends them, but only as a laudably direct instance of noting the dangers involved in detaching God's act from God's being in God's self-revelation.[27] The question here put to Yoder is whether he (or, perhaps better, his envisioned church[28]) can affirm unequivocally that it is none other than God who has come in the person of Christ, that it is none other than God whose abiding presence animates the church, that it is none other than God who *is* the Father, *is* the Son, *is* the Holy Spirit. Whether or not Yoder the Christian believer could or would affirm it, I propose that Yoder's *articulated ecclesiology* is not capable of such affirmation, or at least of sustaining it.

That ecclesiological implications attend directly to decisions made regarding trinitarian doctrine is seen clearest in comparing Yoder's church to Jenson's, for Jenson's theology is not lacking for an equally robust ecclesiology. A brief account of the differences

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[26] Jenson, "A Reply," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52 (1999): 132.

[27] Note the generous but substantive critique in the chapter devoted to Jenson in Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism?: Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 127-155.

[28] The border between the two is porous, and at times Yoder may personally be willing to admit or approve of something which he might not seem to allow ecclesiologically, at least on a prescriptive basis.

between them suggests not only what it is that Yoder fears in approaching authoritative post-biblical tradition, but also why Jenson's vision of the church is no simple answer or substitute for Yoder's.

Jenson does not mince words: as an audience or home for his systematic theology, "the only church conceivably in question is the unique and unitary church of the creeds."[29] He makes this claim without qualification because he believes that "[t]he dogmatic imperative is congenital with the gospel, since a missionary faith necessarily lives from statement of the message to be brought and accepted. Claims to have 'no creed but Christ' either urge a tautology or are self-deception."[30] A "creed," according to Jenson, "is a confessional formula that has acquired dogmatic standing. It demands currency in the life of the church, and any legitimate member of the church must be able to join in it."[31] Mention of dogma may confound; by it Jenson means "the notion of irreversibility," that is, a "choice . . . by which the church so decisively determines her own future that if the choice is wrongly made, the community determined by that choice is no longer in fact the community of the gospel; thus no church thereafter exists to reverse the decision."[32] For example, the formulation of the Nicene Creed, "made . . . for dogmatic-disciplinary purposes," was such that "the orthodox were those who could confess it and the heretics were those who could

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[29] *ST* I:vii.

[30] *ST* I:35.

[31] *ST* I:36.

[32] *ST* I:17. Jenson goes on: "Therefore, to believe that the entity which now calls itself the Christian church is the church of the apostles and to believe that the church's past dogmatic decisions were adequate to their purposes—not necessarily in every way appropriate to them—comes to the same thing. If, for example, the decision of Nicea that Christ is 'of one being with the Father' was false to the gospel, the gospel was thereby so perverted that there has since been no church extant to undo the error. There are few dogmas, for there have been few occasions on which the church has found it both necessary and possible to speak to her members in this ultimately committed fashion."

not."[33] Put most succinctly, the exercise and authority of dogma "is a simple act of faith in the Spirit's guidance of the church."[34]

In a real sense, then, Yoder and Yoder's church are thereby excluded from Jenson's ecclesiology, and even from his theological purview (though perhaps included in the latter indirectly). I take this to be a serious mistake and a broad overstepping of the necessary bounds of theological reflection. *However*, Jenson's unflinching commitment to the authority of the tradition—and thus to the conclusions and judgments reached therein—is at once a telling reminder of the gravity of the questions before us, a profound check on the temptation to forget the church's tragic disunity, and a clarifying image of an ecclesiology truly opposed to Yoder's. What seem to be logical implications for Jenson regarding the Spirit, the church's teaching office, and the authority of the tradition serve as prime challenges to anyone seeking to take up, defend, extend, and/or enact Yoder's vision of the church—as I am.

It will therefore be the signal task of this work to explore what it might mean for a Yoderian ecclesiology to "make room for" the doctrine of the Trinity, by revising and expanding its conception of the timeful role of the Holy Spirit in the church and calling for the temporal reception of past achievements, all the while aiming to do so without falling prey to Jenson's dogmatic overreaching. Before beginning the project in earnest, however, there is one more question to address.

Why these two, John Howard Yoder and Robert Jenson, at all?

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[33] *ST* I:37.
[34] *ST* I:39.

III. Theologians Passing in the Night

There are good reasons for putting Yoder and Jenson into conversation; it is no merely pragmatic, much less arbitrary, decision. For, interestingly enough, if heard without prior knowledge, the stories of Yoder and Jenson would sound eerily similar—if these two were real, and not in fact the same person, one would be reasonable in presuming that, beyond crossing paths, they must have been acquaintances, co-conspirators, allies, even friends. How could one resist the inference?

Born three years apart[35] (just before and after the Great Crash of 1929), each to ethnically demarcated enclaves of Reformation faith, both were intellectually gifted, attended schools of their respective denominations, and sailed for Europe after the War. One studied in Basel, the other in Heidelberg. The former, on the night before his dissertation defense, presented to Karl Barth a critique of Barth's stance on war; the latter's dissertation was itself about Barth, and so he traveled to Basel to receive personal approval of his doctoral work. From there, these polyglot, European-trained theologians moved back to America and, beginning in the early 1960s, enjoyed decades of fruitful and acclaimed work, in and for academy and church alike, in contexts at once specifically denominational and explicitly ecumenical. One passed away in 1997, his 70th year, and the other continues work to this day, prolific as ever in his 81st.

Perusing the indexes of much current theological scholarship, one often finds at least one of these men cited—and liberally—if not both together. They are respectively, and concurrently, two of the most important, influential, and hallowed-or-despised figures of the

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[35] For the following, see Nation, *John Howard Yoder*, 1-29; James McClendon, "John Howard Yoder, One of Our Own (1927-1997)," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 25 (1998): 21-26; Carl E. Braaten, "Robert William Jenson—A Personal Memoir," in *Trinity, Time, and Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert W. Jenson*," (ed. Colin E. Gunton; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1-9; Robert W. Jenson, "A Theological Autobiography to Date," *dialog* 46 (2007): 46-54, and "Reversals: How My Mind Has Changed," *The Christian Century*, online: http://www.christiancentury.org/article.lasso?id=8373 (April 20, 2010).

late 20th century theological scene. Yet the strange fact persists: John Howard Yoder and Robert Jenson never once interacted with or engaged each other's work, and it is unclear if they ever even crossed paths.[36]

Moreover, it is startling to note the overlap shared between them, not only in issues addressed, but also in conclusions drawn. A preliminary list includes:

- the priority of peoplehood as a theological category for Christian faithfulness;[37]
- the contingent but inexpugnable role of Israel in God's history with creation, and therefore the essential Jewishness of Jesus and the tragic mistake of supersessionism;[38]
- the inescapable, explicit politics not merely resultant *from*, but identical *with* the gospel;[39]
- the resurrection as the enduring heart of the primal apostolic proclamation;[40]
- the overarching genre of Scripture as narrative;[41]
- the necessity of the 16th century reformations in response to ecclesial abuses;[42]
- the sweeping project and rehabilitating influence of Karl Barth for 20th century theology;[43]

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[36] This conclusion is derived from extensive research as well as personal correspondence with Jenson, Mark Nation, and Stanley Hauerwas.

[37] See, e.g., Yoder's introductions in *Priestly*, 1-12, and *For the Nations: Essays Public & Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 1-11; and note Jenson's enormous section devoted to the church in *ST* II:165-305.

[38] See Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); and Robert W. Jenson, "Toward a Christian Theology of Israel," *Pro Ecclesia* 9 (2000): 43-56, and "Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism," in *Jews and Christians: People of God* (ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1-13.

[39] This is so evident in each corpus that it is almost nonsensical to cite particular works; but, e.g., see Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, 1994); and Jenson, "Eschatological Politics and Political Eschatology" and "Toward a Christian Theory of the Public," *Essays in Theology of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 16-27, 132-46.

[40] See Jenson, *ST* I:4-5, 12-13, 83-86, 194-206; and Yoder, *Preface*, 53-59.

[41] See Jenson, *ST* I:25-33, 57-59; and Yoder, *Priestly*, 15-45, especially 34-38.

[42] See Jenson, *ST* I:viii ("I regard the initial program of the Reformation as mandated"); and Yoder, *Priestly*, 105-34.

- the restoration of eschatology for a true understanding of Jesus and the Christian life;[44]
- the evangelistic impetus of the church in its constitutive mission to the nations;[45]
- a reclamation of Scripture as the abiding word of God to the church, that succumbs neither to uncritical biblicism nor to hermeneutical theories that distort faithful hearing;[46]
- Christian hope not as ethereal but as the full, final, *political* coming of the *basileia*, of the new Jerusalem, of God's redeemed materiality at last established in the new creation.[47]

Undoubtedly there is more to add to this already lengthy list;[48] below I will offer two sample cases in more depth that help demonstrate the shared areas of work between Yoder and Jenson.

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[43] See Jenson, "Karl Barth," in *The Modern Theologians: An introduction to Christian theology in the twentieth century* (2d ed.; ed. David F. Ford; Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), 21-36. Yoder's statement in his Preface to *Karl Barth and the Problem of War and Other Essays on Barth* (ed. Mark Thiessen Nation; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2003), 3, is especially noteworthy: "American Protestants . . . can hardly sense how simply fitting and how widely true is the statement that a generation of pastors were compelled by [Barth's] work to rethink their faith, and to preach it, in the light of the overwhelming difference it makes if God has really spoken. . . . This study is then most properly understood if it is seen as a grateful tribute to the stature of a teacher who was above the need to want those who learned from him to become his disciples."

[44] See Yoder, *Original*, 52-84; and Jenson, "Eschatology," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 407-20.

[45] See Yoder, *Original*, 107-76; and Jenson, *ST* I:4-5, 14-18; *ST* II:187-88, 209-10.

[46] See Jenson, "Scripture's Authority in the Church," in *The Art of Reading Scripture* (ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 27-37, and "On the Authorities of Scripture," in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 53-61; and Yoder, *To Hear the Word* (2d ed.; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2001, 2009), 77-127.

[47] See Jenson, *ST* II:338-52; and Yoder, *Preface*, 240-80.

[48] One might object that many of these areas of overlap (along with the subsequent comparisons) are shared with and among any number of contemporary theologians; what makes these similarities different or special? One answer, granted that these concerns are not limited to either Yoder or Jenson, is simply to point out the *sheer oddity* of two theologians in such agreement (however popularly shared) working at the same time, with equivalent training, on similar issues, in the same language—and never interacting, personally or professionally. A second is to note how their contemporaneous and almost equally great influence somehow extends to entirely different streams of interest and thought. Finally, I would caution the softening of the radical nature of some of their positions; what seems passé or universal today was not necessarily so at the time, and part of what makes these two thinkers so important is precisely that they were the ones on the cutting edge *introducing and formulating* what would (inevitably) become old hat one or two generations hence.

To begin, consider signal quotes from books at the beginning of their respective careers that helped set the agenda for the coming decades. The first is from Yoder, in his magisterial *The Politics of Jesus*, first published in 1972:

> If then God is going to save his creatures *in their humanity*, the Powers cannot simply be destroyed or set aside or ignored. Their sovereignty must be broken. This is what Jesus did, concretely and historically, by living a genuinely free and human existence. This life brought him, as any genuinely human existence will bring anyone, to the cross. In his death the Powers—in this case the most worthy, weighty representatives of Jewish religion and Roman politics—acted in collusion. Like all men, he too was subject (but in this case quite willingly) to these powers. He accepted his own status of submission. But morally he broke their rules by refusing to support them in their self-glorification; and that is why they killed him. . . . He did not fear even death. Therefore his cross is a victory, the confirmation that he was free from the rebellious pretensions of the creaturely condition. . . . His very obedience unto death is in itself not only the sign but also the firstfruits of an authentic restored humanity. Here we have for the first time to do with a man who is not the slave of any power, of any law or custom, community or institution, value or theory. Not even to save his own life will he let himself be made a slave of these Powers. This authentic humanity included his free acceptance of death at their hands.[49]

Compare these words with those of Jenson, published a year later in his *Story and Promise*:

> The only one who could truly make revolution, would be one who lived freedom from established structures to its end in death, without isolation from the actual human beings living those structures. He would have to be one who knew exactly who and where the publicans, sinners, and pharisees were, was in no way implicated in their alienating enterprises, and just so loved them. He would have to be one who had freely abandoned his life in the inherited society, that is, who had died—for there is no other life than that in the inherited society—and who had died exactly of his acceptance of his fellows in all their hate and alienation. Those of us who say that Jesus the Nazarene lives, say there is such a man, and await the revolution from him.[50]

The mirroring themes pulse from each pen: Jesus, the paradigmatic human being, set in and constituted by societal structures, is, precisely *as* a human person, neither dictated nor determined by these powers, and just insofar as he lived free from their suasion *for the sake of others*—all the way to a death freely accepted—his way and life, vindicated and established by

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[49] *Politics*, 144-45. This citation is from the second edition, but I have left the masculine language from the first edition in order both to locate it in its time and to match it to the similarly located quote from Jenson.

[50] *Story and Promise: A Brief Theology of the Gospel About Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 69. Yoder's essay "The Original Revolution" (*Original*, 13-33) makes for intriguing comparison with Jenson's book.

the resurrection, was and is a life of divinely enacted revolutionary liberation, effective for all. We can of course sense the overtones of the 1960s humming in these representative passages; but what is striking is just how close the thought of each is to the other, at such an early stage in their careers, written at an almost literally simultaneous moment in history.

Another impressive—and, given Yoder's notorious metaphysical squeamishness, surprising—area of overlap is that of *time*. In Yoder's only sustained engagement with and treatment of systematic theology, he contrasts the "amillenial view," in which the eschaton is envisioned as "timeless fulfillment" ("itself the most clearly nonbiblical of [eschatological] positions"), with "biblical thought," in which "the eternal is not atemporal. It is not less like time, but more like time. It is like time to a higher degree." According to Yoder, "The God of the Bible is not timeless." He elaborates:

> If real events are the center of history—certainly the cross was a real event, certainly the resurrection is testified to as in some sense a real event—then the fulfillment and culmination of God's purposes must also be really historic. . . . We cannot conceive of an atemporal God reconcilable with the biblical vision of God. We can conceive of a hypertemporal God who is more temporal than we are, who is head of us and behind us, before us and after us, above us in several directions, and who has more of the character of timeliness and meaningfulness in movement rather than less.[51]

For those familiar with Jenson's work, these words resonate deeply with his paradigm-shattering project of four decades to reconceive the biblical God's relation to time. In his *Systematic Theology*, at the climax of pages of technical and metaphysical argument, Jenson concludes: "The biblical God's eternity is his temporal infinity. . . . The true God is not eternal because he lacks time, but because he takes time." Following expression of this *sort* of eternity in the Psalms, Jenson lays it down: "The eternity of Israel's God is his faithfulness. He is not eternal in that he secures himself from time, but in that he is faithful

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[51] *Preface*, 275-76. In their introduction, Stanley Hauerwas and Alex Sider make a similar connection (21n.24): "Robert Jenson's account of time . . . makes for useful comparison with Yoder, though it is fair to say that Jenson's modified Augustinianism and his extended conversation with Pannenberg renders talk about time more theoretical than Yoder would probably think necessary."

to his commitments within time. At the great turning, Israel's God is eternal in that he is faithful to the death, and then yet again faithful."[52] For Jenson, this construal—however innovative—has its purpose in answering two essential requirements: that it offer a truthful account of the God of Christian Scripture, and just so that it be able to make sense of a God known in a human being, executed and raised up from death, somehow wholly revelatory of this the one God in his own life and person.[53] That is, Jenson's reasons for conceiving of God as having and taking time, and Yoder's for calling God "not timeless" but "hypertemporal," are exactly coincident: faithfulness to Scripture, and therefore to the unavoidably historical narratives of exodus and exile, cross and resurrection.

Other examples could surely be introduced, drawing from the list above or from elsewhere, such as their lifelong engagement with international ecumenical movements,[54] their cautious approval of (but unqualified friendship with) Stanley Hauerwas,[55] their use of historical-critical exegetical methods for the sake of churchly reading[56]—but that is enough for now. Suffice it to say that John Howard Yoder and Robert Jenson share much between them, an overlap that cannot be explained away by similar circumstances or career paths.

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[52] *ST* I:217.

[53] *ST* I:218-223.

[54] See Jenson, *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); and Yoder, *Royal*, 219-320. Cartwright, in his introduction to Yoder's volume, actually connects Jenson's and Yoder's ecumenical concerns: "Jenson and Yoder [would] very likely disagree about the constructive implications of ecclesiology for the doctrine of God, [and] Jenson would also question the viability of a free church ecclesiology on other grounds. However, the general lines of Jenson's frustration about (and critique of) the way ecumenical dialogue has been pursued do converge with some of the objections, cautions, and admonitions that Yoder has raised" (47-48).

[55] See Jenson, "The Hauerwas Project," *Modern Theology* 8 (1992): 285-95; and Yoder, *To Hear the Word* 210-16, or *For the Nations*, 3n.6: "Stanley Hauerwas . . . maximizes the provocative edge of the dissenting posture." In the reverse direction, see Hauerwas' bold suggestion that Jenson "needs to read . . . John Howard Yoder. Of course Jenson may well have read Yoder and see no reason he needs to engage his work, but if that is the case Jenson has made a mistake" ("Only Theology Overcomes Ethics; or, Why 'Ethicists' Must Learn from Jenson," in *Trinity, Time and Church*, 266n.18). Hauerwas goes on to say: "For example, as rich as Jenson's Christological reflections are, I think he has not dealt sufficiently with Jesus' teachings. In that respect Jenson would find Yoder a wonderful resource for reflection on why and how Jesus the teacher (Jesus the prophet) and Jesus the crucified are necessarily understood as the one Word of God."

[56] *The Politics of Jesus* is an exercise in just this sort of reading; perhaps Jenson's stance is best represented by the introductions to his commentaries on the *Song of Songs* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2005), 1-15, and *Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 17-30. See also *ST* II:270-84.

This observation of course begs the question: *What was it* that shielded the work of each from the other, that secluded them in separate conversations, that finally led to such starkly differing judgments on key issues? I will wait to address that important query until the final chapter. For now, it is enough to note that these are not middling professors whittling away their time in some academic backwoods. Neither are they of incommensurate intellectual heft or disproportionate influence, much less marked by such dissimilar training or context as to be uncomparable. No, these are theological giants of their generation, whose work lifts us up to see the peaks and heights of that which they loved and for which they labored so long: the one God and that God's one people. Given their similarities in life and labor's love, their differences will prove all the more crucial to understand for our own task.

IV. The Outline and Plan of this Work

The Christian church is the church of the triune God—the God with whom Robert Jenson is so captivated. The Christian church is the church normed by the politics of Jesus—that pattern of life for which John Howard Yoder is so compelling a spokesman. The relative absence of the former ascription within the latter is the driving force of this project.

Having introduced both the persons and the plot, it remains to outline the structure of what is to come.

In Chapter 2, "The Church According to John Howard Yoder," I take up a close reading of Yoder's ecclesiology, gathering together the vast and unsystematic portions of his vision into eight core aspects crucial to the shape and character of his proposed church. In the second half of the chapter I explore his varied and rare interactions with trinitarian theology, first in his more indirect references to it in work unrelated to the doctrine, then in

his one sustained direct reflection on it in a posthumously published book on theological history and method.

In Chapter 3, "The Church's God According to Robert W. Jenson," I approach Jenson and the Trinity as I did Yoder and the church, explicating his trinitarian perspective and the reasons for its centrality, with especial focus on his magisterial two-volume systematics. The chapter's second half is split between, on the one hand, noting and negating the unfortunate ecclesiological implications that accompany the Trinity's centrality in Jenson's work and, on the other hand, stating the challenges that nevertheless remain for Yoder's envisioned church as posed by Jenson's rigorously argued and conceptualized triune God.

Finally, in Chapter 4, "God in the Church, Tradition in History," I dedicate a good deal of time to discerning a core constitutive difference between Yoder and Jenson that helps to explain their overlapping but finally significantly disparate perspectives. From there I take up and argue against Yoder's critiques of trinitarian faith and theology with my own situating and evaluation of the doctrine. I then seek to supplement Yoder's particular way of reading the church's tradition in history by way of a thicker pneumatology partly learned from Jenson, and conclude by answering the challenges posed by Jenson's work to Yoder's, in hopes that the churchly vision of Yoder will not prove inhospitable in its newfound reception of the triune God into it.

Chapter 2: The Church According to John Howard Yoder

Introduction

From start to finish, the home, object, and audience for John Howard Yoder's half century of scholarship was the one church of Jesus Christ. Whether studying the history of 16th century Anabaptist origins, critiquing 20th century social ethics, offering a newly politicized sketch of the historical Jesus, or analyzing the state of Jewish-Christian relations, Yoder was concerned with the life, character, witness, and faithfulness of the Christian church. His work on the church inspired an entire generation of renewed reflection on ecclesiological matters with specific reference to the Anabaptist tradition, the peace churches, and the "free" or "believers" church, both for those already within such communities and for those outside of them. With adulation as well as rejection, the Yoderian ecclesial vision has been received across the theological and academic spectrum, and will continue to be critically engaged for the foreseeable future.

For good or ill, though the church captured his attention all his life Yoder never gathered or systematized his thoughts into a singular whole. The first half of this chapter will therefore be devoted to assembling a summary constellation of the various unsystematic pieces that constitute Yoder's ecclesiology. My purpose will be to locate the substance of Yoder's envisioned church, rather than to argue for it—though note that I am of course already biased in Yoder's favor. The second half of the chapter will consist of connecting Yoder's ecclesiology to trinitarian theology, first by locating the sparse references to the Trinity in his more general publications, then by engaging his most direct and systematic encounter with trinitarian doctrine in posthumously published lectures on systematic theology. Finally, I will explore the underlying factors which help to explain Yoder's

inattention to trinitarian matters, looking primarily to his Anabaptist heritage and its internal assumptions and theological commitments for insight into this all-important gap in an otherwise diverse and expansive body of work.

I. Yoder's Church

A significant secondary literature has emerged in response to Yoder's work,[57] and with regard specifically to his ecclesiology, this fact is in large part due to a distinct inability to "say it all at once." Like the living organism it seeks to be, Yoder's church has too many moving parts to be summarized in a pithy formula. That being the case, I have eschewed the (tempting) route of declaiming *the* Yoderian definition of the church, and instead have gathered together areas of definitional emphasis and import. Though overlapping at many places, these should help to give perspective on what Yoder believes to be important, what he deems constitutive of ecclesial identity, and what he desires over against other possibilities.

As envisioned by Yoder, then, that church faithful to its Lord is or will be:

1. *Biblically constituted.* One might argue that Jesus, not the Bible, is the starting point of Yoder's ecclesiology (indeed, that is the content of the next point). However, we must begin epistemologically prior to Jesus, if not chronologically or ontologically. For how does one "get" to Jesus? *By no other way than canonical Scripture*. Accordingly, one of Yoder's chief characteristics is that his "method"—if we impute one to him at all, something foreign to his

[57] See, e.g., Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Craig A. Carter, *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001); J. Alexander Sider, *To See History Doxologically: History and Holiness in John Howard Yoder's Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Earl Zimmerman, *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2007); Nigel Goring Wright, *Disavowing Constantine: Mission, Church and the Social Order in the Theologies of John Howard Yoder and Jürgen Moltmann* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Publishing, 2000); Joon-Sik Park, *Missional Ecclesiologies in Creative Tension: H. Richard Niebuhr and John Howard Yoder* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007). This is only a sample, and not even to mention edited collections of essays.

self-understanding[58]—is always and everywhere governed by close readings of the biblical text. Just so, one's "way" to Jesus—and therefore to God's will, to the kingdom's social ethics, to the proper shape of the church—is the hard road of biblical interpretation.

To an extent, given that this is simply the form and internal logic of Yoder's theological method, the best proof is to read his works as a whole. As examples, take his two small books on the church's ministry[59] and sacraments:[60] each is, with little argument and no apology, a straightforward study of what the New Testament texts say on the matter.

Another way of articulating Yoder's concern, instead of biblical or scriptural, is that the church be *apostolic*. The church is that people called and created by God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the authoritative witness to these revelatory events is gathered, discovered, remembered, attested and returned to in the New Testament—the primal apostolic testimony.[61] (Jesus', the apostles', and the church's complex continuity with Israel entails the Old Testament in conjunction with the New.) The Bible thus "represent[s] in any time and place the testimony of the narrative stretching from Abraham to the Apostles," and "in the juxtaposition of those stories with our stories there leaps the spark of the Spirit."[62]

Yoder's emphasis on biblical authority in and for the church has to do especially with the church's relationship to its originating historical circumstances. In this regard, the church's "submission to the apostolic witness . . . is a statement about the accountability of the Christian community as a movement within history, whose claim to be faithful to her

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[58] See John Howard Yoder, "Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism," in *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (ed. Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy, and Mark Nation; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 77-90, 312-317. All further citations of Yoder's work in this chapter will appear without authorial attribution.

[59] *The Fullness of Christ: Paul's Vision of Universal Ministry* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1987).

[60] *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992).

[61] *To Hear the Word* (2nd ed.; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 81.

[62] Ibid., 86.

historical origins in the midst of historical change obliges her to identify the criteria of that accountability."[63] Continuity, therefore, is crucial: "If we are to be continuing the same movement, it will happen . . . by extending in a compatible way the process of conforming to the foundational events."[64] Because the canon is a founding and agreed-upon authority, it also impinges on churchly disunity, for "in each new circumstance" all ecclesial traditions "are responsible to return together to the bar of Scripture . . . because Scripture records the unique beginning of their diversity-in-unity as a movement through history, and thereby will continue to yield the models for processing their diversity and defining the limits of variation which that unity can tolerate."[65]

Thus, the church for Yoder is that community constituted by historical continuity with and textual accountability to its founding events and primal communities, by means of the authoritative witness of Christian Scripture.

2. *Christologically centered*. Yoder is explicit about his christocentrism: "For the radical Protestant there will always be a canon within the canon: namely, that recorded experience of practical moral reasoning in genuine human form that bears the name of Jesus."[66] The wider context of Yoder's statement is the question of the church's ethics, which for him is of course the heart of the matter: the church is nothing if it is not centered on its Lord in obedient discipleship that is faithful to his way in the world.

This claim ultimately has to do with the nature of the incarnation: "What becomes of the meaning of incarnation if Jesus is not normatively human?"[67] Indeed, according to Yoder

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[63] Ibid., 104.
[64] Ibid., 105.
[65] Ibid., 110.
[66] *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 37. See also, among other examples: "The ultimate canon within the canon must in the end, however, be the person of Jesus and, in a broader sense, the narration of the saving acts of God" (*To Hear*, 85).
[67] *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, 1994), 10.

"the ministry and the claims of Jesus are best understood as presenting to hearers and readers not the avoidance of political options, but one particular social-political-ethical option"; moreover, this "option" is "not only relevant but also *normative for a contemporary Christian social ethic*."[68]

The normativity of Jesus for the church's life is concentrated specifically on one aspect of his story: his renunciation of violence. For "pacifism is not the prophetic vocation of a few individuals, but [rather] every member of the body of Christ is called to absolute nonresistance in discipleship and to abandonment of all loyalties which counter that obedience."[69] The call to discipleship is thus not limited to any one subset of the church, but extends to the entire community by definition, for "the Church cannot but be a disciplined fellowship of those who confess that, if there be one faith, one body, one hope, there must also be one obedience; that God's will may be known in the church and commitment to its application expected of the church's members."[70]

Thus, the church for Yoder is that community of nonviolent discipleship centered on and normed by the person and politics of Jesus of Nazareth,[71] the crucified and risen Lord of all.[72]

3. *Pneumatologically empowered*. The church is the arena of Christian ethics not only because the church consists of followers of Jesus, but also because the church is the sphere of the power of the Holy Spirit—which for Yoder is only a different way of saying the same

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[68] Ibid., 11 (emphasis mine).

[69] *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1971), 72.

[70] *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical* (ed. Michael G. Cartwright; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), 228 (inconsistency in the capitalization of "church" is original to the text).

[71] The centrality of Jesus is for Yoder a matter not only of ethics, but of truth itself, for "[t]he point is not that all the truth is in Jesus or in the Bible. It is that the truth that is in Jesus is the truth that matters the most, which must therefore regulate our reception and recognition of other kinds and levels of truth rather than being set in parallel or subordinated thereto" (*To Hear*, 90).

[72] The importance of Jesus' resurrection and lordship will become evident in the discussion of apocalyptic.

thing. Christian ethics—the life of enacted discipleship—is meant not for Kant's universalized everyman, but for those called Christian, precisely because it is *impossible* to expect from those without the empowering presence of the Spirit. When governed by the Enlightenment's moral assumptions and so confused about "the *agent* of Christian ethics . . . the church will teach ethics not for those who possess the power of the Holy Spirit and an enabling hope but for those whose Christianity is conformity."[73] To the contrary, the church may obey Christ because Christ's Spirit enables it to do so.

The Spirit is not only a force for moral empowerment; the church's gathered worship and communal discernment are intrinsically pneumatological. A running theme in Yoder's writings is the practice he calls the "rule of Paul." This procedure details the way in which the gathered body seeks the will of God in the name of Jesus through the willingness to listen to anyone who has "a word from the Lord." By means of this open meeting, the assembly trusts that the Spirit will so work as to reveal God's will in the matter *and* to bring the community to unity regarding the proper action to be taken. The church is able to have radical trust that the process will work—indeed, that it will not devolve merely into a cacophony of personal interests or sinful disunity—"because Jesus Christ is always and everywhere the same, [and] any procedure that yields sovereignty to the direction of his spirit will have ultimately to create unity."[74] Put differently: "Because God the Spirit speaks in the meeting, conversation is the setting for truth-finding."[75]

Finally, the church is made up of baptized believers with gifts given them—*all of them*—by the Spirit for the good of the community. Uncontroversial in itself, Yoder takes

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[73] *Original*, 78.

[74] *Body*, 70. Cf. what Yoder says earlier in the same chapter: "Until everyone with something to say has had the floor and until those who care have talked themselves out, the Spirit's will is not clearly known" (*Body*, 68).

[75] Ibid.

this claim further than many others. Whereas some construe a difference between "clergy" and "lay," or between "charismatic" and "uncharismatic," Yoder says that "no function, no Christian, is non-charismatic; some charisma is flashy and some is not; some is for leading and some is for healing"; but *all* have "these gifts [which] are forms of dependence on the grace of God . . ., rather than privileged possession of a special personal enablement."[76]

Thus, the church for Yoder is the community of the Holy Spirit, empowered for obedience to Christ, gathered in communal discernment, and gifted individually for mutual edification.[77]

4. *Ecumenically oriented*. Yoder spoke and wrote about Christian unity and ecumenism so much that one need only pick out representative quotes with little addition to demonstrate his views. For example: "The unity of Christians is a *theological* imperative first of all in the sense that its reasons arise out of the basic truth commitments of the gospel and the church's intrinsic mission." Moreover, "it is a Christological imperative: it has to do with who Jesus is." In fact, Yoder can go so far as to say that "[w]here Christians are not united, the gospel is not true in that place."[78] Put in less drastic and more concrete terms, "the functional meaning of church unity is not that people agree and, therefore, work together but that where they disagree they recognize the need to talk together with a view to reconciliation."[79]

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[76] *Fullness*, 31, 33.

[77] See also Yoder's remarkable statements about the Spirit in *For the Nations: Essays Public & Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 228-233, where he repeatedly contrasts "the politics of rebellious mankind" with the politics enabled by "the Spirit of God," inasmuch as "the believing community *as a structured entity*, i.e., as *political*, is a foretaste, a testing ground, and a model of the Spirit's sociopolitical work" (228).

[78] *Royal*, 291.

[79] *Royal*, 292.

Unity is thus not merely a goal or a static end hoped for; it is a call to action.[80] However, the church's unity—and its consequent catholicity—must come about according to its own peculiar politics received from Jesus. Yoder identifies three defining "marks" of discovering and implementing true catholicity: first, "renouncing any of the tools of privilege and power in defining it"; second, "the affirmation of reformation as a constant need"; and third, "the functional definition of faith must be local; it must occur in each place freely."[81] In this way "[c]atholic existence will not be achieved by one decisive act but asymptotically, cumulatively, through communication processes that fulfill more or less our common calling."[82]

Thus, the church for Yoder is the one catholic people of God called to unity as a divine imperative and so as an ongoing task to be implemented through reformation and conversation.[83]

5. *Apocalyptically minded*. The heart of Yoder's deployment of apocalyptic, and the centrality it obtains, is most compendiously seen in the closing paragraph of his 1988 essay, "Armaments and Eschatology":

> The point that apocalyptic makes is not only that people who wear crowns and who claim to foster justice by the sword are not as strong as they think—true as that is: we still sing, "O where are Kings and Empires now of old that went and came?" It is that people who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe. One does not come to that belief by reducing social process to mechanical and statistical models, nor by winning some of one's battles for the control of one's own corner of the fallen world. One comes to it by sharing the life of those who sing about the Resurrection of the slain Lamb.[84]

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[80] Not unlike the church's defectibility, discussed below as point number eight.

[81] Ibid., 314, 315.

[82] Ibid., 320.

[83] See the two essays by Yoder that conclude *Radical Ecumenicity: Pursuing Unity and Continuity after John Howard Yoder* (ed. John C. Nugent; Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2010), 193-221.

[84] "Armaments and Eschatology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 1 (1988): 58. This quote has been made famous by its use as an epigraph to Stanley Hauerwas's *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), 6. Cf. Yoder's rhetorically similar comment in *Original*, 159: "We are not marching to Zion because we think that by our own momentum we can get there. But that is still where we are going. We are marching to Zion because, when God lets down from heaven the new

As Nathan Kerr comments, " 'apocalyptic' for Yoder names the particular operation of God's 'transcendence' and of God's 'Kingdom' *within* history, on the basis of its having *broken into* history *from beyond*." Moreover, apocalyptic is not merely an "event back there" with no import for today or for the church's ongoing life; rather, "apocalyptic is fundamentally an 'idiom' or 'style' of living and thinking history as eschatologically oriented."[85] This idiom of apocalyptic names Yoder's fundamental way of discerning history and the church's life therein.

On the one hand, then, it follows that "the very existence of the church is its primary task. It is in itself a proclamation of the lordship of Christ to the powers from whose dominion the church has begun to be liberated."[86] From this perspective Yoder makes one of his boldest claims: "The ultimate meaning of history is to be found in the work of the church."[87]

On the other hand, "being the church" does not constitute a position of authority or privilege over others; rather, it calls the church to a servanthood willing to suffer for the sake of others—"not because it works, but because it anticipates the triumph of the Lamb that was slain."[88] In this way "believing behavior is seen as an effect and not only a cause," "a reflection of a victory already won as much as . . . a contribution to a future achievement."[89] Such a mode of life Yoder calls "seeing history doxologically,"[90] which trusts that, because "a

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Jerusalem prepared for us, we want to be the kind of persons and the kind of community that will not feel strange there."

[85] Nathan R. Kerr, *Christ, History, and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 135 (italics in original).

[86] *Politics*, 150.

[87] *Original*, 61.

[88] Ibid.

[89] *Nations*, 195.

[90] *Royal*, 135.

once slaughtered Lamb is now living,"[91] right action will be judged not according to "the predictable success before it but the resurrection behind it, not manipulation but praise."[92]

Thus, the church for Yoder is a community of apocalyptic patience, called and enabled, in the power and knowledge of the resurrection, to embody the New Age in the midst of the Old.

6. *Missionally dispersed*. It is axiomatic for Yoder that the church's "sent-ness"—its apostolicity in a second sense—is constitutive of its existence. The church is the church insofar as it is in mission,[93] dispersed among the nations; that is a given. But what is the purpose, what is the character of the church's mission? According to Yoder, it is to embody, in the church's life together, God's new and coming way, revealed in Jesus' pattern of life and in his death and resurrection; to live apocalyptically, that is, but *on behalf of* the world precisely as *an alternative to it*. This vision is "the original revolution": "the creation of a distinct community with its own deviant set of values and its coherent way of incarnating them."[94] In the midst of the old world, "The believing community is the new world on the way."[95]

The church is not, however, apolitical in contrast to "political" communities: "[t]he Christian community, like any community held together by commitment to important values,

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[91] Ibid., 128.

[92] Ibid., 137-38. Cf. what Yoder says about apocalyptic in *Nations*, 216: "[T]he future toward which the prophet knows God has already effectively begun to move the world is prefigured in the possibilities offered and to some modest extent fulfilled in the believing community. . . . The people of God are not a substitute or an escape from the whole world's being brought to the effective knowledge of divine righteousness; the believing community is the beginning, the pilot run, the bridgehead of the new world on the way. Its discourse may be called 'apocalyptic' if by that—without disregard for other meanings the term may have—we designate a portrayal of the way the world is being efficaciously called to do that does not let present empirical readings of possibility have the last word."

[93] For further discussion see Kerr, *Christ*, 161-196.

[94] *Original*, 28.

[95] *Nations*, 50.

is a political reality."[96] Therefore, "The difference between church and state or between a faithful and an unfaithful church is not that one is political and the other not, but that they are political in different ways."[97] And as one political community ("a structured social body"[98]) in the midst of others, the church is *politically paradigmatic*. "The alternative community discharges a modeling mission. The church is called to be now what the world is called to be ultimately,"[99] for "the will of God for human socialness as a whole is prefigured by the shape to which the Body of Christ is called."[100] "The church is thus not chaplain or priest to the powers running the world: she is called to be a microcosm of the wider society, not only as an idea, but also in her function."[101]

Moreover, the church's role is not limited to merely showing or evincing this alternative way, for it is a legitimate *offer* to the world—in the sense both of joining the life of the church and of modeling the world's own life on that of the church. On the one hand, because "[t]he calling of the people of God is . . . no different from the calling of all humanity" the church's challenge is "so to purify and clarify and exemplify [its witness] that the world can perceive it to be good news without having to learn a foreign language."[102] This is the practice of evangelism.[103] On the other hand, the fact that the church "will be a

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[96] *Body*, viii.
[97] Ibid., ix.
[98] Ibid., viii.
[99] *Priestly*, 92.
[100] *Body*, ix.
[101] *Priestly*, 92.
[102] *Nations*, 24.
[103] Yoder treats this issue delicately and superbly in his essay, " 'But We Do See Jesus': The Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth" (*Priestly*, 46-62), in which he argues for the historical contextuality of the missionary gospel and the inevitable particularity of truth claims. On the ground, this entails taking cultural raw materials for granted and then *reworking them* according to the logic of the gospel. For example: "To ask, 'Shall we talk in pluralist/relativist terms?' would be as silly as to ask in Greece, 'Shall we talk Greek?' The question is what we shall say." Thus: "We are now called to renew in the language world of pluralism/relativism an analogue to what those first transcultural reconceptualizers [that is, the apostles and writers of the New Testament] did; not to translate their results but to emulate their exercise" (56). For an explicitly Yoderian approach to evangelism, see Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007).

minority in society"[104] does not mean that a lack of mass conversion mitigates its relevance or efficacy, for "the order of the faith community constitutes a public offer to the entire society."[105] To take Yoder's favorite examples, the way the church mediates conflict (binding and loosing), integrates differences (baptism), shares financially (Eucharist), subverts power structures (universal giftedness), and makes decisions (open conversation) is in fact a model for other communities to learn from and imitate—and indeed, many have done so historically. This is the leaven of the church's social witness.[106]

Thus, the church for Yoder is the paradigmatic community of God's new and coming world, whose life and witness in mission among the nations offers a political alternative to other communities' ways of being, both as invitation to membership and as offer to appropriation.

7. *Congregationally defined.* According to Yoder, "The time is ripe for a restored insistence on the primacy of the local gathering as defining the reality of the church."[107] It is not mere locality that is crucial, though, but locating *authority* within each congregation,[108] and just so distinguishing discrete instantiations of the church from larger institutional structures as well as from host societies. Here Yoder is concerned with facets of the church's life he considers essential: its freedom, its voluntariness, its autonomy, its self-discipline, and its visibility. Each is an identifying aspect of the "free" or "believers" church.

The church must first of all be *free* to act according to its own faith and convictions, and this freedom entails refusal of "official" or "establishment" status in culture, which

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[104] *Original*, 39. And this "assumed" (39), as it "is not a statistical but a theological observation" (116).

[105] *Nations*, 27 (de-italicized). In context, Yoder is explicating a claim he finds in Barth, but with approval.

[106] See also *Priestly*, 151-195; *Nations*, 15-93; and (for concise example) *Royal*, 364: "The multiplicity of gifts is a model for the empowerment of the humble and the end of hierarchy in social process. Dialogue under the Holy Spirit is the ground floor of the notion of democracy. The admonition to bind or loose at the point of offense is the foundation for what now would be called conflict resolution and consciousness raising."

[107] *Royal*, 273.

[108] *Priestly*, 22-28.

status leads to the church's being co-opted by power structures alien to itself.[109] The structural consequence of this freedom is emphasis on the local congregation over against a generic or abstract "organization" of churches (itself only secondarily and ambiguously able to be called "church").[110] Disestablished and free, the church must, as a local gathering of confessing believers, be a *voluntary* association—coercion is absolutely foresworn, as is unconscious or undesired "soft" coercion such as infant baptism or automatic ecclesial membership as a result of national citizenship, being inimical to the gospel and a parody of the meaning of baptism.[111]

Per the local church's freedom, it must have *autonomy* in relation to broader ecumenical or doctrinal agreements and statements of faith.[112] No individual or group has final authority over (an)other congregation(s), for each is finally self-governing (and this from within, and equally: no *a priori* credentials required, and no distinction between clergy and lay).[113] This local self-governance takes the form of real communal *discipline*, such that, as persons freely choosing to belong to one another in conviction and practice, the community responds authoritatively—albeit in its own peculiar way—to deviance and deviation in its members' lives.[114]

Finally, all of these characteristics constitute the local church's *visibility*: the church is not a set of doctrines or a list of beliefs but a *locatable community of human persons*, whose particular practices set it apart.[115] These constitutive practices, sometimes called "sacraments," are human actions "in and with, through and under" which God acts

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[109] See *Priestly*, 80-101.
[110] See *Royal*, 232-241, 263-276.
[111] See *Body*, 28-46; *Royal*, 278-288.
[112] See Yoder's essay "Is There Historical Development of Theological Thought?" in *Radical Ecumenicity*, 223-235.
[113] See *Fullness*, 1-35.
[114] See *Body*, 1-13; *Royal*, 325-358.
[115] See *Royal*, 54-64, 297-99.

concurrently.[116] The local congregation may be known and identified by these practices, for it alone is authorized and enabled to enact them, in its life together, as God's own actions in and for the world.

Thus, the church is that local gathering of baptized believers in Christ—free, voluntary, autonomous, disciplined, visible—whose communal practices mark them out as God's people.

8. *Perpetually defectible*. In the course of the church's life among the nations—of its witnessing, in its corporate life, to the way of God revealed in Christ as found in Scripture—the church will inevitably fail, and indeed, inasmuch as it is made up of sinners in a fallen world, it is liable (though not destined!) to fail miserably and with terrible consequences.

On the one hand, this recognition strikes against the traditional doctrine of ecclesial indefectibility, that is, the teaching that the church cannot finally fail in some decisive way. Though of course the interpretation of the term is itself a matter of debate, for Yoder the church is not kept safe from "possible apostasy," for, in agreement with his forebears, "the Church, any church, including [our] own, is radically defectible."[117] Yoder goes still further: "Fundamental unfaithfulness within history is not only hypothetically possible; it has happened, and it is we who have done it."[118] As for Jesus' promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the *ekklesia* (Matt. 16:18): "The future of the Church is sure in the sense that God is a God who gives life to the dead. Yet the future of *our* church, that of any given community, enjoys no security."[119] God has simply not "given his people any such blank

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[116] *Body*, 72-73.

[117] *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 123.

[118] Ibid., 137.

[119] Ibid., 123.

cheque. Indefectibility belongs then only to his promise, never becoming negotiable as our appropriation of it."[120]

The church's defectibility is not cause for alarm, however. It is instead, like unity, a charge and a task. In order to check its temptation to idolatry and disobedience, the church is to return constantly to its roots in Scripture for refreshment, reproval, and rehabilitation. Yoder calls this ongoing process of reading the Bible as the church's constitutive authority a "looping back" or "reaching back",[121] an "appeal to a prior commonality against an innovation," for "Scripture comes on the scene not as a receptacle of all possible inspired truths, but rather as witness to the historical baseline of the communities' origins and thereby as link to the historicity of their Lord's past presence."[122] In this way "*Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* is not really a statement about the church" as much as "about the earlier tradition's permanent accessibility," such "that we are able, thanks to the combined gifts of teachers and prophets, to become aware that we do not do what it says, and that the dissonance we thereby create enables our renewal."[123] And in the event of unrecognizable distortion, of "fundamental unfaithfulness," even more must lamentably be called for. In that case, "The radical renew[al] of the Church must be not a mid-course correction but a new beginning, to correct for a fundamental wrong turn in the past."[124]

Thus, the church for Yoder is that community of (forgiven) sinners whose fallibility and historical embeddedness[125] are a charge to constant renewal by returning to Scripture.

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[120] Ibid., 140.
[121] *Priestly*, 71.
[122] Ibid., 69.
[123] Ibid., 70.
[124] *Schism*, 137.
[125] Note Yoder's comment that, insofar as "the historicity of the incarnation committed God to the particularity of an ongoing history," it is therefore "not a regrettable mistake of church strategy contrary to the divine plan, when we find ourselves needing to deal with the unfinished quality of the definition of the Christian story" (*To Hear*, 109).

And so we have come full circle, to the church's constitution and sustenance and renewal by the grounding scriptural witness. Having sketched the foundations and shape of Yoder's ecclesiology, we come next to his evaluation of and engagement with trinitarian theology.

II. Nominal But Peripheral Trinitarianism

In the broad scope of his published work, Yoder has four modes in which he makes reference to the Trinity or to trinitarian doctrine: (1) cursory or straightforward positive description; (2) peripheral or subordinate reference to substantiate an already argued or assumed point; (3) direct mention as a negative or ambiguous example of a larger point; and (4) significant reflection on the meaning of the incarnation. The first is quite rare, while the second and third occur often enough to be a pattern, though sparsely enough to avoid being thematic. The fourth happens a good deal, but often connected to the third tendency, which seriously mitigates its actual *trinitarian* character. Below, I will briefly offer examples of these four modes of indirect engagement, before moving on to analysis of Yoder's one sustained encounter with the doctrine.

Four Modes of Indirect Engagement

Yoder's first mode mostly consists of reference to "God the Spirit." For example: "Because God the Spirit speaks in the meeting, conversation is the setting for truth-finding";[126] or:

[126] *Body*, 70.

"dialogical freedom [is that] whereby God the Spirit brings her people to unity."[127] I am unaware of similar mention of "God the Son" in an uncritical or hortatory context.

In at least one place Yoder does make approving reference to the Trinity: "Catholicity . . . is a lived reality that will have its place or 'location' wherever all comers participate, in the power of the Triune God, in proclaiming to all nations (beginning where they are) all that Jesus taught."[128] Even here we must qualify, however, because Yoder's use of "the Triune God" is in an ecumenical speaking context *and* in discussion of the Great Commission, which of course is the location of the one undressed explicit reference to "the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19 rev.).[129] In the same essay, Yoder has already identified "five dimensions of universality" in "[t]he last words of the Gospel of Matthew," including the command "to baptize . . . in the Triune name."[130] The exception, in this case, seems to prove the rule. Unsurprisingly, in the rest of Yoder's corpus, God is rarely if ever named explicitly as Trinity or triune.[131]

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[127] *Royal*, 314. I confess myself fascinated by Yoder's unremarked use of the feminine pronoun for the Spirit; I assume that it is intentional, but I am not aware of his arguing for it or similar use of it in anywhere else.

[128] *Royal*, 320. The title of the essay is "Catholicity in Search of Location," and was delivered in honor of James Wm. McClendon Jr.'s departure from Church Divinity School of the Pacific in 1990.

[129] All quotations, unless otherwise specified, are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

[130] *Royal*, 309.

[131] One place in Yoder's oeuvre that demands mention is his penetrating and insightful (and, given the rest of his work, highly surprising) reading of the Creed in his 1991 essay "A Theological Critique of Violence," *The War of the Lamb* (ed. Glen Harold Stassen, Mark Thiessen Nation, Mark Hamsher; Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 38-40. In his use of the Creed—neither introduced nor explained—he approaches the wrongness of violence implicitly from what we might call the *perspectives* of Father, Son, and Spirit: "What is wrong with violence is that what is violated is a creature of the sovereign God" (38); "[C]onfessing Jesus Christ risen, ascended, and seated at the right hand of the Father meant, in the first century, that history *cannot* get out of hand." (39); "Th[e] third article is not just an addendum. All of this concrete reconciliation and community is the work of the Spirit, who is no less Godself than are the Father and the Son" (40). This latter language is a rarity in Yoder, though it is interesting that we find it again assigned to the Spirit. He cannot, however, leave his reading purely positive, and so goes on: "I said nothing until now about the human career of the Jesus of the Gospels, because the creed does not. The creed skips from Bethlehem to Golgotha, from Mary to Pilate. But of course the Gospels do not make that leap, nor did the real story. If there had not been the story in between, there would have been no creed. Because of the metaphysical invasion of our bespoken by the verb 'begotten,' there had to be the story in between, for which my name is *The Politics of Jesus*" (40).

The second mode is more common, but equally ambiguous. Yoder's pattern in this case is to make a point according to the logic of his argument or alternative position, and *then* to suggest that, whatever else the Trinity means, it corroborates or secondarily affirms his otherwise achieved point. An oft-repeated instance of this tact is discussion of the Christ Hymn of Phil. 2:6-11. Yoder questions the dominant reading of this text, preferring to read it in terms of the human Jesus' decision (in the wilderness and/or Gethsemane) to forsake the way of the sword for the way of the cross. On this reading, the "form of God" is akin to the "image of God," alluding to Adam's former *wrong* decision in a different garden, and Jesus' *kenosis* is a movement not from divine to human but from powerful to weak, from ruling to serving. However, when Yoder allows the traditional reading, his language is such that one *does* get to the point of the Hymn through divine condescension of the preexistent Son, though the route is unnecessary, even potentially misleading. Instances of this mode abound.[132]

The third mode is a kind of bad habit, in which Yoder makes pejorative or dismissive reference to the Trinity or some other synecdoche for it, whether Nicaea or creeds or councils or metaphysics or philosophy.[133] The doctrine by whatever name is evoked as a conceptual bogeyman[134] whose entry into the Christian tradition constitutes a serious

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[132] With reference only to the Christ Hymn, see *Politics*, 119-122; *Priestly*, 52; *Preface*, 79-88; *He Came Preaching Peace* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985, 2004), 89-95.

[133] To take a random example: in his essay, "Primitivism in the Radical Reformation: Strengths and Weaknesses," in *The Primitive Church in the Modern World* (ed. Richard T. Hughes; Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 74-97, Yoder is discussing (76) the way in which the "paradox" of one-time radical traditions becoming conservative over time and appealing to the "old-time religion" of their predecessors. He observes that this is "not peculiar to the Baptists and their like. The majority of the people who characterize themselves as 'catholic' (Roman or otherwise) hold no less to components of tradition as if these practices had always been the same, which, however, were in fact novel when they first were adopted." One of Yoder's three ready-at-hand examples is phrased thus: "Celebrating Constantine and *imposing dogmas by imperial 'ecumenical' councils* were brand new in the fourth [century]" (emphasis mine). Note especially the scare quotes around "ecumenical."

[134] For example, "the 'essentialist' mode of Greek thought": "A major debate during the early Christian centuries had to do with the relationship between the divine 'nature' and the human 'nature' within Jesus Christ. Because these two 'natures' or essences were by their very definition incompatible with one

diversion from the mission and faith of the church, if not a profound error in need of correction. It is hard to know—as with Yoder's scattered comments about Constantine[135] and Augustine[136]—how seriously to take some of these statements, given their context or state of publication; Yoder, like all academics engaged also in popular spheres of discourse, has his more and his less nuanced moments. The overall sense, however, is that, at least in unguarded moments, Yoder's attitude toward the doctrine of the Trinity varies on a continuum from an arm's-length affirmation, to a flat neutrality, to outright disapproval, primarily because of what it signifies historically for him.

The fourth mode is reflection on the meaning and import of the incarnation. Here Yoder enters repeatedly and in detail, for (unexceptionably) he sees it as the heart of Christian faith, the consequences of which redound especially in matters of ethics, biblical interpretation, and ecclesiology. For example, he asks in an ethical mode: "What becomes of the meaning of incarnation if Jesus is not normatively human? If he is human but not normative, is this not the ancient ebionitic heresy? If he be somehow authoritative but not in his humanness, is this not a new gnosticism?"[137] He later goes on to elaborate:

> 'Incarnation' does not originally mean (as it tends to today in some theologies of history, and in some kinds of Anglican theology) that God took all of human nature as it was, put his seal of approval on it, and thereby ratified nature as revelation. The

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another, they could not be present in the same person. One series of debates around the theme 'Trinity,' rounded off in the fourth century, and the second series about the 'two natures' during the next two centuries were the product of the incapacity of the Greek conceptuality to deal with personality and individuality otherwise than by reducing them to the application of general categories" (*To Hear*, 170, 170-71).

[135] See, e.g., *Schism*, 137-138, 155, 170, 171, 192; *Original*, 65, 67, 112, 116, 120, 142; *Priestly*, 74, 82, 107, 119, 129, 135-147, 157, 165, 174, 18, 201, 209. Note Peter Leithart's recent book *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic Press, 2010), which takes Yoder as its chief objection of criticism, as well as Jon Nugent's response, " 'Trial and Error': A Yoderian Rejoinder to Leithart's *Defending Constantine*," *Englewood Review of Books*, online: http://erb.kingdomnow.org/featured-a-yoderian-rejoinder-to-leitharts-defending-constantine-vol-3-46/ (December 17, 2010).

[136] See, e.g., *Schism*, 81, 122, 160; *Royal*, 57, 58, 62, 89, 154, 214n, 245; *Priestly*, 75, 79, 183; *Original*, 66; *Preface*, 206, 231-232, 266, 278, 361, 383. As a sample: "It is true that Augustine did organize his historic vision around two cities, one of them celestial: but that was because he was a Neo-Platonist, not because he was Christian" (*Schism*, 160). Not everything Yoder says about Augustine is so polemical or biting, but much of it is.

[137] *Politics*, 10.

> point is just the opposite; that God broke through the borders of our standard definition of what is human, and gave a new, formative definition in Jesus. 'Trinity' did not originally mean, as it does for some later, that there are three kinds of revelation, the Father speaking through creation and the Spirit through experience, by which the words and example of the Son must be corrected; it meant rather that language must be found and definitions created so that Christians, who believe in only one God, can affirm that that God is most adequately and bindingly known in Jesus.[138]

Yoder rejoins, to the contrary of those who would question the orthodoxy of his politically normative presentation of Jesus, "that the view of Jesus being proposed here is more radically Nicene and Chalcedonian than other views."[139] In fact, he is not "here advocat[ing] an unheard-of modern understanding of Jesus," but "ask[ing] rather that the implications of what the church has always said about Jesus as Word of the Father, as true God and true Human, be taken more seriously, as relevant to our social problems, than ever before."[140] The church need not, then, "choose between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of dogma," for "[t]he Jesus of history is the Christ of faith. . . . In him the sovereignty of YHWH has become human history."[141]

Three things are important to note here. First, just as in the second mode, Yoder subtly offers no actual *judgment* on the decisions of Nicaea or Chalcedon, much less on the doctrine of the Trinity or that of Christ's two natures, but merely denies that he is negating them and submits that his argument—albeit by other means—supports and fills out what those formulations say in other words. Second, Yoder comes to these doctrines through an *ethical lens*,[142] inquiring into their moral cash-out and the way they have been used in the past

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[138] Ibid., 99.
[139] Ibid., 102.
[140] Ibid., 102.
[141] Ibid., 103-4 (the first quotation has been de-italicized).
[142] A superlative example is found in Yoder's 1991 essay "Politics: Liberating Images of Christ": "Trinitarianism evolves historically . . . *not* as a 'constructive' or 'imaginative' elaboration of a speculative metaphysic, but as the defense of the normativeness of Jesus. When understood in the context of the polemic of the time, that development, which ultimately let to the notion of a Triune God, is, not a dilution but a defense of the radically anti-iconic Mosaic monotheism within which it was born. It is not a mental *tour de force*,

to justify a- or un-christological modes of ethical reasoning.[143] Third, the very last quote, about as close as one can come to saying "God became human" or "Jesus is God," *yet remains* a kind of poetic circumlocution of the direct claim. This is an important and habitual feature of Yoder's reflections on the incarnation: he hesitates, if only at the last moment, to use language that, however popular in the tradition, seems to him unwarranted, unnecessary, abstract, dangerously ahistorical, and/or unbiblical—whether or not he would affirm the force of the claim itself.[144]

Before we move on to Yoder's most direct commentary on the heritage of Nicaea, it is important to make as clear as possible that this investigation is *not* about Yoder's (personal or potential) orthodoxy. Others have debated that question,[145] and however legitimate an enterprise it may be, it is not the purpose of the present study. Rather, I am concerned to locate Yoder's actual stated comments about the doctrine of the Trinity, and all its attendant legacy and meaning, in order to understand better why it is largely absent in his work and to offer suggestions for its integration into his ecclesiological vision. In any case, asking after Yoder's orthodoxy is finally a question of ecclesiology, since his church—in life and in

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stretching a hard-to-believe mathematical miracle. It is, rather, a lexical rule to defend at the same time as Hebraic monotheism and the normativeness of Jesus. Only later, when *incarnation* and *trinity* were taken over by Hellenistic speculators and alienated from the Mosaic heritage, did those notions take the shape that was later to seem to Jews, then to Muslims, and more recently to Western Unitarians and rationalists, to sell out the prophetic monotheism, as it seemed to others to constitute a precedent for unaccountable speculative reformulation" (*War of the Lamb*, 173).

[143] H. Richard Niebuhr is of course in view here. See also, in a similar ethical vein, his statement in *Nations*, 138: "This [trust in God's lordship over history] is then the immediate political pertinence, in a situation of frustration, of confessing with the Creed that it is Jesus who for us and who for our liberation was made human."

[144] A wonderful example is found in *Politics*, 246, where Yoder calls Jesus "both the Word . . . and the Lord" "of the cosmos." Two similarly biblical instances reside in another essay: "If Jesus, accepting the cross, is the icon of the invisible God, then our participation in that same love is at the heart of the transformation of humankind into that same image"; "Who can liberate is only the authentic image of the gospel vision: Jesus the nonviolent Jew, confessed as revelatory, God enfleshed" (*War of the Lamb*, 177-178, 180). In a more popular context, Yoder puts it this way: Christians "believe that when God acts among us . . . he takes the shape of Jesus" (*Preaching*, 66); and, in almost perfectly summary form: "What [incarnation] means is that God acted in a totally human way, and unhesitatingly entrusted his own cause to the hands of ordinary people" (72).

[145] Among them, A. James Reimer and Craig Carter; see the discussion of Carter's book below.

thought—was and is non-creedal and non-conciliar, which means that his status as orthodox is contingent upon his church's status as orthodox. I assume Yoder would have it no other way.

But now, finally, to Yoder's formal treatment of trinitarian doctrine.

Trinitarian Theology in Historical Perspective

For more than fifteen years, "from the early 1960's through the spring of 1981,"[146] Yoder taught courses in systematic theology and its history at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. His mimeographed lectures were available there by the late 1960s, with a later version housed at Duke Divinity School in the early 1980s, but they were not edited and published officially until 2002, five years after Yoder's death, as *Preface to Theology: Christology and Method*. Though Yoder's authorization of his lectures' use by others similarly authorizes our own use of them, the context of their current published form ought to temper our reading for three reasons.

First, Yoder did not have final say in the editing process, and there may have been a reason why he did not (over the course of three decades) seek to have them published. Second, they are lecture notes; speaking and teaching to students in a classroom setting is a significantly different context than communicating to peers in the guild. Third, the environment in which Yoder was teaching was *in-house*, that is, internal to the world of Mennonites and the Anabaptist heritage. Just as he was attempting to impute an appreciation of theology and the theological tradition into students within his own Radical Reformation heritage, he also shared many of their assumptions regarding the validity or quality of pieces

[146] *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002), 11. For the broader telling of the history behind the text, see 9-15.

of the tradition other Christians may value much higher than they. These qualifications should help us in our reading, not to take Yoder's words *less* seriously, but to sift and interpret them appropriately, according to their context.

To begin, Yoder walks through the history of the centuries following the apostolic period, and sympathizes with the difficult questions Christians faced at that time. Because the early church was still predominantly made up of Jews, and so did not conceive of God as a "philosophical Absolute or unique metaphysical being irreconcilable with this one man Jesus" but as "the God of their story, the YHWH of Old Testament history," they were therefore "not bothered by the philosophical difficulty of putting *this* absolute deity together with the humanity of Jesus."[147] However, "as the Jewish background receded and the church became" increasingly gentile—more specifically, "Greek"—in ethnicity, culture, language, and thought, "then the problem of relating this jealous and zealous monotheism of biblical faith with a high view of Jesus arose. Is there one God after all or are there two? Three? How do we connect Jesus with the only God?"[148] Yoder isolates "two lines of thought," each equally problematic: "We can say strong things about Jesus, but then we have a potential threat to monotheism, or we can say strong things about the Father and then deal with the problems of how real Jesus could be and how necessary his work can be."[149] Looking back, this problem is nothing to scoff at:

> This is an intellectual problem. A problem we have because of words. You could say that if we refused to use the words we have been using we might not have the problem, but the church of the second and third century had to use their words. We have to respect the problem they had with their words even if we come to the conclusion that we have better words and do not need to stumble in the same way.[150]

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[147] Ibid., 183.
[148] Ibid., 183.
[149] Ibid., 186.
[150] Ibid., 186.

Having set up the problem in its historical context, Yoder comes to the doctrine itself. In his estimation, "The doctrine of the Trinity in a very simple sense is just a set of rules about which . . . words you use for what."[151] So trinitarian doctrine is primarily linguistic: "To be quite simple, the doctrine of the Trinity in Greek simply means that you use the word *hypostasis* for what there are three of. Then you use the word *ousia* for what there is one of."[152] Is this linguistic "set of rules" a sufficient or legitimate solution, then? "The solution . . . is a mere verbal formality, but it is a verbal formality that meets a need and answers a question. It safeguards the New Testament content with at least a degree of success in a quite different thought world."[153]

Here we might expect finally to hear Yoder's critique. But he has still more affirming words, chiefly concerning "the New Testament content," namely "that Jesus, the Word in Jesus, is genuinely of the character of deity and genuinely human, and that his work is the work of God and yet the work of a man. The Nicenes try to say this not in narrative but in ontological and philosophical language."[154] Understood in context and over against uncharitable interpretations, "this is a way to affirm the love of God," "the way to say 'love,' in the language of ontology," "the way to make the statement that God's being among us is free grace."[155] Indeed, "[t]his new definition avoids" the dangers of Arian's "ma[king] Christ a halfway thing" and of Sabellius' "ma[king] Christ a transient thing," for "Christ is not just a

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[151] Ibid., 200

[152] Ibid.

[153] Ibid. Note the distancing rhetoric: "at least a degree of . . ."; "in a quite different . . ."

[154] Ibid., 201-2. Note again: rather than create the obvious parallelism of saying that Jesus is "genuinely *God/divine* and genuinely human," Yoder qualifies his rhetoric: "genuinely *of the character of deity*." Why?

[155] Ibid., 202.

transient thing, but REAL. He is not just a mixture, but this divine *hypostasis* genuinely became a man."[156]

Having made these conceptual and historical moves to put himself and his students in the place of "the Nicenes" and their followers, Yoder shifts to his critique. His first point is that, while the metaphysical language adopted in the fourth century is "defending a biblical concern in nonbiblical language," it nonetheless remains that "*in form* we are moving farther and farther away from the Gospel story," such that "one recognizes no narrative to it anymore."[157] Indeed, "with Nicea we are still moving away from the biblical center in mood, in style, in content."[158]

The next step away from the center, according to Yoder, is the notion that the doctrine of the Trinity "was given us by special supernatural revelation," or worse, "that God's self-revelation of threeness-in-oneness is *itself* something that saves us."[159] "As a matter of fact," Yoder says, "it was not given us by revelation," but "is something the Cappadocians figured out in the fourth century."[160] The Trinity is a consequence of prior assent to the authority of Scripture, and so "not itself a revealed truth, but the solution to the word problem we get into when we accept revelation in Jesus, the continuance of that revelation in the Holy Spirit, and hold to monotheism at the same time."[161] In sum,

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[156] Ibid.

[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid. Given what we know of Yoder's theological perspective, it would be difficult to imagine a more devastating critique, here stated as a would-be innocent descriptive statement.

[159] Ibid., 203.

[160] Ibid., 204.

[161] Ibid. Yoder's phrasing here—"the continuance of that revelation in the Holy Spirit"—is a curiously suggestive choice of words, and echoes other similar statements, like that found in *Preface*, 379: "The New Testament church did not assume that the truth was all in the teachings of Jesus or in the teachings about Jesus. It is assumed that truth will continue to come and that *new revelations, new workings of the Spirit, will continue*. . . . No one thought the truth was all settled" (emphasis mine). Hints of a thicker pneumatology with regard to time and revelation, or—given that he goes on to say that these new workings must be "tested by their link to the core message, the Jesus story" (379)—simply another way of locating continuity between Calvary and Pentecost?

> The doctrine of the Trinity is a test of whether your commitments to Jesus and to God are biblical enough that you have the problem the doctrine of the Trinity solves. It may be that there will be other solutions, words, phrasings or ways to avoid tripping over the problem the way the Greeks did. But we shall have to examine them with the same commitment to the man Jesus, and the same commitment to the unique God that they had, or else we shall have left the Christian family.[162]

Thus, on the one hand, Yoder affirms *the problem* the Trinity purports to solve, such that the commitments the problem springs from are essential to Christian faith. The doctrine as such, on the other hand, while culturally comprehensible, is temporally confined and so requires reformulation (or, just as likely, replacement) in succeeding generations. In any case, it is certainly not binding on believers across disparate times and places.

This brings us to the question of creeds. As we have seen, Yoder believes "the problem the doctrine of the Trinity seeks to resolve . . . is a problem Christians will always face if they are Christian."[163] Inasmuch as the church in the fourth century faced a particular challenge with creativity and biblical fortitude, the formulation of the Trinity at that time was an honorable and worthy achievement. Does it, then, in the form of the Nicene Creed, have abiding authority over believers? Given the questionable politics of the councils and the parochial Hellenic thought inscribed by them, "we have to be dubious about giving this movement any authority," needing ultimately "to challenge whether the creed does us much good."[164] In agreement with his earlier claim, Yoder concludes that, having only "provided the best answer to an intellectual problem," Nicene "doctrine is not authoritative, but the claims of Jesus who creates the problem are. [It] is not supernatural truth, supernaturally communicated for its information value."[165]

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[162] Ibid.

[163] Ibid.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid., 205. What this means, given what Yoder says elsewhere about revelation, truth, and Scripture—in, e.g., the two central essays of *To Hear*, 77-119—is entirely unclear. I will address this inconsistency in Chapter 4.

Two attitudes or lines of interpretation of the creeds seem to have emerged, centering on issues of historical contingency, biblical authority, political compromise, and missionary cultural engagement. On the one hand, the entire creedal process "is valid because it reflects the serious struggle of people, within their language and culture, with their commitment to an absolute God and to a normative Jesus."[166] Non-creedal believers should therefore remain "quite interested in listening to [the creedal] history, learning from it, and sympathizing deeply with what it tried to say," for "[t]he creeds are part of the only history we have."[167] Albeit "a fallible history and a confused history," "this is the history with which God has chosen to lead a confused people toward at least a degree of understanding of certain dangers and things not to say if we are to remain faithful."[168] In this way, Yoder can affirm that "these creeds fruitfully define the nature of the problem with which we are struggling. They are helpful as a fence, but not as a faith."[169]

On the other hand, the creeds simply are not and cannot be authoritative for the church. Why give "special importance to the fact that the church . . . made decisions about phrasing in the fourth of fifth century"?[170] Should the church "take over from fundamentalism . . . the idea that there is a certain amount of post-biblical dogmatic substance that all true Christians have to believe?"[171] The church rightly responded to the challenge of speaking the gospel "in the terms of the culture in which they were speaking," "solving a problem that came out of the encounter of different frames of reference and sets of definitions."[172] But a historically locatable and now past missionary encounter can neither

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166 Ibid.
167 Ibid., 223.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid.
170 Ibid., 222.
171 Ibid., 223.
172 Ibid., 219.

usurp the authority of Scripture nor take an equal place alongside it. And this is not even to mention what is most damning in Yoder's eyes: imperial power wedded to an ecclesial decision of faith. On one side, the Council was presided over by a man who "was not yet a baptized member of the church,"[173] and on the other, those who were anathematized were often "less nationalistic, less politically bound to the Roman Empire, more capable of criticizing the emperor, more vital in missionary growth, more ethical, and more biblicist than the so-called orthodox churches of the Empire."[174]

In short, the creeds are temporarily useful (or at least understandable) in particular contexts, but not as lasting authorities or binding dogmas. Specifically trinitarian doctrine as creedally promulgated is therefore neither authoritative for nor central to Christian faith, though the problem it seeks to solve (in Greek philosophical terms) is sure to remain with the church in every cultural context.[175]

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[173] Ibid., 197.

[174] Ibid., 223.

[175] For those familiar with Craig Carter's book, *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder*, my conclusion here stands in serious disagreement with his thesis. It is Carter's stated "conviction that Yoder's work shows us how the trinitarian and christological orthodoxy of the fourth and fifth centuries contains the key to the survival and flourishing of the church's witness to Jesus Christ in the post-Christendom era that is now dawning" (23). Accordingly, in Yoder we find "a thinker . . . who has a deep respect for the creeds and historic Christian orthodoxy," such that "he argues from the Bible and classic trinitarian and christological creedal orthodoxy for his radical position" (17). Similar statements abound: "In appealing to the classic doctrines of the Trinity and incarnation, Yoder is seeking to derive ethical implications from them" (79); "In short [summarizing Yoder's position], the Trinity guards and expresses biblical truth that is essential to Christian faith" (119); "The authority of the creeds [for Yoder] is not equal to that of Scripture, but the creeds express truth precisely because they are biblical" (134). At times Carter recognizes the difficulty of his claims and makes more nuanced statements: "Yoder does theology with what could be called a 'practical trinitarianism,' that is, by means of assertions that depend for their coherence on the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity" (126); "Yoder sometimes sounds less than fully accepting of the creeds" (133), but "there is solid textual evidence in Yoder's writings for interpreting Yoder himself as holding to a solidly orthodox Christology" (135). Apart from these, however, Carter's enormous claims made *on behalf of* Yoder overwhelm his more understated qualifications. That Yoder's theological vision is fertile soil for teasing out and constructively proposing a Yoderian approach *to* trinitarian doctrine—this much we can happily endorse as borne out by his writings, and the present work is a step in just that direction. That Yoder himself and in his work held to and worked out of a strong or explicit trinitarian perspective—this is to claim a good deal too much, as I have already demonstrated in my explication above.

III. Underlying Anabaptist Hesitations Regarding the Trinity

Having seen the contours of Yoder's vision of the church set in relation to his evaluation and uses of trinitarian doctrine and creedal authority, it will be helpful to conclude by unearthing some of the theological premises funding his perspective. Most helpful in this regard is to look at the ways in which Yoder's Anabaptist heritage informs his views, both explicitly and implicitly, with the purpose not of reducing his arguments and convictions to a traditioned determinism, but of placing him in his context and isolating the resources of thought from which he draws for his arguments. In this sense the question is not "What does Anabaptism say about all this?" but rather "How does Anabaptism inform and shape and undergird this particular Mennonite's views?" Because Yoder's lifetime project was so to position the Anabaptist tradition vis-à-vis the ecumene that the wider church could learn from it (and vice versa), I see this approach as consonant with Yoder's own understanding of critical ecumenical and theological inquiry.

First, from his Anabaptist roots Yoder inherited and appropriated a lasting emphasis on *the decisive authority of Scripture*. In a sense, all else that follows can be traced back to this point, for matters of history, power, extra-biblical authorities, ecumenism, and the shape of the church ultimately return to the question of what it is that is norming the church's decisions over time. And if Scripture is "operationally defined as witness from/to a norming past, of such quality that the voices from that thus-recognized past can stand in judgment upon later betrayals of their story,"[176] everything that follows must be submitted to this "judgment" as a possible "later betrayal" of the originating events of the community's existence and identity. Even if it is not a betrayal—say, in the particular context of fourth century Greek philosophical thinking—then that is only a discernment proper to its time and

[176] *Nations*, 82.

place, and by definition not binding for other times and places or for one's status as a member of the church.

This observation leads to a second accent Yoder received from his heritage, which is a sustained insistence on *the provisional nature of contingent historical decisions*. In his evaluation of creedal authority, Yoder shares a traditional story that reflects this emphasis well. Imprisoned together in the 16th century, "a Catholic priest and three Anabaptist women" have a conversation about their respective beliefs. After some frustrating answers on the part of the women, the priest exasperatedly asks whether they "believe in the Apostolic Creed." Admittedly, on a popular level Anabaptists generally assented to the Apostolic Creed, colloquially referred to simply as "*Der Glaube*" ("The Faith"). But the women's response is telling: "When did Jesus say that?"[177] This points up the authority ascribed to the Bible, but manifests also the conventional Anabaptist distrust of whatever has come *after* the Apostles—however agreeable a statement or appropriate a document or faithful a creed—simply by reason of its being post-biblical.

The next inherited piece, no less a matter of family resemblance, is an attitude Yoder not only shares and assumes but actively propagates, namely, *a disciplined distrust of ecclesial decisions after Constantine*. In speaking of the Radical Reformation,[178] he often differentiates it from the so-called Magisterial Reformation by specifying where each located the point of "the fall of the church." The latter found it somewhere in the millennium after the fourth century—whether in the centralization of papal power, or the shift to magisterial teaching authority, or the understanding of sacrifice in the Mass—and thus retained the Catholic Church's position regarding imperial power, ecclesiastical structure, infant baptism, creedal

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[177] *Preface*, 222.
[178] *Priestly*, 105-108, 123-147; *Schism*, 72-75, 105-108, 121-122, 133-139.

orthodoxy, and so on. The Radical Reformers, on the other hand, dated the church's fall precisely *to* the historic decisions and changes of the fourth century (along with the shifts and fault lines leading up to it), such that creed and sword, bishop and emperor, paedobaptism and state religion were inextricably intertwined. To proclaim *sola scriptura* in the service of the church's renewal necessarily entailed rejection, therefore, at least of the *authority* of post-Constantinian ecclesial decisions, if not also of their wisdom and truth entirely, conjoined to a lasting distrust for magisterial decision-making in general.

The flip side of the Anabaptist distrust of elitist authoritarianism after Constantine is the tradition's understanding of *the local gathering as the primary ecclesial unit and final arbiter of spiritual discernment*. Each congregation is itself an autonomous laboratory of the gospel, subject to "fraternal admonition and counsel from sisters churches," to be sure, but alone authorized, accountable, and able, *as a community*, to be faithful to its professed Lord or, *as a community*, to apostatize.[179] This never-ending task and process should occur locally by the leading of the Holy Spirit ("a permanent Presence in the church"[180]) and under the authority of Scripture (whose "nucleus . . . is the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ"[181]). For this reason "no creed or council, synod or bishop may stand in judgment over the congregation as in each age and in each place men gather around the Bible and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."[182] These words of Yoder were specifically composed to be spoken to fellow Mennonites in an ecumenical context, and so represent a distillation of Anabaptist thought regarding congregationalism over against magisterial or top-down authority in matters of faith and practice.

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[179] "Is There Historical Development of Theological Thought?" in *Radical Ecumenicity*, 235.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid., 234.
[182] Ibid., 235.

Mention of ecumenism raises the issue of unity, which is another aspect of Yoder's underlying Anabaptist impulse: *the imperative of working for unity "from below."* If Scripture is the common unifying basis between different congregations (being the basic and most primary ecclesial unit) and, accordingly, trans-congregational authorities' contingent historical decisions are highly qualified, then the only way to work toward the oneness of the universal church is from one local gathering to another, from this community to that one, from "us here" to "y'all there." This is a defining feature of the Radical Reformation churches that goes against the predominating ecumenical grain. For example, in response to the highly acclaimed "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" document produced in 1982, Yoder speaks from "a 'free church' perspective" when he protests that "[t]he family of communions who by conviction are without central episcopacy and confessional documents are at a disadvantage in conversational processes based on those components of ecclesiological and ecclesiastical identity."[183] As a Mennonite rooted in his tradition, Yoder saw the ecumenical task located at the local level in face-to-face interactions, not at the level of international agreements between professional elites.[184]

Finally, Yoder shares the Anabaptist *suspicion of tendencies toward abstraction*. Here we can see a fortuitous affinity with Yoder's training as a historian (events, facts, testimony), ethicist (actions, practices, decisions), and exegete (texts, documents, application). Where, his tradition taught him to ask, do philosophy, ontology, and metaphysics play out on the ground? Why ask whether "everyone" can live a certain way? Whence the pressure to commit to a single "meta" or all-encompassing theoretical framework?[185] With his tradition, Yoder deems the propensity to focus on the abstract as contradictory to the biblical

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[183] *Royal*, 279.

[184] A chief resource here is Yoder's final completed and published article (to have been delivered the month following his death), "On Christian Unity: The Way From Below," *Pro Ecclesia* 9 (2000): 165-183.

[185] Note again his important essay "Walk and Word," in *Theology Without Foundations*, especially 83-90.

worldview, where the concrete soil of communal life and contested decisions and remembered history take center stage, a perspective which ought to prove primary also for believers.[186]

These six aspects of historic Anabaptist thought are so interwoven in Yoder's work that they are difficult to extrapolate without simply repeating Yoder's stated positions on the issues in question. It is thus not without reason that the above exploration comes close to a recapitulation of the prior (more detailed) analyses of Yoder's ecclesiology and of his understanding of post-biblical development. However, I think it important to locate Yoder within his particular historical tradition, not only in order to grasp his positions with more clarity, but also to recognize the ways in which his project is *constructively unoriginal*—that is, not starting from scratch, but, as a grateful heir to a powerful legacy, receiving, reformulating, and passing on an antecedent argument. Yoder's body of work is a living testament to this mode of thought.

Having, then, appropriately contextualized Yoder's project, we are now in a legitimate position both to affirm its insights and to critique—perhaps even to amend—its shortcomings.

[186] See, e.g., Yoder's typical statement in *Preface*, 177: "We have learned, and the Bible has taught us, that God works through history. The passage of time matters." Note also Yoder's nuanced discussion of the canon and historical modification and reception in *To Hear*, 94-119.

Chapter 3: The Church's God According to Robert W. Jenson

Introduction

A classical systematic theologian *par excellence*, Robert Jenson has not limited himself to any one topic, but, in accord with the overarching relevance of his umbrella discipline, has devoted himself to nearly every imaginable theological and ethical topic under the sun. These include—to limit our survey only to books or central themes—the sacraments,[187] ecumenism,[188] theology of culture,[189] the thought of Karl Barth[190] and of Jonathan Edwards,[191] the Lutheran tradition,[192] the theology of hope,[193] theologies of Israel and Judaism,[194] and biblical interpretation.[195] Truly, here is a thinker unencumbered by disciplinary limits or a single theological focus.

However, though he has not been limited in what he has addressed or engaged, over the course of Jenson's career there has emerged, gradually but unambiguously, a single principal subject matter to which, like satellites in orbit, all else in turn becomes ordered and fitted. That subject is the triune God. For Jenson, the Trinity is the particular God of Christian faith and so of the confession of the one universal church; this God is therefore

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[187] Robert W. Jenson, *Visible Words: The Interpretation and Practice of Christian Sacraments* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978). All further citations of Jenson's work in this chapter will appear without authorial attribution.

[188] *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

[189] *Essays in Theology of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

[190] *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963); *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future As Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1969, 2010).

[191] *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[192] Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jenson, *Lutheranism: The Theological Movement and Its Confessional Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

[193] *Story and Promise: A Brief Theology of the Gospel About Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973); Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *The Futurist Option* (New York: Newman Press, 1970).

[194] "Toward a Christian Theology of Israel," *Pro Ecclesia* 9 (2000): 43-56; "Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism," in *Jews and Christians: People of God* (ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1-13.

[195] *Song of Songs* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2005); *Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009).

the determining and overriding focus for all theological inquiry—whether moral, cultural, political, or whatever—being of course the proper and sole subject of the practice of theology itself.[196]

Perhaps the best example of this perspective in action is Jenson's remark in the introduction to his small collection of essays *On Thinking the Human: Resolutions of Difficult Notions*: "only by reference to the specifically triune God is it possible to make [the following] anthropological notions work well in thought. The rhythmic structure that has resulted may inflict a certain exasperation on some readers . . .: they may come to say, at about the two-thirds point of each chapter, 'Here we go with the Trinity again!' I can only say, 'Well—Yes.' "[197] The Trinity is not merely one topic among others for the theological task; it is the chief doctrine which informs all others and so demands its own serious explication if the life and faith of the church be rightly directed to and governed by the God Christians confess as Lord.

Thus, as the previous chapter sought to envision the faithful church according to Yoder, this chapter will seek to describe the church's particular God according to Jenson. I will begin with a close exposition of Jenson's articulation of trinitarian theology, focusing especially on the central importance he places on it, and how and why it functions within the church and over time. (I will wait to offer a theological evaluation of Jenson's trinitarianism—again, with emphasis less on its metaphysical proposals than on its overall force—until the final chapter. At that time, I will do so with a view to Yoder's position, elaborating my reasons outlined in Chapter 1, together with Jenson's own reasons

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[196] Cf. the similar sentiment expressed by John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 43: "Christian theology has a singular preoccupation: God, and everything else *sub specie divinitatis*. All other Christian doctrines are applications or corollaries of the one doctrine, the doctrine of the Trinity, in which the doctrine of the church . . . has its proper home."

[197] *On Thinking the Human: Resolutions of Difficult Notions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), x.

summarized here, for why it is right to stress God's triunity so centrally.) Next, I will move to critique the ecclesiological implications that result in Jenson's theology, undertaken in the hope that they are neither necessary nor inevitable. Finally, granted the unacceptable ecclesiological proposals Jenson argues for alongside the prominence he gives to trinitarian doctrine, I will argue that the latter need not presuppose the former and, moreover, that it offers significant challenges to Yoder's vision of the church, to his doctrine of God, and to his understanding of the role of theology in history.

I. Jenson's God

Although the Trinity was far from absent in the first two decades of his work, the loose threads of Jenson's initial trinitarian thought were woven together systematically for the first time in 1982, with the publication of his *The Triune Identity*.[198] The proposals and arguments offered therein then incubated for approximately 15 years, and came to fruition in Volume I of his *Systematic Theology*, appropriately entitled *The Triune God*.[199] It is primarily from these two works, with supplementary material culled elsewhere, that I will describe Jenson's understanding of the implications and the importance of knowing and naming the Christian God as triune.

Why, we may ask at the outset, attend to the doctrine of the Trinity at all? Why does Jenson, and why ought others to care whether (and where and how) he succeeds or fails? Quite recently Jenson answered this very question with succinct clarity:

> [F]aith is directed to God. It therefore belongs to the very truth of Jewish or Christian faith that we be faithful to the way Scripture portrays its God. The doctrine of the Trinity is not so much a specific body of propositions, as it is the church's continuing effort to conceptualize such faithfulness. So whether or not that effort

[198] *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1982).
[199] *Systematic Theology: Volume 1: The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

> has been well done so far matters quite a lot. Through the church's history some theologians have hoped to further the effort, and recently a few of us have tried it again. And so also whether we have done well or been misguided in that matters quite a lot. If the church is misled about the Trinity, the very possibility of faith is wounded.[200]

Pieced together: "The doctrine of the Trinity . . . is the church's continuing effort to conceptualize . . . faithfulness" "to the way Scripture portrays its God," to which God Christian "faith is directed," a faith whose truth is predicated on scriptural fidelity and whose "possibility . . . is wounded" "if the church is misled about the Trinity."

For Jenson, then, trinitarian faith is precisely (and so nothing more than) commitment to the biblical story. Its origins lie at the beginning, with the proclamation of the gospel. The message of the gospel is that "The God of Israel has raised his servant Jesus from the dead,"[201] or at its most compact, that "Jesus is risen."[202] The gospel is thus "witness *to* something"—the resurrection. And "to attend theologically to the Resurrection of Jesus is to attend to the triune God," for (as we saw in Chapter 1) "the gospel's God can be an object for us if and only if God is so identified *by* the risen Jesus and his community as to be identified *with* them."[203] This attending must, therefore, accord with the character of the gospel "as witness to a determinate reality," and so calls forth "worship in *trinitarian specificity*: in petition and praise to the Father with the Son in the Spirit."[204] But that is to get ahead of the question. From the ground up: How does Jenson articulate the movement to discover who or what the triune God is, the way by which we come to such knowledge or faith, and the implications or consequences that follow?

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[200] "Response to Timo Tavast," *Pro Ecclesia* 19 (2010): 369.
[201] *ST* I:4.
[202] *ST* I:14.
[203] *ST* I:13.
[204] *ST* I:13 (emphasis mine).

As Jenson consistently puts it, "Religion is the cultivation of some eternity,"[205] inasmuch as "[t]he defining characteristic of deity—under any identification—is eternity. A God is someone or some thing or some aspect of things that holds past and present and future together."[206] In fact, "There are very many possible eternities."[207] In general three such eternities offer themselves historically: the timeless Platonist eternity of absolute stillness in simultaneous relation to all points of temporal change; "that of high Indian religion, which seeks to abolish [time]";[208] and "the Christian eternity, in which God is not the still center of the turning wheel but the one who whips the wheel along."[209] Jenson presents the situation in this way:

> The doctrine of the Trinity comprises . . . the Christian faith's repertoire of ways of *identifying* its God, to say *which* of the many candidates for godhead we mean when we say, for example, "God is loving" or "Dear God, please . . ." So long as we could suppose it obvious which putative god would truly be God if there were any, Western Christians could shut their eyes to the disuse of these means. We no longer have that luxury. In the foreseeable future the life of the Western world will be very like that of the declining Mediterranean antiquity in which Christian trinitarian language was first created—presenting a different divine offering on every street corner. For Christian discourse to be intelligible, we shall have to accept our place as one item of this pluralism and make clear—first and principally to ourselves—*which* god we mean, before we venture his reality or characteristics. Therefore the Western church must now either renew its trinitarian consciousness or experience increasing impotence and confusion.[210]

Hence, the *need* for identification. But what of its *truth*? Jenson is deeply aware of the Feuerbachian possibility that in "longing and resentment" for unavailable or incomplete but commonly valued goods "we project the fullness of these goods onto the screen of eternity,

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[205] *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 119.

[206] *Essays in Theology of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 88.

[207] *Essays*, 89.

[208] *Identity*, 1.

[209] *Essays*, 89. Note Jenson's rhetorically resonant comment in *ST* I:218n.61: "God, says Pannenberg, has no future beyond himself because he is not finite and *therefore* is not subject to the march of time. So far, so possibly good. But then it appears that God's being his own future is equivalent to his having *no* future . . . This is exactly what we have learned to deny. *God is not subject to the march of time, but this is not because his eternity does not march*" (last emphasis mine).

[210] *Identity*, ix.

where such fullness may be conceived, and we then find our comfort and hope in what we there behold, that is, in our own communal values writ large."[211] If the gospel is true, the gospel's God is (blessedly) no communal projection, for this God is both *self-revealing* and *freely electing*:

> According to the claim that the God of Israel makes for himself, Israel did not envision her God by the needs of her culture, but rather *he* chose Israel, *with* her culture. This God could, he claims for himself, have chosen any other nation or nations, with one or several of their different cultures, as the very same God he is. The Lord, in full antecedent individual identity, is the God of Israel not because of a fit between his characteristics and Israel's values but by historically contingent events—the rescue from Egypt and, retrospectively, the call of Abraham—that as such were not determined or necessitated by any cultural patterns in Israel. . . .
>
> The God of Israel claims to precede [the Feuerbachian] structure, to have and introduce a specific and integral personal identity prior to our projections. He claims to be an actual person, who therefore indeed essentially dwells in community but *is who he is* for his community. The one who rescued Israel from Egypt and raised our Lord Jesus from the dead is, if not a double illusion, the God of sovereign election, whose reality among us is determined by his free decision and thus is located in events contingent within the cultures to which they occur.[212]

As a consequence, twin features of Israel's relation to its identified God persist together. On the one hand, "The bulk of Israel's Bible is a record of the Lord's struggle to create and sustain Israel's exclusive faithfulness to him *against* other claimants to godhead, all saviors of some sort."[213] Israel's God will suffer devotion to no other, and so must be named concretely and with specificity of description and narrative. On the other hand, "A desperate irony is . . . located at the heart of biblical faith: the biblical critique of religion recoils primarily on the devotees of biblical religion."[214] Israel's God will likewise suffer no mere human projections of deity, and so must be spoken of and related to in particular ways consistent with his character and actions.

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[211] *ST* I:52-53.
[212] *ST* I:52, 53.
[213] *ST* I:50.
[214] *ST* I:52; cf. 56-57.

Having established the need for divine identification and the truth of this particular identification, *what is* the identity of the gospel's God? In Jenson's formulation, "God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt."[215] The connection of the former to the latter is both verification and confirmation that the gospel's God is the selfsame God of Israel, but now newly identified by reference to Jesus. Having before been named as YHWH, Israel's God is now called "Father" by Jesus, thereby construing himself as God's "Son."[216] Moreover, "Jesus appears in the New Testament as a prophetic bearer of the Spirit" authorized and empowered "to give the Spirit" to others.[217] The baptismal mandate of churchly initiation as "a ritual washing 'in the name "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" ' " brings these characters together and thereby "uniquely identifies the particular God of the gospel, recounting at once the *personae* and the basic plot of the scriptural story."[218] "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" therefore becomes and remains for the church both "a very compressed telling of the total narrative by which Scripture identifies God and a personal name for the God so specified."[219] Who is God? The singular answer of the church of Jesus Christ, the crucified Messiah of Israel, is: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Sprit. *That* one is YHWH.

The one true God of the church's confession has been duly identified. What follows from this achievement? Is anything implicated or determined by it, theologically or otherwise?

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[215] *ST* I:63.
[216] *ST* I:45.
[217] *ST* I:88.
[218] *ST* I:45.
[219] *ST* I:46.

First of all, trinitarian faith *comports with the biblical witness*. Not only is trinitarian confession fully consonant with the Old Testament,[220] the New Testament displays an internal and unavoidable "trinitarian logic" whose "rule may be formulated: when the specific relation to God opened by the gospel is thematic, God the Father and Christ and the Spirit all demand dramatically coordinating mention."[221] As the church learned over the many centuries to find and employ the language adequate to God's triunity, "the church's liturgy" served as "[t]he school of this logic."[222]

Second, trinitarian faith is *an index and necessary outworking of confronting the subject of the gospel*—Jesus the crucified and risen Lord, proclaimed as good news. Specifically, it is a product of the encounter between christology and soteriology: Is it *God* who saves—who comes and lives among us, who suffers and dies and rises—or is it, need it be, some "godlet" [223] lower down on the ontological ladder? Does God need a mediating link to creatures, or does God appear and act and save and come near *as God*? Jenson exults:

> Nicea teaches dogmatically: the true God needs, and the gospel provides, no semidivine mediator of access to him, for the gospel proclaims a God who is not in fact distant, whose deity is identified with a person of our history; antiquity's struggle to overcome a supposed gulf between deity and time is discovered to be moot in light of the gospel. Vice versa, any pattern of thought that in any way abstracts God "himself" from this person, from his death or his career or his birth or his family or his Jewishness or his maleness or his teaching or the particular intercession and rule he as risen now exercises, has, according to Nicea, no place in the church.[224]

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[220] *ST* I:63: "All aspects of the Lord's hypostatic being appear in Israel's Scripture. The church's trinitarianism is commonly thought to depart from Israel's interpretation of God. This is the exact contradictory of the truth. . . . [T]he doctrine of Trinity only explicates Israel's faith in a situation in which it is believed that the God of Israel has prior to the general resurrection raised one of his servants from the dead." Cf. *ST* I:75-89.

[221] *ST* I:92.

[222] *ST* I:92.

[223] *Story*, 42. See also his early line in *Lutheranism*, 5: Nicaea "assert[s] that Christ is not the kind of halfway station on the way to God that is provided by normal religion's saviors."

[224] *ST* I:103. Note also his earlier comment in *Lutheranism*, 4-5: "By the 'Nicene' Creed, for example, the ancient church said publicly: those committed to a message about the reality of God *himself* in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection belong to our community; those committed to a less radical claim belong to some other community." The perspective outlined in these passages cohere provocatively in his definition of christology elsewhere: "Christology is, or should be, the thinking involved in *getting over* the self-evidencies about God that antecedent religion will in each case of the gospel's missionary penetration have hidden in the

Third, therefore, trinitarian faith *affirms the actual presence of God to and with the Christian community*. Just as it is nothing less and no one other than God who acted (and acts) in and as Christ the risen Lord, the Holy Spirit is nothing less and none other than the same God abiding with and within the church. For "the true God blesses and the gospel agitates no religious dynamism not identical with God's own active presence, no religious seeking or journeying that only *leads* to him. . . . And again, vice versa: any pattern of thought that in any way abstracts God 'himself' from the actual historical dynamism of the church's life has no place in Christianity."[225] The church's sacraments are thus tokens of the intersection between the christological and pneumatological thrusts of trinitarian faith, speaking visibly as God's embodied promises (in the bread and wine) to God's embodied people (in the community) based precisely on God's own lively presence having come to the elements and abiding with and among the community.[226]

Fourth, trinitarian faith *confirms and establishes the practice of Christian prayer*. As Jenson puts it most colloquially, "In giving the church the prayer he did, Jesus permitted and invited us to, if one may so speak, piggyback on his relation to the Father and attach our prayer to his address to his Father."[227] He goes on to elaborate this claim in view of trinitarian faith:

> Thus we have the classic pattern of Christian prayer: for most occasions and purposes, Christians pray *to* the one Jesus called Father, *with* Jesus the Son, who has the intrinsic right to do this, and as we thus enter the relation between them, we pray *in* the Spirit, who is that relation of mutual love. When I am asked to explain the Trinity, I often ask, "Do you know how to pray the Lord's Prayer?" If the answer is "Yes," I then reply, "Then you do understand the Trinity."[228]

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minds of this new sort of believers. A christological proposition is adequate just insofar as it outrages something comprehensively and radically that everybody at a time and place supposes 'of course' to be true of anything worthy to be called God" (*Unbaptized*, 120).

[225] *ST* I:107.

[226] See his earlier *Visible Words* as well as *ST* II:187-188, 211-227, 250-269. That it is *actually God* who resides among and sojourns with the community speaks also, for Jenson, to the particular character of this God as one whose "absolute Contingency . . . in the triune perichoresis" (*Thinking*, 69n.20) gets played out on—and is thereby determined within—the theater of history, in the drama of exodus, exile, cross, and resurrection.

[227] *Canon and Creed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 48.

[228] Ibid.

Fifth, trinitarian faith *confesses a God whose life in communion determines reality*. Here any number of implicated topics arise, from the communal nature of human life,[229] to the temporality of created history,[230] to the love that characterizes the triune life,[231] to questions of truth and beauty,[232] to anthropological challenges like consciousness and freedom,[233] to cultural issues like education and art.[234] (This is not even to mention the converse of discerning trinitarian faith *from* Scripture: namely, trinitarian interpretation *of* the biblical texts. Jenson calls this, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, the "Nicene theory" of biblical exegesis.[235]) Of course, to list these or other matters potentially affected is only another way of saying that, *if God is triune*, then that fact will bear out in all of God's works of and in creation; it is in this sense a key to all of created existence.

Sixth and finally, trinitarian faith is *an ongoing theological task*. In Jenson's words—recalling the quote we began with above—trinitarian doctrine "is less a homogeneous body of propositions than it is a task: that of the church's continuing effort to recognize and adhere to the biblical God's hypostatic being."[236] Accordingly, Jenson defines theology as

> reflection internal to the act of tradition, to the turn from hearing something to speaking it. Theology is an act of *interpretation*: it begins with a received word and issues in a new word essentially related to the old word. Theology's question is

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[229] See, e.g., II:53-111. Cf. *ST* I:38: "What is surely required is to recognize that 'humanity' and . . . 'deity' must be *communal* concepts. That Christ has the divine nature means that he is one of the three whose mutuality is the divine life, who live the history that God is. That Christ has human nature means that he is one of the many whose mutuality is human life, who live the history that humanity is." Jenson is aware that this statement would seem to make three gods of the triune *hypostases*, but works out the qualified disjunctions in the analogy elsewhere.

[230] See, e.g., *Systematic Theology: Volume 2: The Works of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3-49.

[231] See, e.g., *ST* I:148-49, 155-59.

[232] See, e.g., *ST* I:224-36.

[233] See, e.g., *Thinking*, 16-45.

[234] See, e.g., *Essays*, 76-94, 147-155, 163-189, 202-224.

[235] *Ezekiel*, 25. Of course, the comment's being tongue-in-cheek does not mean that he does not mean it; for further development of Jenson's use and understanding of the Creed as "critical theory," see the discussion below of his recent book *Canon and Creed*.

[236] *ST* I:90.

> always: In that we have heard and seen such-and-such discourse as gospel, what shall we now say and do that gospel may again be spoken?[237]

Thus, in the course of the church's life over time—being that community whose "whole mission . . . [is] to speak the gospel"[238]—the crucial question of the identity of the gospel's God and the constant call to name that God rightly will never finally be safe from danger, but demand theological vigilance in reformulating in every succeeding generation and cultural context what it means to be faithful to the triune God vis-à-vis whatever new challenges arise.[239]

This last statement, in raising the matter of the theological task, brings us to the threshold of the church, and so to disputed ecclesiological questions.

II. Negative Ecclesiological Implications

More than a third of the second volume of Jenson's systematics, *The Works of God*, is dedicated to the church. Consisting of seven chapters dealing, respectively, with the church's founding, polity, communion, office, sacraments, Scripture and icons, and form of life, Jenson's ecclesiological proposals are not merely a piece of his project, they are inseparable from it. Or at least, Jenson understands them to be so. In hopeful disagreement with him, then, it will be the purpose of this section to take up problematic aspects of Jenson's ecclesiology, particularly in the light of Yoder's ecclesial vision, in a critique aimed primarily at severing the supposedly logical connections he sees between his envisioned church and the centrality of trinitarian faith.

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[237] *ST* I:14.

[238] "How the World Lost Its Story," *First Things* 36 (1993): 19.

[239] Given Jenson's own attempts at such reformulation, this is a good place to note critiques of his trinitarian theology. For two noteworthy examples, see Francesca Alan Murphy, *God is Not a Story: Realism Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); and George Hunsinger, "Robert Jenson's *Systematic Theology*: A Review Essay," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55 (2002), 161-200.

To begin, let us consider Jenson's claim that "the only church conceivably in question" as an audience for or recipient of his (or any other Christian) theology is "the unique and unitary church of the creeds."[240] He is able to say this, of course, because by his reckoning "any legitimate member of the church must be able to join in"[241] recitation of the Nicene Creed, inasmuch as "the orthodox [are] those who [can] confess it and the heretics [are] those who [cannot]."[242] The force of these statements should not be lost on us: per Jenson's blunt clarity, Yoder's Mennonite church is not in fact a church at all. This goes also for all other non-creedal ecclesial traditions, including the various descendents of Zwingli,[243] baptists in general,[244] Pentecostals, Stone-Campbellites,[245] and so on. Such a list indicts Jenson's claim as the supreme ecumenical non-starter that it is.[246] Precisely "in the situation of a divided church," living thus in "radical self-contradiction,"[247] should not such divisive definitions be *somehow* qualified? It is no way to work toward unity, even at the issue of confession of God as triune, when the boundaries have already closed off one's dialogue partners.[248]

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[240] *ST* I:vii.

[241] *ST* I:36.

[242] *ST* I:37.

[243] Note Jenson's characteristically dismissive reference, in discussion of the Reformation controversy over the real presence of Christ in the meal: "One may suggest that the flat-footed Zwingli related to the standard previous tradition in much the same way as had Arius. Both let a cat out of the bag" (*Unbaptized*, 129n.31).

[244] I am thinking here of a theological representative as robust (and trinitarian!) as James McClendon.

[245] In this case, I am thinking of the similarly Yoder-influenced Joe R. Jones (Disciples of Christ); or, more immediately pertinent to the present work, myself (churches of Christ).

[246] Here also Jenson has a penchant for quips and assumptive jabs; for example: ". . . dialogue with sectarian Protestantism has not yet progressed beyond the most superficial level. Perhaps the situation will change somewhat when and if such groups do come seriously to grips . . ." (*Unbaptized*, 10).

[247] *ST* I:vii.

[248] I pause briefly to note the fundamental and structural difference between *confessional* and *creedal* boundaries, that is, between confessionally trinitarian and creedally trinitarian churches, which I will take up for discussion later in this and the last chapter. Given the current disarray and disunity of the church, I take Jenson's lack of nuance in this regard to be a serious flaw in his commitment to ecumenism.

This ecumenical posture immediately raises other problems, not least of which is Jenson's radical conception of dogma as "congenital with the gospel,"[249] and so at once irrevocably decisive, forever thereafter true, and true for the reason that it is laid down as such. Worked out practically, this position takes the awkward shape of defending a proposition because, "Well, if the church says so . . ." For example, take the dogmatic declaration of the assumption of Mary. At the end of a five-page section devoted to Mary's status as virgin, as Mother of God, as archprophet, and as immaculately conceived, Jenson discusses the "second Marian dogma" in an extended footnote.[250] Though so "obscure" that "perhaps it is impossible to discover any intellectual content in it," Jenson concludes that "it should be read not as a set of propositions but as an urgent recommendation to venerate the icons of Mary's dormition, surely an excellent recommendation." Thus, however admittedly strange and potentially vacuous, dogma is dogma, and one must seek to rescue it from obscurity for the sake of what is (ostensibly) faithful praxis.

I suggest that the church (and we with it) ought to take another route—one well modeled by Yoder. In an essay entitled "The Imperative of Christian Unity," he comments: "No amount of ecumenical good manners can justify refusing to name an error when it is recognized as such." Just so "the promulgation of the doctrine of the Assumption of the Virgin in [1950] was hogwash theologically and a sin against the unity of the body of Christ."[251] Here the dogma is not merely lacking authority, nor only bizarre or uncalled for, nor even misleading or false—but an ecumenical *sin*. Yoder does not mince words, for he

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[249] *ST* I:35.

[250] *ST* II:204n.95.

[251] Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical* (ed. Michael G. Cartwright; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), 293.

recognizes the issue at hand: How can the one church's unity or mission be served by such an assertion, much less by explanatory gap-filling after the fact?[252]

Creedal fundamentalism and dogmatic authoritarianism raise a third issue in Jenson's ecclesiology: the role and authority of an ecclesial magisterium. According to Jenson, "the church's need for a teaching office in succession" is a consequence of the task of keeping faithful to texts whose interpretation is a disputatious affair, such that "if the text itself is in any degree to adjudicate between proposed interpretations, some living, personal reality must maintain the text's independence."[253] This must take the shape of "the church *as* the church over against the church as a certain number of conjoined persons," for finally "[b]iblical authority . . . [is] not possible apart from a voice for the church as community speaking to the church as association, that is, in the church's own language, apart from a teaching office, a magisterium."[254] Apostolic succession in charismatic office is but the church's embodied (that is, personal) diachronic continuity with the church's founding persons and events—in Jenson's approving use of the Catholic Church's phrase, it is "catholicity in time."[255]

Magisterial authority, moreover, is both a symptom and a cause of another, related problematic, namely the notion that the ecumenical task is a matter of top-down doctrinal consensus between ecclesiastical, academic, and/or intellectual elites. This is less an explicit view held by Jenson than an implicit logic funding his ecclesiology. *Unbaptized God*, his book dedicated to the present ecumenical bypass, is in its entirety a survey and critique of the formal bilateral and multilateral dialogues between churchly delegates from various denominations and communions. This ought not to be a surprise, for Jenson has been

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[252] I should note that I hesitate to endorse Yoder's willingness to call the action as unqualified *sin*, but the more basic point nonetheless stands.

[253] *ST* I:39.

[254] *ST* I:40. Cf. *ST* II:228-249, as well as the chapter on "Episcopacy" (71-76) in the now decade-later work, *Canon and Creed*.

[255] *ST* I:41.

personally involved in such dialogues regularly for decades, and he shows his great respect for their convergences and achievements when he cites them as more or less unassailable authorities in his systematics.[256]

But what does it mean—as Yoder would have us ask—for the church's unity to be predicated on elites' agreement on the sophisticated nuances of theological doctrine? No doubt such things cannot be ignored or discarded, but are they the substance or heart—much less the proper means or way—of the imperative to unity? To be sure, Jenson recognizes "the problem of reception" by ordinary believers in the pews, as well as "that of churchly authorities" unable to imagine "actual sacramental or institutional moves toward reunion."[257] But these seem to be secondary, subordinate, or after-the-fact concerns relative to the central matter of doctrinal agreement "at the top."[258] I suggest that this emphasis or way of viewing the situation is but a reflection of his apparently desired *right* state of affairs, that of a church whose ordained leaders carry a kind of overriding didactic clout which, in turn, should trickle down into the church's regular members.[259] This is of course a caricature, but one not far afield from the implications of the sort of politics at work in Jenson's

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[256] See, e.g., his use of *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* in *ST* II:230-34.

[257] *Unbaptized*, 2.

[258] For example, Jenson's supremely complex argument about temporality and the Christian doctrine of God laid out at the end of *Unbaptized God* (107-147) is offered as a solution to the current ecumenical impasse; but is there anyone except highly educated academic theologians who could grasp it, much less suggest an alternative?

[259] In *Canon and Creed*, Jenson pens revealing phrases that are difficult to swallow from a believers church perspective. He identifies "the Eastern churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Anglican churches" as "together embrac[ing] the vast majority of the baptized" (71). He similarly claims that "most Christians . . . beg [Mary's] intercession" through praying the Hail Mary (107), and that "in the conviction of most Christians," the "one universal church . . . should have its bishop" (73). And finally, the biggest howler: "most Christians have thought that it is mandatory, that bishops or pastors are to be taken into the diachronic body of shepherds by a rite of the sort that consecrated Timothy" (74). I will take these in reverse order. Between "most" and "Christians" in the fourth quote we should read "literate representatives of." Instead of the "of" after "conviction" in the third quote, let us instead read "expressed by highly technical statements often unread and certainly not ratified by." As for the second quote, is this an empirical claim, or simply an assumption about Catholic piety? And regarding the first quote, it is perhaps most ironic that, in an argument in favor of episcopal succession, reference would be made to "the baptized" of precisely those episcopal institutions *which baptize nonvolitional persons* (that is, infants).

proposals. And so we come at last to the heart of the ecclesiological differences between him and Yoder: the political shape of the church.

As we have seen in detail, and now in summary form, Yoder sees the church as a minority people in exilic sojourn among the nations, a servant community sent on behalf of others and therefore unwilling to exercise coercion for any reason, but just so socially "responsible" insofar as cruciform servanthood is the grain of the cosmos and the only truly transformative power in human community.[260] Reckoning the Constantinian settlement[261]—and with it, all alliances between the church and the sword—as *the* paradigmatic idolatrous refusal of Jesus' way, the life and faith of the church are instead defined by Spirit-enabled, apocalyptic discipleship to the life and teachings of the crucified and risen Lord, Jesus of Nazareth. The politics of Jesus thus constitutes the normative politics of the church. And in the midst of a violent and rebellious world, the church is not and can never faithfully be sectarian or quietist; rather, and most radically: "The believing community is the new world on the way."[262]

Jenson identifies the church rather differently. As the present availability to the world of the ascended Lord, the community of the church over time literally *is* the body of

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[260] See, e.g., Yoder, *Nonviolence: A Brief History* (ed. Paul Martens, Matthew Porter, and Myles Werntz; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 38: "For those who confess the Lamb that was slain as risen Lord worthy to receive power, there can be no ultimate need to choose between suffering love and social effectiveness."

[261] Because I agree with Yoder's reading of history, I refrain from neutral or scare quotes, though I am also refraining from using Yoder's most striking phrase: the Constantinian *heresy*. One quote should serve to state adequately Yoder's understanding of the historical metonym he calls Constantine, as well as make clear what he fears in ecclesiologies like Jenson's: "The church is no longer the obedient suffering line of the true prophets; she has a vested interest in the present order of things and uses the cultic means at her disposal to legitimize that order. She does not preach ethics, judgment, repentance, separation from the world; she dispenses sacraments and holds society together" (*The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* [Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1971], 65). This last polemical indictment—of the church holding together "society" or the world—makes for excellent comparison with Jenson's claim in his 1993 essay, "How the World Lost Its Story," that in postmodernity "the church must herself *be*" "a narratable world" for "her hearers" who do not antecedently inhabit one (22).

[262] Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Public & Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 50.

the risen Christ on earth.[263] In that capacity, "It is the whole mission of the church to speak the gospel."[264] As to how this mission was affected in and by the imperial situation after Constantine, Jenson "lean[s] both ways"; but his own telling of the story is that Constantine "called to the bishops: 'Come over to the palace and help us!' " And "could charity have refused the empire's call for help? . . . For my part, I think not."[265] In this respect, Jenson's theological politics—as nothing less than an expression *of* his ecclesiology—is explicitly and profoundly Lutheran-Augustinian. Following Augustine,[266] he believes that the only truly just society is one that worships the true God,[267] and that Christians may (even at times should) justifiably participate in warfare.[268] The word the church has to speak to the nations to which

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[263] *ST* I:201-206. In a later essay, Jenson provocatively extends this claim to the synagogue as well: "Can there be a present body of the risen Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, in which the lineage of Abraham and Sarah so vanishes into a congregation of gentiles as it does in the church? . . . [S]o long as the time of [Jewish disbelief in Jesus as Messiah] lasts, the embodiment of the risen Christ is whole only in the form of the church *and* an identifiable community of Abraham and Sarah's descendents. The church and the synagogue are together and only together the present availability to the world of the risen Jesus Christ" ("Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism," in *Jews and Christians: People of God* [ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 13).

[264] "How the World Lost Its Story," 19. Though the claim is still reductionistic, Jenson's understanding of the church's embodied actions as also performances of speech ("visible words") should here be kept in mind.

[265] "Christian Civilization," in *God, Truth, and Witness: Engaging Stanley Hauerwas* (ed. L. Gregory Jones, Reinhard Hütter, and C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell; Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 153-55. Regrettably consistent in this case is Jenson's one reference to the man in his systematics as "Constantine the Great" (*ST* I:102).

[266] The question of what separates Yoder and Jenson will be addressed fully in the next chapter, but one fascinating aspect of their differences will remain unexplored and only alluded to here: If Barth is the heretofore identified point of *contact* between Yoder and Jenson, thus carrying a whole host of important questions at this one site of shared origin, Augustine is a gesture toward a representative point of *departure*, inasmuch as both thinkers spilled a good deal of ink on the saint's work—and nearly always with opposing verdicts. In a sense, my thesis in Chapter 4 about the core point of difference between Yoder and Jenson could very well be extended or translated by asking simply: "Which is an Augustinian, which is not, why in each case, and in what ways?"

[267] See *ST* II:76-85.

[268] See Jenson, "Is Patriotism a Virtue?" in *God and Country?: Diverse Perspectives on Christianity and Patriotism* (ed. Michael G. Long and Tracy Wenger Sadd; New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007): 147-53. See also his comments in *Ezekiel*, 75-77, 192-193, interestingly enough in respectful dialogue with Yoder's most prominent protégé: "In recent theology, Stanley Hauerwas has urged, with unique and disquieting persistence, the defenselessness that must characterize God's people. And indeed God's people as church or synagogue must and can eschew violence, even in self-defense; but God's people as Samaria and Jerusalem were a nation among the nations. Is the appearance in history of a peaceful *nation*—or tripe or empire or other political entity—possible? is it conceivable? Could it perdure even long enough to be a community? Could the United States withdraw from all armed engagement simply because peace is always intrinsically preferable to violence?" (192).

it is sent must, to be sure, be promise (that is, gospel), but it may and inevitably will contain judgment and prophecy (that is, law).[269]

Thus we have before us two distinct entities: the discipleship minority of Yoder, and the sacramental polity of Jenson. Jenson would surely point out that the former is assumed and included in the latter, while Yoder would likely respond that the former, in order truly to be itself, must reject the temptation to become the latter. In these strongly contrasting visions of Christ's church, we have breached a deep and fundamental level of difference between the two.

This difference raises one more important limitation, or at least related tendency, in Jenson's theology as it relates to the church: a marked leaning to speak of the church as a kind of built-up intellectual deposit of knowledge.[270] As Jenson puts it (in an otherwise superb discussion of the church's missionary nature vis-à-vis new or alien cultural encounters), "[The] history of the gospel is necessarily a history of thought."[271] A charitable (indeed, delightful) reading of this statement and the overall perspective it represents is to affirm with Jenson that "theology is actual as a continuing consultation," not at all "the adding of proposition to proposition in the steady construction of a planned structure of knowledge," but "a discussion and debate that as it continues regularly confronts new questions, and from which participants drop out and into which new participants enter."[272] A

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[269] See *Story*, 62-101; ST I:15-16; II:73-94, 314-17.

[270] I take this characterization from conversation with Steven Kraftchick.

[271] *ST* I:16. The bracketed "The" replaces "This," the antecedent of which in the context of the passage is: "Therefore the gospel is itself an impeller and enabler of history. For, precisely, promises not only open a future to our vision but themselves enable that future; they contain and convey the future possibility they signify. And *therefore* the gospel must itself have history" (15-16). I do not believe that my use and critique of the sentence that follows is inappropriate based on this context, but I note it in case I have mistaken his point.

[272] *ST* I:17.

less charitable reading, but one at times warranted, is that within Jenson's project, Jesus came that we might have metaphysics, and have it to the full.[273]

Where the balance or right interpretation lies—not only between dialogical history and metaphysical skepticism, but also between sword and cross, top-down and bottom-up, magisterium and congregational agreement, creedal dogma and *sola scriptura*—is exactly the space opened up between Jenson's and Yoder's conceptual and theological leanings. The question is not whether these can be *harmonized*, nor whether one or the other is fully right, nor even whether Jenson's schema can withstand Yoder's critique. The question, and accordingly the challenge before us, is *whether Yoder's church has room for Jenson's God*—who, as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is just so the church's God. Phrased differently, the question is whether the foundation and structural integrity of Yoder's ecclesial architectonics can hold, will perhaps even be bolstered by, the presence of its truest author and occupant, or whether it will buckle at the pressure thereby exhibited.

And so we turn to the challenges Jenson's trinitarian theology nevertheless presents to Yoder's church in spite of his project's ecclesiological shortcomings.

III. Nevertheless: Challenges for Yoder's Church

From Jenson I have so far identified a number of significant reasons to take trinitarian faith seriously. These include its comportment with the biblical witness, its following naturally from the outworking of the gospel, its affirmation of God's actual presence "with us" and

[273] I am here riffing not only on Jesus' statement ("I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"; John 10:10 NIV) but also on Adam Kotsko's own first riffing on it. In his " 'That They Might Have Ontology': Radical Orthodoxy and the New Debate," *Political Theology* 10 (2009): 115-124, he says: "The fact that liberation theology, Latin American or otherwise, is not the subject of any sustained treatment in a volume supposedly devoted to 'theology and the political,' presumably because of the Radical Orthodox bias of the theological contributors, is not only bizarre, but it also renders obscure what precisely the political goals of Radical Orthodoxy *actually are*—unless one is to edit Christ's famous statement: 'I have come that they might have ontology, and have it robustly' " (119-120). In this respect, while much of its contents contain profound reflections on meaningful philosophical topics, Jenson's *On Thinking the Human* is an exemplary case.

therefore within the Christian community, its undergirding the normative pattern of Christian prayer, its determining relationship to creation, and its status as charge and task. In a sense, then, by situating Yoder's inattention to the Trinity in relation to the present project's discussion and these preliminary conclusions, I have already made clear why the doctrine's ambiguous place in Yoder is a regrettable lacuna and thus in need of explanation, correction, and modification by those engaged in appreciative reception of his work. I will conclude, however, by putting these concerns together and restating them in the form of questions Jenson's work poses to Yoder's vision of the church, which I will then take up in fuller detail in the fourth and final chapter.

1. *What is the role of the Holy Spirit in history?* Yoder seems to conceive of the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church over time as the divine agent of empowerment for obedience,[274] the unifying force of dialogical discernment,[275] and the spark of the meeting between primal source and present context toward the goal of renewal in accord with the apostolic witness.[276] Jenson presses the issue to ask after the role of the Holy Spirit construed in a way other than interpersonally (ethics), congregationally (unity), or textually (renewal), that is, *eschatologically*—looking and moving, not outward to the world or inward to the community or backward to the past, but *forward*, into the future.[277] If the Holy Spirit is the power of God to break open the constraints of the given, to overturn the minimal possibilities imaginable on the world's terms—and with such statements Yoder would gladly sound the amen—then what of the Holy Spirit's guidance and leadership in the discipleship

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[274] See, e.g., Yoder, *Original*, 78, 115; *Royal* 121-122; *Nations*, 228-233.

[275] See, e.g., Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 61-70; *Royal*, 94, 363-364.

[276] See Yoder, *To Hear the Word* (2nd ed.; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 4, 86; *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 63-74, 117. I leave aside the (to Yoder all important) issue of the Spirit's gifting each member of the community for the building up of the body, being more of an index of the way in which these three specific roles are exercised than a role unto itself.

[277] See Jenson's most sustained pneumatological reflections in "Eighth Locus: The Holy Spirit," *Christian Dogmatics* (ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 105-178.

community over time precisely with regard to matters of faith, confession, teaching, doctrine? And if the Holy Spirit *can* act in such a way, is it feasible the Spirit *has* thus acted? What would be the theological and ecclesiological implications, and through what structures or events would it have occurred?

2. *What kind of authority does or ought the church to have in its missionary cultural encounters?* Yoder readily acknowledges and elaborates on the missionary nature of the church and the way that the New Testament itself offers a christological modus operandi for creative cultural engagement.[278] The question is the extent to which such engagement in the post-apostolic period has any *authority* for the church, whether it should, and if so in either case, in what way. It appears that, in Yoder's schema, these are to be merely ad hoc, local, and with little authority, binding or otherwise. Jenson argues, to the contrary, that there come moments in the church's encounters with preexisting or powerful forms of life, or within its own life as internal crises reach a critical mass, when the church must exercise the authority it has (which it in fact must have, given by God) to respond decisively (i.e., in *statu confessionis*), and in faith in nothing less than God's promise to "back up" such decisiveness, lest the gates of hell prevail against the people of God.[279] Though the particular form Jenson perceives the latter to assume may not be the best answer, he nonetheless posits the necessary question.

3. *How should identity-defining challenges be faced by the church when both sides claim biblical support? How ought the church to judge a contested post-biblical* status confessionis*?* Following from the last question is the issue of the identity of the Christian community, of what defines it and what constitutes acceptable boundaries to it that are somehow at once flexible and firm.

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[278] See Yoder, *Priestly*, 46-62; *Preface*, 114-137.
[279] See *ST* I:11-41.

Yoder is perhaps the quintessential model of ecumenical engagement, in that he repeatedly and intentionally addresses interlocutors—with whom he at times shares little and very often disagrees profoundly on issues central to the faith—as members of the church, persons of sincerity, and bearers of God's image and so worthy of dignity and respect.[280] In this respect Yoder would perhaps, given his understanding of the church-divisiveness of believer's baptism and participation in warfare, not even consent to granting *status confessionis* to issues of doctrine.[281] In any case, Jenson rightly pushes back with an argument whose simplicity and historical precedent are impossible to deny: *The identity of the true God is worthy of just such a status*. Moreover, no ecclesial conflict has so far existed that did not have Bible-claiming opponents on each side.[282] Ecumenical respect and dialogue must surely remain as a first principle of attitude and action, but they cannot determine a systematic refusal to define, as loosely or strictly as possible, what it is that marks the Christian disciple and the Christian church *as Christian*.

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[280] For a splendid example, see Yoder's essay "Gordon Zahn is Right: Going the Second Mile with Just War" in *The War of the Lamb* (ed. Glen Harold Stassen, Mark Thiessen Nation, Mark Hamsher; Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 109-116, in which he defends his sympathetic engagement of the just war tradition as a pacifist. This brief piece contains some of Yoder's most generous as well as revealing methodological reflections: "As a disciple of Jesus Christ, I have never considered [the just war] system to be morally adequate. I have, however, considered it part of my responsibility to honor the human dignity of those who hold to it, or who at least say they hold to it" (109); "I owe it to their dignity as fellow humans, some of whom are fellow Christians, to address them in terms of their moral culture, not only of mine. That readiness to make oneself vulnerable to the language world of the other, as a part of the ecumenical conversational process, is itself a minority view. For many, the only honorable stance in ecumenical settings is a vigorous advocacy of the rightness of one's own orthodoxy. For me, the opposite is imperative on grounds of practicality, ethics, and spirituality" (110); "My position is itself a form of the love of the enemy, turning the other cheek, affirming the dignity of the adversary, which also underlies my refusal of war. . . Such *second-mile dialogical readiness* [aims] to honor the interlocutors' dignity, more than they themselves do" (111); "I know from having tested it for thirty years *from inside* that the just war tradition is not credible. I don't dialogue with the just war tradition because I think it is credible, but because it is the language that people, who I believe bear the image of God, abuse to authorize themselves to destroy other bearers of that image" (116).

[281] I take this to be a live question. I would be interested to know how Yoder scholars would answer it.

[282] See Jenson's comment in *ST* I:100n.71: "We may indeed think of the Arians on the pattern of Biblicists generally: on the one hand, they often put the more conceptually sophisticated to shame in their grasp of certain necessities of the gospel; on the other hand, precisely the conviction of their own faithfulness to Scripture can blind them to their captivity to the culture."

4. *Is the lasting impact of nonbiblical modes of thought or speech on the church to be avoided (if avoidable at all)?* Yoder's notion of "looping back" is sophisticated enough to resist an anti-historical bent; indeed, Yoder is insistent on attending to history at every step of the church's self-critical reflection.[283] However, it is unclear if this notion, comparable also to a traditional understanding of "reformation," is consistent or commensurate with traditions of "restitution" or "restoration,"[284] in which the goal is not to loop back to apostolic origins and then to work *through* subsequent history, but rather quite literally to *reinstitute* or *restore* "the church" of the first century or of the New Testament.[285] Yoder at times affirms the latter conceptions along with the former, but it seems that one is historically realistic while the other is historically impossible, and so are incommensurate ecclesiological programs.[286] And, to varying degrees, each approach carries with it a suspicion, as we have already seen, of modes of thought or speech that are post-biblical.

Jenson would have Yoder understand, first, that this is an inevitable and even laudable fact of the church's life in time, and second, that it is precisely the church's job to *discern* in post-biblical thought what of it is a-, non-, and/or anti-biblical—rather than to

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[283] See, e.g., "Part II: History" in Yoder, *Priestly*, 103-147.

[284] See Yoder's sometimes synonymous use of and engagement with this terminology in, e.g., *Royal*, 85, 238; *Priestly*, 5-6; *Nations*, 21; *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 137-140.

[285] As a member of a church hailing from the quite literally termed "Restoration Movement" of the 19th century, I can confirm that this is precisely the meaning of the term on the ground, and originally in the movement.

[286] Indeed, Yoder knows and names the problematic: "One kind of 'free-church' movement, especially in nineteenth-century America, has run the danger of being unhistorical in its claim that the reforming process can be completed, can have 'restored' the 'New Testament patterns' and stands no more in the need of reformation. . . . The danger of naiveté or self-righteousness about having restored 'the New Testament church' does exist, but it represents a caricature. This characterization obscures for the critics and for some of the friends of this vision the difference between stating that the New Testament vision is normative and claiming to have fulfilled it. When the radical reformer criticizes in established reformation patterns is not the failure to be perfect but the specific apology, made on behalf of the 'establishment' traditions, for being unfaithful, i.e., for aiming at some other point than the quality of obedience and community to which the New Testament writings were calling their readers" (*Priestly*, 197n.2). This is an evenhanded recognition and thus duly noted; in my estimation, however, the overall ambiguity of the various movements' interwoven terminology and use as examples in Yoder's writings remains. For further discussion, see his "Primitivism in the Radical Reformation: Strengths and Weaknesses," in *The Primitive Church in the Modern World* (ed. Richard T. Hughes; Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 74-97.

collapse the prefixes on themselves in a flurry of thoughtless biblicism that is itself unbiblical. With regard to our present subject, Jenson proposes (rather mildly) that "the Trinity" is with us to stay, as are words and ways of thinking like *hypostasis*, *ousia*, and *perichoresis*, analogous to the way that *kenosis*, *kyrios*, and *koinonia* are as well. Indeed, at this point it would be impossible to eliminate them from the tradition's vocabulary. Why seek to avoid them if they are so entrenched historically and, in many cases, have so far served their purposes well?[287]

5. *What is the relationship between revelation, Christian Scripture, and ecclesial tradition?* One of Yoder's stated complaints against the doctrine of the Trinity is that it is "not given us by revelation," "not itself a revealed truth" from God,[288] and so not trustworthy as a matter of faith (only, in his words, "helpful as a fence"[289]). This is a curious charge from a thinker lacking a worked-out doctrine of revelation—or at least a place in his theology where it plays a substantive role—spoken out of an understanding of Scripture that (rightly!) does not rely on traditional Protestant notions like "inspiration" or "infallibility."[290] What then would or could it mean for the Trinity to be inspired or revealed, and over against what? Jenson is likewise iffy on doctrines of inspiration, preferring with Yoder to understand the Christian canon as the church's book and so normative just because it has been construed to be so (the conviction that God somehow shaped it and speaks through it to be worked out after

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[287] Given Yoder's tireless work in critiquing the tradition's tendency to argue for beliefs and practices as "around to stay" simply by virtue of their antiquity—and thus their self-justifying "staying power," as it were—I should make clear when I make these claims that I am already *presuming* an argument in trinitarianism's favor (largely still awaiting us in the next chapter), and specifically a biblical one. As I am in full agreement with Yoder's critique of the just war tradition, I would consider it a deeply unsatisfying nonstarter to hear from a just warrior that the theory is right or good because it's "always been around" and so "with us to stay." These claims must be built on arguments that are themselves grounded in appeals to Scripture, the norm of Jesus, the practice of discipleship, etc.

[288] Yoder, *Preface*, 204.

[289] Ibid., 223.

[290] See Yoder's nuanced treatment in his essay "The Authority of the Canon" in *To Hear*, 94-119.

the fact).[291] Jenson does, however, have an articulated conception of theological knowledge and of the ways of the church's knowing;[292] and whatever may be its finer points, by it he is able to *account* for how the church may come to knowledge not explicitly worked out in the texts of the Bible. A full-fledged Yoderian ecclesiology must come to terms with this challenge, whatever its final judgment.

6. *In what sense is the formation of the canon connected to the rule of faith (and so to the Creed)?* Jenson's recent book *Canon and Creed* is a salutary and forceful reminder of the undisentangleable relationship between the establishment of the canon—a centuries long process, as Yoder has no difficulty allowing[293]—and the creedal concretization of the rule of faith. (Jenson also includes Irenaeus' third ecclesial mark, episcopal succession, which is its own challenge, but not immediately pertinent here.) If the church's collection of authoritative texts were so chosen and understood as to be authoritative *in irrevocable hermeneutical relation* to the rule of faith whose final forms are the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, what would it mean now to claim the former while disregarding the latter (particularly given that naming them as Scripture is an action no less alien to their original authors)? Jenson is candid as always: "the canon without the creed will not serve to protect the church against perversion of the gospel, *and* neither will the creed without the canon."[294] Accordingly, he proposes a particular functional relationship between the two: "The question has to be 'Following *what* critical theory, and penetrating to *whose* agenda, should the church read its Scripture?' My answer is . . . [that t]he community positioned to perceive

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[291] See Jenson's two complementary essays (the first of which makes for superb reading alongside Yoder's cited above): "Scripture's Authority in the Church," in *The Art of Reading Scripture* (ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 27-37; "On the Authorities of Scripture," in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 53-61.

[292] See *ST* I:11-41, 224-229; *ST* II:153-164, 301-305.

[293] See Yoder, *To Hear*, 102-107.

[294] *Canon*, 32.

what a scriptural text is truly up to is the church, and the creed is the set of instructions for discerning this agenda."[295] Whatever be our final (or even preliminary) answer to this challenge from the perspective of Yoder's modified ecclesiology, it must be met.

7. *Is a non-creedal church necessarily non-trinitarian? Is a church that worships Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by definition trinitarian? Is a church that does not worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit alike and together as God able to be called Christian?* The answers to these questions *ought* to be no, yes, and no, respectively. Jenson would agree with my second and third answers, but his first answer would probably involve a quip: "No—but if it be a church at all." It remains uncertain, however, what Yoder's own answers would be. He would likely quibble with the first two questions, given the Trinity's inseparably creedal character, and remain hesitant (regarding the third) about drawing ecclesial boundaries around triune confession. I propose in response that these are the most pressing challenges raised for Yoder's ecclesiology by Jenson's theology, for not only do they cut to the heart of so many of the differences between them, they also point up the *functional* nature of trinitarian faith, and so include questions relevant to all non-creedal but confessionally trinitarian ecclesial communities.

It is therefore to these and other challenges, inasmuch and insofar as they are addressed first of all to those who would defend and seek to implement Yoder's ecclesial vision, that I turn in the final chapter.

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[295] Ibid., 81.

Chapter 4: God in the Church, Tradition in History

Introduction

The bulk of the labor up to this point has consisted of the descriptive task of explicating the respective thought of Yoder and Jenson, the analytic task of putting them into conversation regarding the church and the Trinity, and some gestures toward constructive decisions regarding aspects of their theological positions. In Chapter 1, I set up the terms and subjects of the debate, articulated reasons for taking it (and its participants) seriously, and laid out background and context for what was to follow. In Chapter 2, I offered a substantive interpretation of Yoder's ecclesiology, engaged in a close reading of his reflection and comments on trinitarian doctrine, and concluded with suggestions as to what of his Anabaptist heritage might be lying beneath the surface of his suspicions regarding the Trinity. And in Chapter 3 I turned to Jenson, expounding his understanding of the centrality of trinitarian theology, explaining (in agreement) why it is so important, critiquing (in disagreement) his ecclesiological proposals, and concluding with some of the challenges remaining for a modified Yoderian ecclesial vision.

It is now time to begin the prescriptive task, in terms of both the more general issue of reading Yoder and Jenson together and the narrower question at hand of trinitarian theology and Yoderian ecclesiology. I will therefore begin by seeking to discern what it is between Yoder and Jenson that seems to keep them on opposite sides of a theological barrier, which will aid us in understanding the scope as well as the limitations of their projects—not to mention the overlap—as well as serve as a helpful segue into discussion of an appropriate approach to critical reception and modification of Yoder's ecclesiology. I will then take the opportunity to offer my own evaluation of the importance (and the practical

import) of trinitarian doctrine, with specific reference to Yoder's critiques reported in Chapter 2. My concluding constructive proposals will be twofold. First, I will suggest an alternative logic in supplement to Yoder's way of reading the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church over time, noting especially how this proposal plays out in the facets of Yoder's ecclesiology identified in Chapter 2. Second and lastly, I will set about answering the questions posed at the end of Chapter 3 from Jenson's theological perspective, questions which any properly trinitarian church in a Yoderian mold must address.

I. Articulating Churchly Logics

I began this project by introducing two sets of oppositions: the first between doctrines, that of the church and that of the triune God, and the second between persons, namely John Howard Yoder and Robert Jenson. The course of this work has been to explore the first by way of the second, and not merely for convenience, but for the express reason that these two theologians are worthy of interest in themselves, and that, furthermore, when put into dialogue they foster new and surprising lines of thought. As we have seen, Yoder and Jenson truly embody alternative, or at least historically divided, ecclesial and theological traditions of thought and praxis.

At the same time, given the facts of their similar prominence (and provenance), their many overlapping interests and (at times) conclusions, and their overwhelmingly similar stories contemporaneous to each other, how are we to account for the curious fact of their lack of mutual engagement? That is to say: *What is it about the respective interests, approaches, and labors of Yoder and Jenson that sets them, if not at odds with each other, then at seemingly distinct projects, such that between them a point of contact never arises?* The question is not a matter of disinterested history, but rather is borne from the conviction that their projects are a vital contribution to

theological scholarship and to the church's life and faith, and that it is to be lamented that Yoder and Jenson never "found" each other. I contend that this "finding"—and, perhaps, after-the-fact *befriending*—is an important task of constructive theological work today, and one to which I intend the present work to be an initial contribution, at least in the specific intersection of trinitarian theology and ecclesiology. Moreover, discovering the answer to this question will serve as a helpful aid in our search for both the reason and the solution for Yoder's notable inattention to matters trinitarian.

A Difference of Disciplines

One answer seems immediately to present itself: whatever sort of work Yoder and Jenson ended up doing in their careers, they were separated by the character of their doctoral training. In perhaps too simplified terms, Yoder was a Mennonite historian doing biblical social ethics, and Jenson a Lutheran metaphysician doing philosophical and systematic theology. Simply by attending to their proper disciplines, Yoder and Jenson would be (and were) occupied with separate matters in separate circles.

But disciplinary difference is little explanation for the radically *opposing* views to which their respective conclusions and opinions led them. For while their circles of activity located their topics of interest, these topics themselves tell us what they deemed important, and such topical enclosures never held either man back from commenting on broader issues.

For example, we have already seen the profound differences they share on conceptual and historical questions such as the force of creedal authority as it relates to the Trinity and dogmatic authority as it concerns Mariology. But it is not only in highly abstract or technical conversation that Jenson and Yoder find themselves on opposite sides of the spectrum; just as much, if not more so, it is in questions of practice. Take the issue of

baptism. Jenson argues that "it should be possible to agree"—precisely in the ecumene—that "the church's ancient decision that infants can be baptized . . . is (if correct) *not* separable from God's mandate of this sacrament itself, is (if correct) a law of the gospel."[296] This remarkable claim does not keep Jenson—at least in his early days[297]—from being critical of the voluminous number habitually "run through the baptism-mill" in the modern "recognized church"; but even here he remarks that "definitely, we *can* baptize infants," even if "it does not follow we always ought to do so."[298]

Unsurprisingly, the Anabaptist Yoder has serious problems with Jenson's position. In a similarly ecumenical context, Yoder notes that in dialogue he and other descendents of the Radical Reformation "meet people who have not all, as we have, publicly asked to be counted as believers in a congregational celebration of confession and baptism."[299] With Balthasar Hubmaier, Yoder does not base "the adult celebration of baptism upon a particular kind of subjective conversion experience or doctrinal affirmation but rather upon the candidate's readiness to enter wittingly and willingly into a covenant of mutual accountability," thereby "enabl[ing] the local congregation to have solidarity without legalism and pastoral responsibility without clericalism."[300] This is so because, eschewing both a

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[296] Jenson, *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 87. I confess myself unable to make much sense of this claim, given the conditional "if correct" repetitions.

[297] See Jenson's extended commentary on baptism in *Visible Words: The Interpretation and Practice of Christian Sacraments* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 126-173; and for a brief account of his later perspective, see *Systematic Theology: Volume 2: The Works of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 187-188.

[298] Jenson, *Story and Promise: A Brief Theology of the Gospel About Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 173.

[299] Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical* (ed. Michael G. Cartwright; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), 269.

[300] Ibid., 265. This passage, along with the foregoing discussions of each thinker's position, should suggest how staunchly opposed Jenson and Yoder are on the issue of "voluntariness." First Jenson: "The church, according to current ecumenical theology, is to be essentially a *people*. Now a people is a very particular sort of community. A people is an irreducible given for its members; one did not create one's people, by contract or otherwise, one does not choose it, and once born into it one cannot escape it. When the church is right, she has this character of givenness: once you are in the church, you know it was not finally your choice which brought you there, and once you are baptized the church will never let go her claim on you. The church is not to be a voluntary association, however religious" ("Toward a Christian Theology of Israel," *Pro Ecclesia* 9

"Zwinglian" and "a sacramentalist understanding" in order to "resurrect a sacramental realism," baptism may be understood rightly as "the constitution of a new people whose newness and togetherness explicitly relativizes prior stratifications and classifications."[301] Beginning with the social fact of egalitarianism in the baptismal act, "the reasons to disavow any nonvoluntary practice of the act are built in." From Yoder's perspective, the notion that the baptism of infants could somehow belong to the dominical command is impossible to conceive.

As with their similarities, the differences—conceptual and practical, abstract and concrete—between Yoder and Jenson could be listed for pages on end. For example: What of Catholicism? Whereas the Mennonite Yoder taught at a Catholic university for years (in constant dialogue and friendship with numerous Catholics) while consistently critical of Rome's history,[302] Jenson is able to ask himself, given his developed commitments, why he has not simply finished the job and become Catholic.[303] Or what of the Eucharist? Yoder understands the Supper akin to baptism, as the socially radical act of *eating together* as an

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[2000], 51). For Yoder, on the other hand, the church's character as voluntary is absolutely essential, in that it names the noncoercive, cost-counting nature of discipleship that attends confession and baptism, which accordingly allows communal discipline to avoid both legalism and authoritarianism. See, e.g., Yoder's comments in *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 5: "Of [the potential and historic abuses of mutual correction], the most destructive are probably those that arise from the loss of the community's voluntariness. In the first century and in the renewal movements we shall soon be noting, the practice of this discipline was or is at home in a voluntary community whose members have committed themselves to its standards and to its practice, by means of a personal commitment of baptism or confirmation. We can pursue reconciling confrontation because we trust one another and because we asked to be placed under this kind of loving guidance. To do the same thing in a nonvoluntary community gives them a quite different meaning; this is where in our culture the word *Puritan* got its bad taste."

[301] Ibid., 367. See also Yoder's fuller treatment of "Baptism and the New Humanity," *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 28-46.

[302] Perhaps the best example of Yoder's critical but friendly engagement of the specifically Catholic tradition is found in his *When War is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-War Thinking* (2nd ed.; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1996).

[303] See Jenson, "Reversals: How My Mind Has Changed," *The Christian Century*, online: http://www.christiancentury.org/article.lasso?id=8373 (April 20, 2010).

economic remembrance and enactment of Jesus' way with the poor,[304] while Jenson belongs squarely with Luther in wanting little to do with bread and wine that are not themselves the real presence of Christ.[305] And so on.

Before every seeming similarity and drastic difference of whatever import, the question remains: Can we discern a constitutive center to these differences?

A Difference of Christological Task

If taking up the difference in Yoder's and Jenson's theological training is a step in the right direction, perhaps it would be valuable to extend that originating differentiation in more exact fashion to their career bodies of work and so to their identities as Christian scholars. The simplest way to do this is by appropriating one of their own such identifications of another. In *The Triune Identity*, Jenson calls Origen of Alexandria "the first truly great thinker and scholar of Christian history," and goes further in crowning him "the first great christologian after John the Evangelist, the first to do all theology as meditation on and analysis of the reality of Christ."[306]

This title ("christologian") and its definition ("all theology as meditation on and analysis of the reality of Christ") are immediately arresting in their direct applicability to both Yoder and Jenson. Yet each is not a christologian in the same sense, nor do they (necessarily) see their tasks as synonymous. For present purposes, drawing on their original training and decades of work, I will term Yoder an *ethico-ecclesial christologian*, and Jenson a *metaphysico-dogmatic christologian*. Such descriptive labels identify both that which *directs* the method, labors, and ends of their work and that which *funds* the substance of the work itself.

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[304] See Yoder, "Disciples Break Bread Together," *Body*, 14-27.

[305] Jenson, *Unbaptized*, 128-31.

[306] Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1982), 74.

In Yoder's case, being a theologian of the Christ leads always to two intertwined questions: Given Jesus' normative status as human, what does such-and-such *imply for human life*? And: Given the church's unique orientation of allegiance and obedience to this Jesus, what does such-and-such-in-human-life *look like embodied in the community of discipleship*? However finally reductionistic, in the scope here represented, theological questions for Yoder have ultimately to do with the life of the incarnate Christ vis-à-vis ethics and/in the church.

Jenson would not necessarily disagree with Yoder's ordering questions, but the form and content of his work reflect different priorities. Jenson will ask instead: Given the absolute priority of the man Jesus as simultaneously the second identity of the triune God, what is the overarching metanarrative, what is the structuring *metaphysics* able to contain and make sense of this revolutionary fact?[307] And: Given the task of the church's working out the implications of Christ over time, what has and ought the church to say authoritatively as and about the truth of the gospel? Whatever else comes in its reach (which, for Jenson, will in fact be *all* else), theology has to do with divine reality as revealed to the church through the person of Christ.

Seen through this prism, previously unexplained differences emerge in a new light. While Jenson may coherently approach questions and issues *from* dogmatically established doctrines, Yoder will do so only *toward* them, and then only in a contingent fashion, discerning provisional but never final doctrinal positions. This latter process, as we have seen, Yoder calls "looping back," defined as "a glance over the shoulder to enable a midcourse correction, a rediscovery of something from the past whose pertinence was not

[307] See in particular Jenson's crisp and lucid contribution ("How Does Jesus Make a Difference") to *Essentials of Christian Theology* (ed. William C. Placher; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 91-205.

seen before, because only a new question or challenge enables us to see it speaking to us."[308] For Jenson, alternatively, "the total theological tradition . . . is in a certain way normative for theology,"[309] and with specific respect to dogma, there is telling contrast to Yoder's proposal of "looping back": "A dogmatic choice is one by which the church so decisively determines her own future that if the choice is wrongly made, the community determined by that choice is no longer in fact the community of the gospel; thus no church thereafter exists to reverse the decision."[310] Nicaea and all subsequent councils and dogmatic decisions belong to this "notion of irreversibility,"[311] as Jenson calls it.

Here we perhaps pass the outer ring of concentric circles containing the *reasons* for Yoder and Jenson's respective differences. The content of the heart of the gospel, and the questions it demands of theology, split Yoder and Jenson into different approaches and priorities, thus helping to explain divergence in the way each reads and perceives (the) tradition's authority.

A Difference of Ecclesiology

This observation leads to another consequence of the split, which itself becomes the next progressive level in the quest for a discriminating core to their disparities: ecclesiology. In

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[308] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 69.

[309] Jenson, *Systematic Theology: Volume 1: The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 38.

[310] Jenson, *ST* I:17. The manifest falsity of this statement should be self-evident: if not *all* of the community agrees with those making the dogmatic decision *on behalf of* the community, then there is in empirical fact a remnant that "exists to reverse the decision." Moreover, given that the discussions and arguments from that particular point of past history are available to us even centuries later (rather than, say, being lost to the evanescence of oral disputation), even if there was at one time no contingent left to differ with the dogma, there could arise others down the line who reassessed the original dogmatic arguments and concluded that the official decision was incorrect or unwise. What, other than a lack of personal continuity—which, though serious, is not thereby inevitably crippling—would keep this from happening? "Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Luke 3:8).

[311] Jenson, *ST* I:17.

Chapter 3 I outlined the starkly differentiated visions envisaged by each, euphemizing them as the discipleship minority of Yoder and the sacramental polity of Jenson. Questions of the church's identity, mission, and role in the world are inextricable from contested political matters like truth, power, and faithfulness, parsed and parceled according to ecclesiological stance. Within this still deeper level of difference—granting that even ecclesiology could be taken as the *consequence*, rather than the cause, of divergence—is there in the end a determining center?

A Difference of Ecclesio-Historical Logic

I propose just such a determining center to the diverse and important differences between Yoder and Jenson, which takes the form of rival hermeneutics for reading history, canon, creed, and theology. I term this disjunction a fundamental dichotomy of *ecclesio-historical logic*. As should be obvious by now, both theologians have a particular way of interpreting the flow of historical processes and events, related to and governed by their conceptions of the church. This lens colors all they see.

Beginning with Jenson, the logic underwriting his view of the church in history is what I will call a *pneumatic dialectic of perdurance*.[312] His logic is a *dialectic*, first of all, in that he envisions the church as an ongoing conversation through time, one which through dialogue, discussion, argument, and pronouncement constantly finds itself in the give-and-take of

[312] In personal correspondence, Jenson brought to my attention that, given its echoes in metaphysical discourse (and his attacks against its use there), the language of "perdurance" may be an unhelpfully loaded term. I will keep the word with diffidence, even as I wonder whether this connection does not hint at a larger problematic within Jenson's ecclesiology. For example, note the use of "perdurance" in his definition of "scripture" within a religious community's life in *Canon and Creed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 13-14: "Let me propose: a religious community's scripture is a body of literature that is fixed in some medium that preserves it—which may simply be trained memories—and that precisely in that fixity is necessary for the perdurance of the community."

speech, asking perennially, "What does it mean to say gospel today?"[313] This dialectic is *pneumatic* in that it is no human-determined conversation—however much it is carried out by the church's members—but rather is led by the Holy Spirit, the third identity of the triune God. In this respect Jenson repeatedly calls forth one of his favorite biblical quotes, that of Jesus' personal promise to the church that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18 KJV). This promise—fulfilled and borne by the Spirit through history's crises and triumphs—entails the absolutely trustworthy belief on the part of Christians that "the church cannot fall decisively."[314]

Finally, this Spirit-kept conversation is not a brief blip on the first century's radar, nor thereafter left unprepared for the Lord's delay. As Jenson tells the story, a few generations after the apostles' passing, "the church found itself with a past history, and so—if the delay did not simply disprove the message—had to anticipate a future history also, in which institutions of historical continuity would be needed." He goes on: "At this juncture, the Spirit . . . granted touchstones of the true gospel and just so institutions of the community's historical self-identity." These Spirit-granted institutions are the coterminous development so famously laid down by Irenaeus: canon, creed, and episcopate.[315] Elsewhere, and more directly to our purposes, Jenson asks whether "the church should not contemplate a long run." His answer? "I think it must."[316]

In short, the relation between church and history, and the church *in* history, is that of an ongoing conversation of disputation and convergence, led by the Spirit, kept for the long run—that is to say, a pneumatic dialectic of perdurance. All else spins out from there.

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[313] Jenson, *ST* I:14.
[314] Jenson, *Unbaptized*, 87.
[315] Jenson, *Canon*, 5.
[316] Jenson, "Christian Civilization," in *God, Truth, and Witness: Engaging Stanley Hauerwas* (ed. L. Gregory Jones, Reinhard Hütter, and C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell; Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 162n.4.

In profound contrast, the logic undergirding Yoder's line of sight may summarily be characterized as an *apostolic apocalyptic of renewal*. I identified each of these aspects in Chapter 2, in my reading of Yoder's ecclesiology. Beginning with apocalyptic, I noted the way (quoting Nathan Kerr) that it " 'names the particular operation of God's 'transcendence' and of God's 'Kingdom' *within* history, on the basis of its having *broken into* history *from beyond*," serving not as an "event back there" with no import for today or for the church's ongoing life, but rather as "an 'idiom' or 'style' of living and thinking history as eschatologically oriented."[317] This "idiom" constitutively locates Yoder's logic of reading the church in history.

Yoder's apocalyptic is qualified as *apostolic* inasmuch as the canonical scriptural texts hold within them the primal witness of the apostles to the person and work of Jesus. A touchstone in the church's apostolicity is the (so far much discussed, being so central to Yoder's thought) process of "looping back" or "reaching back,"[318] which necessitates an "appeal to a prior commonality against an innovation," for "Scripture comes on the scene not as a receptacle of all possible inspired truths, but rather as witness to the historical baseline of the communities' origins and thereby as link to the historicity of their Lord's past presence."[319]

And so we arrive at *renewal*: the revelation of Christ as witnessed to by the apostles and prophets in Scripture is the singular authority to which the church, in its historical life, must return time and again for rejuvenation, rebuke, and even rebirth. Understood in this way—and as a chief point of contrast with Jenson's logic—the church is *not* kept safe from "possible apostasy," for "the Church, any church, including [one's] own, is radically

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[317] Nathan R. Kerr, *Christ, History, and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 135 (italics in original).

[318] Yoder, *Priestly*, 71.

[319] Ibid., 69.

defectible."[320] As I laid out in more detail in Chapter 2, this claim is not meant as a recipe for melancholic pessimism; in fact, Yoder grounds his contentions about radical defectibility and critical renewal precisely in the affirmation of the possibility of actual obedience: "Because the Messiah came and poured out God's Spirit, obedience is possible." This is not, as with Pelagius, "an affirmation about Man," but "an affirmation about God. The affirmation that obedience is possible is a statement not about me nor about human nature, but about the Spirit of God."[321]

It is fitting that Jenson and Yoder would find themselves at odds regarding the church's defectibility:[322] it is the paramount question of the church's sustained assurance—precisely as itself—in its vulnerable sojourn through history. No doubt each would understandably claim the descriptors of the other's logic's: Jenson has no fight with apocalyptic, believes the creeds *for* their apostolicity, and is a premier advocate for the church's theological and institutional renewal. Similarly, though Yoder might prefer "perseverance" to "perdurance," his renewal's authenticity would be its grounding in the

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[320] Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 123.

[321] Ibid., 123. Later Yoder quite nearly gives a definition of his position: "Radical reformation biblicism is different in kind [from the way of the magisterial reformers], whatever be the logical puzzles or circularities involved in seeking to let a book interpret itself. Interpreted by the community which its very proclamation in the Spirit creates, the Scripture itself legitimates and empowers a new apostolicity, accredited as such not by judicial succession but by consonance of method and message" (138). Yoder's phrasing of the contrast between "judicial succession" and "consonance of method and message" is about as concise a summary as we could ask for.

[322] Recall Yoder's remark on the gates of hell: "The future of the Church is sure in the sense that God is a God who gives life to the dead. Yet the future of *our* church, that of any given community, enjoys no security" (*Schism*, 123). Jenson often says something quite similar; for example: "To be sure, we are permitted to believe that the gates of hell will not finally prevail against the universal church, but there is no such guarantee for the Presbyterians or the Baptists, as there was none for the great churches of Pergamum or Hippo, now vanished without a trace" (*Canon*, 3). Yoder would likely ask back, however: "Is there any such a guarantee for Rome?" Less to the question of defectibility and more to the that of infallibility, Jenson writes in *ST* II:246: "Can a council err? Obviously it can, in the sense that it is always possible for a gathering of bishops and other dignitaries to fall into conflict with Scripture or existing dogma, even when that gathering understands itself to be and claims to be a council of the church. But then it is not one. This will be discovered, if the Spirit guides the church, and the church's assent 'cannot fail' to be refused; just this happened in the case of the famous 'Robber Council' at Ephesus, which in its mere formalities differed little from the ecumenical 'Council of Ephesus.' "

Spirit's leading, and his constant appeal to ecumenical dialogue is to be *more* honest, for in the church's talking God speaks the authoritative word.

Whatever the value of such labels, what they attempt to name is real; the question is whether they succeed in delineating the men's differences. In Yoder's case, his apostolic apocalyptic of renewal accounts well for his positions on restitution, on the possibility of ecclesial apostasy, on the mission and form of the church, on the authority of tradition, on the import and implications of christology, on the sacraments, on the Catholic Church, on the creeds, and on all post-biblical developments and doctrines.[323] Obversely, Jenson's pneumatic dialectic of perdurance clarifies and coheres in his positions on the same, including especially the *in*defectibility of the church, the *iure divino* status of post-apostolic developments, the necessity of institutional succession and authority, and the metaphysical glories of Christ's truth.

Interestingly enough, the barrier here identified as a core difference of ecclesio-historical logics is strikingly similar to that discerned by Jenson between Catholics and Protestants:

> Between Catholicism and Protestantism what is finally at issue is *being in time*. Catholicism sees that self-identical historical being means *institution*. And it sees that institutions of the gospel must share the gospel's mystery and cannot be mere human arrangements; as the latter, they would be frivolous. Protestantism sees that historical being means *freedom*. And it sees that the freedom of the gospel is God's own freedom, which humans cannot administer; our attempt to administer such freedom would be sin. What we are not in position to do, is to see both truths at once.[324]

To a significant extent, insofar as Jenson has, over time, shifted further to the Catholic side, Yoder and Jenson embody these traditional archetypes well. (Much of the question, of

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[323] Yoder's 1967 essay, "Is There Historical Development of Theological Thought?" in *Radical Ecumenicity: Pursuing Unity and Continuity after John Howard Yoder* (ed. John C. Nugent; Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2010), 223-35, speaks directly to these issues in helpful detail.

[324] Jenson, *Unbaptized*, 107. Fascinatingly, before publication of the book this comment was originally communicated in 1988 by letter to—and then followed up by personal conversation with—Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (107n.1), now Pope Benedict XVI. According to Jenson, "The Cardinal did not reject the construal."

course, hinges on definitions of terms, for Jenson's project is dedicated to locating the action of God the Spirit, who is freedom itself, in, with, under, through, and even *as* the institutional structures and sacramental activities of the church, *precisely* on the basis of God's promise.[325])

In any case, having identified the determining logic for each theologian's project, we are thereby enabled to see both in a new light and to understand with enriched insight areas of real commonality as well as areas of divergence. Knowing all this, and in such rich detail, will serve at once as a specific point of departure for discussing particular arguments or claims in relation to either thinker, and as a solid foundation on which to build something new in what follows.

II. Situating the Doctrine of the Trinity: Countering Yoder's Critiques

Recall that my interest in Jenson's theology is less for his particular *articulation* of the Trinity, though I do believe there to be much that recommends it.[326] Rather, I see him as a faithful but creative representative of the tradition's insistence that the confession of God as triune is at once crucial, healthy, practical, correct, requisite, and inescapable, both for personal Christian faith and for the life of the church. Placing him in conversation with Yoder, Jenson's dynamism and boldness only further bolster the important distinctions needing to be drawn between their positions, while in the process clarifying nicely the implications of each. Having thus far outlined Yoder's critique of the Trinity and Jenson's adamant contention that it is of primary importance, with only preliminary or suggestive judgments

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[325] See, e.g., Jenson's pneumatological commentary in *Unbaptized*, 132-147.

[326] For example: the sustained exegesis of actual biblical texts; the unwillingness to interpret Jesus by deity but rather deity by Jesus; the commitment to making sense of the sort of metaphysically explosive ways Scripture speaks of God; the argument for God's commitment to and within time as well as for divine passibility; the retrieval of a front-and-center pneumatology; fidelity to narrative and so to abolishing the immanent/economic divide; etc.

laced throughout, I will now offer my own theological evaluation of the doctrine's role and importance with specific reference to Yoder's critical comments and concerns. I will do so by situating the doctrine in relation to various theological *loci* that emerge from reading Yoder's and Jenson's discussions of it.

Worship

The doctrine of the Trinity is a necessary and unavoidable answer to the question, "Who or what is the proper object of Christian worship?" The God of Israel is an unargued given; the Israelite Jesus of Nazareth comes along and addresses this God as "Father" (Matt. 11:25; 16:17), and subsequently invites others also to do so (Matt. 6:9). And so we have God the Father (John 6:27; 1 Thess. 1:1), Israel's God. But what of the one thereby designated Son (Mark 1:11 parr.; Rom. 1:4), the man Jesus, confessed as "both Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36)? Can a creature be worshiped with or as Creator, be proclaimed and treated as God? Can God be human? And what of that intangible presence called Spirit (Mark 1:10 parr.; Acts 1:8; 2:4, 33)—is this a third party, or merely a product or relation of one or the other (or both)? In whichever case, is the Spirit *also* God and so to be worshiped with or alongside the Father and the Son?

If an answer follows which is affirmative in the slightest, the confession of one God is immediately threatened—and so the Trinity or some such similar doctrine appears on the scene. Just so, these are the obstinate questions that drove the church in the third through sixth centuries to address the challenge of identifying God aright, always for the express and particular purpose, as in God's word of liberation to Pharaoh, "that they may worship me" (Exod. 9:13). Such questions will never vanish so long as the church is a people committed to the worship of God.

Contra Yoder, therefore, the church, if it seeks to worship the true God of its calling and founding, must adequately and explicitly identify the object of its worship. And if it be faithful, it will name and confess the triune God.[327]

Scripture

The doctrine of the Trinity is both a response to a problem the Bible creates and a solution produced by the Bible's own witness. The problem is that the biblical texts make abundantly clear, over against the mythologies and cosmologies of other religious traditions, that there is a fundamental ontological distinction between God and that which is not God. Thus, when the question of Jesus' and the Spirit's status as deity arises, the answer must come decisively: *either* they are somehow also God, and so Creator, *or* they are not God, and so creature.

The biblical texts provide the answer to the problematic they generate by way of the New Testament's remarkable and clear triadic logic of divine action, personality, relationship, and differentiation. Passages like the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8 parr.), Jesus' Baptism (Mark 1:9-11 parr.), the Upper Room Discourse (John 13–17), the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20), the Christ Hymn (Phil. 2:6-11), the Hymn of God's Son (Col. 1:15-20), the Prologue to the Gospel of John (John 1:1-18), and Paul's various triply interwoven tellings of the gospel (e.g., 2 Cor. 13:14; Rom. 8:11; Eph. 1:13-14; 2:18; 1 Cor. 12:4-6) all attest to a structured pattern of thought and belief that function authoritatively for subsequent

[327] By this relatively undemanding statement I do *not* mean that churches must have or claim to know—much less preach on—the intricacies of God's triune life with some kind of rigorous specificity that excludes all ambiguity. I simply mean the minimum of the church's achievement in confessing God as triune, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God from everlasting to everlasting—*from which* confession the innumerable conceptual attempts, on the part of theologians, to articulate and understand God's immanent life have sprung and coalesced to become an extended meditative discourse. In other words, I believe the confession of God as triune to be a *minimalist* grammatico-confessional boundary rather than "only one more" secondarily derived stumbling block to faith.

trinitarian formulations. This pattern rightly continues to structure and shape trinitarian faith for Christians today.

Contra Yoder, therefore, the Trinity is not biblical merely in its recognition of a problem, but also—and decisively—in its articulation of the three *personae* in the scriptural drama as at once personally differentiated, relationally inseparable, and "very God."

History

The doctrine of the Trinity is not a product of "the Hellenizing of the gospel," but is in fact the highest achievement of "the Gospelizing of Hellenism."[328] That is to say, the church exists in particular contexts and does not thereby forsake its normative originating circumstances; it seeks instead to learn what that normativity looks like *here and now*. The Trinity is thus a prime reflection of the fact that a-biblical modes of thought—such as metaphysics, philosophy, and the like—will inevitably impinge on the church's life and faith. The church, like the incarnation, must take on particular cultural flesh at times and places that cannot be abstracted either "upward" (into an ideal or essence) or "backward" (into a pure original condition).

Moreover, a decision as momentous as the doctrinal confession of God's triunity is not something that can be relativized by locating it historically and saying, in effect, that it was good for them but not for us. Part of honoring our forebears' challenges means taking them as seriously as they did, and by all accounts they took the christological controversies to be a crisis that spoke to the very heart of the faith. If we judge their response to have been

[328] Jenson, "Ipse Pater Non Est Impassibilis," in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (ed. James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White, O.P.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 118n.1.

faithful, are we at liberty to criticize their passing it along to others, much less those who received it after them?

Contra Yoder, therefore—or at least unclear tendencies in his arguments—the church's particularity and historical existence entail the enfleshment of post-biblical forms of life (ideas, language, culture) when contextually appropriate and faithfully baptized.[329] As these are critically received by succeeding generations, they become the church's living tradition—an index of which is trinitarian doctrine—and so become something *more* than merely provisional contingencies of history.

The next two *loci* expand these comments on history in relation to mission and to time.

Mission

The doctrine of the Trinity is a paradigmatic example of the way in which the church's missionary impetus inexorably leads to and demands encounter with others, and so results in new and unexpected formulations of its faith.[330] Correlative to its historical character, the church's commissioned dispersion among the nations entails that *newness*—whether understood as the byproduct of cultural fusions or as the lively work of the Holy Spirit—will constantly be a feature of ecclesial life. Of course, such newness must be tested and discerned, but just as those are blessed who welcome disciples on their missionary way (Matt. 10:40-42), so will disciples be faithful—*precisely* as those sent to bear witness to the

[329] I recognize that this phrase has come to take on a polemically pejorative meaning, but I intend it in its barest biblical sense: putting antecedent forms of life to death, then receiving them back to life in disjunctive but newly transformed continuity.

[330] See Kerr's excellent (and Yoder-inspired) account of the church as mission in *Christ*, 169-196, as well as the similar but differently inflected account in Paul J. DeHart (Kerr's doctoral advisor, as it happens), *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 240-282.

good news—who come to their hosts amenable to whatever new thing might occur in the space opened in the encounter between them.

Thus, not only is the church by nature culturally incarnated and so coincident with ongoing development of life and thought, the source and cause of this traditioned embeddedness—encounter with cultural strangers and religious others—is internal to the church's commissioned identity as a sent people.

Contra Yoder, therefore, the work of the Holy Spirit in the church is not limited to ethics, unity, or renewal, but includes also the impelling force of bringing the church into unimagined futures that *really are new*,[331] and so, while consonant with what has come before (including Scripture), are neither predictable nor shackled thereby. In short, when the church confesses its God to be triune, it does so in faith *that* it does so by the guidance and power of the Spirit.

Time

The doctrine of the Trinity is a reflection of the church's temporal character, such that the church can never repristinate itself but must always belong to its own time and place, as heir to a past it can never repudiate, abolish, or forget. The church's location in time is alike undivorced and inseparable from the church's historical particularity and missional impulsion, and moreover clarifies that the past—the *church's* past[332]—is both sheerly there,

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[331] In many places Yoder sounds as if he is saying this very thing (e.g., *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* [Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002], 257-259, 377-384), but it remains unclear to me what new thing, particularly doctrinal, might be able to be proposed and agreed upon within his schema, or even by him.

[332] I recognize the ambiguity of identifying "the" church, or a supposed single or monolithic past to any actual community. I am here seeking only to speak out of my personal location at the end of the broad Palestinian, Mediterranean, medieval, Western, and now (most immediately) American context which constitutes *one* of the one church's many courses through history. As this is my own recognized self-limitation, it is also my general intended audience; at the same time, I do not intend for my arguments to be construed as parochially cut off from other, different traditions. How triune confession can and should be incarnated in

unchangeable, and irreparably possessed, the church's own and no other's. That is, the church may *repent* of its past—indeed, it belongs to its life that it must and ought to do so, and regularly—but may never *rid itself* thereof.

Negatively, this means that the facts of Constantine and imperial power and dirty politics and purist exclusivity and all the rest are forever included in the church's story of arriving at trinitarian confession. Positively, it means that the church may never return to zero, but must always begin where it already is, with its great mixed historical baggage of decisions and detours ever in tow.[333] With regard to the Trinity, the upshot is that the church cannot "get behind" its sustained engagement of the questions and challenges that came to a head at Nicaea and Constantinople and elsewhere; better to receive its history with equal parts gratitude and critique, and go on from there to the task of faithfulness today.

Contra Yoder, therefore, the church's temporal reception of trinitarian doctrine is an ineradicable feature of Christian faith *as temporally extended across the ages*. Christian faith has been trinitarian for sixteen centuries,[334] from the highest peaks of scholasticism to the simplest acts of piety, and unlike certain mistakes or blunders—Constantinianism, say, or the doctrine of congenital original sin—this decision goes all the way down. We may and ought to take issue with Jenson's calling *every* dogma a make-or-break ecclesial moment, but as regards this question, the judgment is appropriate.

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particular contexts—especially those outside the West—is an excellent question to consider, but not one I am able to treat adequately here.

[333] Again, this sentence probably could have been *written* by Yoder, it is so near to his mode of thought. The point is what *follows* from this claim, with (in the present moment) specific reference to the Trinity. My discussion below of Yoder's concept of "looping back" will clarify further what I mean by this critique.

[334] This claim should be read through my qualification above about limited social location. What I go on to say, however, should also make clear why I think the Trinity's historic pervasiveness is theologically significant.

Language

The doctrine of the Trinity is a consequence inherent in the challenge of human speech, taking seriously the question, "What shall the church say to be faithful to God?" This point is but a correlate of the church's commission (Matt. 28:19-20; 2 Tim. 1:13-14) to teach truthfully about the God whom it confesses. This is related to but broader than sheer *identification*, having to do with the ongoing "word work"[335] and finessing care for the sake of right speech concerning the God so identified. The church must discern what it means to speak rightly and faithfully about the one God both internally to believers (through proclamation, catechesis, and biblical study) and externally to nonbelievers (through conversation, scholarship, and openness to challenge).

In the same vein, it is not insignificant that the church has so consistently renewed the legacy of Nicaea and Constantinople and named God triunely. The energy behind this regular renewal—a different kind of renewal than that envisioned by Yoder!—is the simple conviction that *it matters what we say*, and as the subject of the gospel proclamation, it is right and fitting that the church take time to establish and confirm how to speak the God whose story it tells.

Contra Yoder, therefore, the word problem to which the Trinity is the solution, while accountable to and grounded in Scripture, is not finally capable of finding decisive expression *apart from* words outside of Scripture. It is precisely the church's "agents of linguistic self-consciousness"[336] who have taught and continue to teach that, in order to worship, preach, pray and witness rightly to the God of Jesus, Christians must do so by speaking the triune God.

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[335] I take the use of this phrase in a theological context from the work of Stanley Hauerwas.

[336] Yoder, *Priestly*, 32-33. See the discussion in the fourth section below for further use of this helpful term.

Analogy

The doctrine of the Trinity is a resource of profound and inexhaustible use to the faith and thinking of the church, for whatever the true God *is* (or is like) carries manifold significance for God's works, that is, creatures.[337] Thus the history of reflection on God's triune life—for all its metaphysical escapades and self-indulgent philosophizing—is a rich and meaningful activity, to be taken up anew and imitated with discipline in our own day.

To take only a few examples: if the one true God is a community-in-communion of perfect and infinite love;[338] if this God is internally self-differentiated without loss or envy, a plenitude of beauty and liveliness with room for others;[339] if God's "Triune order as 'the structure of supreme love' " manifests that "the self is most fully itself only as it exits the self";[340] if God's eternal life is best described as the kind of celebration analogous to nothing less than "a wedding feast, the love of two celebrated by a third";[341] if God's own interpersonal relations are constituted *both* by abundance, fullness, giving, power *and* by absence, receiving, gratitude, *kenosis*[342]—then these features of divine life reveal massively important things about the God of the gospel and, accordingly, about the character of life created by that God. The doctrine of the Trinity is thus no abstraction; if true, it is one of the most relevant subjects available to us.

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[337] By "analogy" I do not mean anything so technical as the tradition's use of the term, only the simple assertion that the nature and character of the creator contain implications for the nature and character of creation.

[338] See David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 46-79, 120-131.

[339] See Jenson's splendid way of putting it in *ST* I:214-237, especially 214-215, 226, 230, 234-236.

[340] J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 234, set in the larger context of a chapter on Gregory of Nyssa's christology, 229-251. Carter's own quoted phrase is taken from Dumitru Staniloae.

[341] Eugene F. Rogers Jr., *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way Into the Triune God* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 195, and more broadly, 195-275.

[342] See Arthur McGill, *Death and Life: An American Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1987); *Suffering: A Test of Theological Method* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1982).

Contra Yoder, therefore, trinitarian faith, however construed as a form of knowledge, has significant implications for Christian understandings of creaturely existence, including both human and non-human life, and so for how to live in the world. These cannot of course be separated from the biblical witness or the communal life of the church, but neither are they merely speculative or negligible. If God is triune, the import for God's creation is immeasurable.

It is for these reasons, among others, that I believe Jenson (representing the great tradition he claims and reconfigures so attractively) to be both *correct* in his insistence on the centrality of the Trinity and therefore also a *corrective* to Yoder's reluctance and trepidation vis-à-vis trinitarian faith and theology. I have not addressed every challenge to the Trinity or voiced every reason for its importance, but limited myself to those areas that speak directly to Yoder's critiques and/or to those facets of Yoder's logic of reading history that rub against the possibility of abiding trinitarian confession. I will now go on to explore Yoder's ecclesiology, in the hopes of finding structures sufficiently malleable to make space for faith in the triune God.

III. Making Space for the Spirit: Supplementing Yoder's Logic

In this section I want to address the conceptual component of modifying Yoder's ecclesiology. Specifically, having critiqued Yoder's reasons for hesitation with regard to trinitarian confession and put forth opposing arguments in its favor, I want to go to the heart of what divides Yoder from Jenson, his ecclesio-historical logic, and propose an alternative logic that brings to bear a portion of Jenson's thought that should serve to facilitate new opportunities for conceiving the discernment of the church's life over time. I

will then carry this over to the next section, where I will explore how this proposed logic interacts with and relates to the features of Yoder's ecclesiology which I outlined in Chapter 2, and conclude by suggesting new answers from inside this modified Yoderian ecclesio-logic to the questions asked at the end of Chapter 3.

Put succinctly, I believe Yoder's logic for reading the church in history should be revised so as to become an apostolic apocalyptic, not of renewal, but of *pneumatic edification*. Such a revision—not, admittedly, to something Yoder has suggested but to my own summary of his overarching mode of thought—is in effect an attempt to *make space for the Holy Spirit in the temporal life and faith of the church*. This is not to say that the Holy Spirit is absent from Yoder's thought, only that one particular function of the Spirit's work is lacking, or at least left ambiguous: that of building up the church, not only into unity, moral maturity, and scriptural fidelity, but also into *an ever-fuller knowledge of the true God*. I take my direction in this regard from one of Yoder's favorite passages, the opening verses of the fourth chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. . . . The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, *for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ*. . . . [S]peaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. (vv. 4-7, 11-13, 15-16; emphasis mine)

Let this passage hang as a thematic control over all that follows.[343] In it we read that the work of the "one Spirit" in the "one body" of Christ—which is made up of those called

[343] Unbeknownst to me at the time of this section's original writing was the way in which James Wm. McClendon Jr. uses the very same passage from Ephesians for similar Yoder-honoring purposes in his essay, "The Believers Church in Theological Perspective," in *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John*

by the "one God and Father of all" to "one faith" in the "one Lord," and so to "one hope" and "one baptism"—is to give gifts from the risen Jesus to the whole body for the sake of that body's edification, a primary goal of which is "the knowledge of the Son of God." We could not ask for a more fulsome (or winsome) account of a properly ecclesial identity and form of life: one governed by a trinitarian pattern of calling and community, ordered to the Father as the people of the Son in the charismatic power of the Spirit, given gifts and persons by the Spirit for the building up of the body over an indefinite temporal horizon.

The two terms of my modification to Yoder's governing logic serve multiple ends. On the one hand, the use of "pneumatic" takes the Jensonian point that a faithful vision of the church must discover a way to understand—and, practically, to engender openness to—the maturing work of the Holy Spirit with respect to the knowledge appropriate to faith. On the other hand, the addition of "edification" seeks to avoid problematic or loaded terminological baggage in both directions: from Jenson's side, that of "development" and "perdurance," from Yoder's that of "renewal" and "restitution." Of course, each of these terms is somewhat unavoidable in theological discourse, both conceptually and practically, but in this case they tend to lead in unhelpful directions.

In the first instance, "development" can suggest a kind of unending self-gathering mass of immovable doctrine, closed to critique and unable to enact reform or correction, while "perdurance" brings with it overtones of sheer institutional survival, such that the task of the church is not to be *the church* but simply *to be*. In the second instance, though Yoder's unquenchable energy for ecclesial renewal is a gift to be applauded when appropriately interpreted and applied, it can uncomfortably imply a sort of perpetual return-to-zero, never

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Howard Yoder (ed. Stanley Hauerwas, Chris K. Huebner, Harry J. Huebner, and Mark Thiessen Nation; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999), 309-326, especially 322-326.

moving *forward* into something new but always *backward* toward an ideal, which can then lead to the radicalized form of "restitution" (or "restoration"), making of some standard of accountability a reified essence of a-contextual emulation.

As an alternative, "edification" is a biblical metaphor that takes the church as both its object and its subject, depending on discursive context. In either case it is the Spirit acting *on* the church, even as it is the Spirit (at least at times!) working *through* the church. The Spirit's freedom is thus front and center, for just as the Spirit is the Spirit *of* the community—promised to abide among and within it—the Spirit is utterly free to act in relation *to* the community, either as gentle guide or as agitating aggressor. In exact accordance with these relational dynamics, the Spirit's work of building up the church may take the form of developing tradition or faithful perseverance, just as it may appear as biblical renewal or prophetic reconstitution. Furthermore, such building up to maturity need not be limited to unity in the faith or moral empowerment or self-critical reform, but may also include the proper teaching and content *of* the faith, the knowledge of which takes the name "theology."

In sum: I propose that Yoder's ecclesiology make room for a *thicker pneumatology*, particularly as it illumines and informs the church's doctrinal identity over time.

How does this proposal affect Yoder's envisioned church according to my eight-fold summary account of his ecclesiology in Chapter 2? First of all, it remains biblical (I.1), for the work of the Spirit's building up of the body will be fundamentally *consonant* with the witness of Scripture (which, accordingly, I have indicated by leaving "apostolic" in the designated phrase for the new logic). Similarly, it remains centered on Christ (I.2), insofar as the pattern of obedient discipleship and the lens through which all is interpreted is finally the person, teachings, and triumph of the crucified and risen Jesus. Furthermore, the church is no less defectible (I.8), for it is precisely the Spirit's work not only to lead the community

"into all truth" (John 16:13) but also to reprove and discipline it when it fails in its charge or falls in its faith. Nor is the congregational form of Yoder's church necessarily altered *a priori* (I.7), inasmuch as ecclesial structures need not be known or determined in advance, as Yoder himself readily allows.[344]

The most straightforward amendment is to the church's pneumatological empowerment (I.3), not so much by critique of or excision from Yoder's vision as by an epistemic and temporal expansion of it. The ecumenical task (I.4), moreover, is if anything strengthened by the frank affirmation that the Spirit can work—and *has* indeed done so—to lead the church catholic further and deeper into "the knowledge of the Son of God," not least by means of trinitarian confession, itself a matter of widespread ecumenical agreement. To the church's missionary impulse (I.6) my proposal simply adds—or, better, *clarifies*—the import and meaning of missionary encounters with alien cultures and a-biblical modes of thought. Per this construal, the church's cultural flesh is not merely (or at least not necessarily) temporary dress, without effect on Christian faith and identity and so to be discarded in lieu of some truer inner self, but rather is inseparable from and bound up with who Christians are as disciples and believers.

And as for the church's apocalyptic existence (I.5), the eschatological orientation of the church's life (participation in God's kingdom irrupted into the present) and faith ("seeing history doxologically,"[345] that is, through the prism of the slain lamb who yet lives) remains intact, now bolstered and enlivened by the unpredictable Eschatos[346] himself, the Holy Spirit of God. Hence my keeping "apocalyptic" in the logic's phrasing, a term which opens itself

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[344] See Yoder, *Royal*, 222-230, 280-288, 301-320, especially the pithily representative statement: "We'll have to see" (319). As regards forms of ministry, see his *The Fullness of Christ: Paul's Vision of Universal Ministry* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1987), 85-105.

[345] Yoder, *Royal*, 135.

[346] Jenson, *Systematic Theology: Volume 2: The Works of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 167: "We believe in God the Creator . . . We believe in God the Eschatos . . ." See also *ST* I:146-161.

up to a broader trinitarian thrust: in Nathan Kerr's formulation, apocalyptic recognizes "that it is the Spirit who works in us, and delivers us over to the work of worship," the latter occurring "only by way of a *pneumatic* irruption of the Kingdom whereby one is made to participate in that *Christic* pattern of life by which 'history' is 'unhanded' to the Father in the mode of incarnation, cross, and resurrection."[347]

Having addressed Yoder's ecclesiology taken in itself and according to Yoder's own presentation, we now move to those challenges posed to it by Jenson's trinitarian theology.

IV. Answering Jenson's Challenges: Toward a Trinitarian Yoderian Ecclesiology

The previous concluding discussion about eschatology and the Holy Spirit relates directly to the first question posed at the end of Chapter 3: that of the role of the Spirit in history. Because I have already addressed this question in detail, I will not repeat my argument; but perhaps there is one other thing to be said in response to Yoder's concerns. The new alternative logic here proposed is not intended either to split the trinitarian persons against one another or to offer sources of authority or revelation apart from Christ—both of which strategies Yoder battled against much of his life.[348] The work of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the world cannot be divorced from Jesus the crucified or from the One Jesus called *abba*, being at once "the Spirit of Christ" and "the Spirit of God" (Rom. 8:9).[349] How the Spirit leads and works will and must be at one with the Father "who sends rain on the just and the unjust alike" (Matt. 5:45 NLT) *and* with the Son who, "while we still were sinners"

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[347] Kerr, *Christ*, 167.

[348] With regard to social ethics, we may take *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, 1994) as one great attempt to counteract predominating theological tendencies to find revelation either in opposition to or apart from Christ. See its first chapter (1-20) for a rundown of Yoder's real and perceived opponents.

[349] In bolder formulation, we might paraphrase: "the Spirit of the Father's Son" (Gal. 4:6 rev.) and "the Spirit of the Son's Father" (Rom. 8:11 rev.). See also Matthew 10:20: "[I]t is not you who speak," says the Son to his disciples, "but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."

and even "enemies" of him and so of God and one another, "died for us," that is, "died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:8, 10, 8, 6).

The second and third questions raise the issue of the church's authority in missionary cultural encounters that prove to be transformative or epochal for the church's identity and self-understanding. I suggest here that Yoderian ecclesiology can learn from the diasporic character of the synagogal Judaism for which Yoder expresses so much admiration.[350] Simply put, there are and will continue to be meetings between the church and its host societies that result in crucial periods of flourishing or crisis, after which the church as a whole can and never will be the same. Because it belongs to the church's life to exist in commissioned dispersion, such transformative encounters are not only not something to be avoided, but ought to be anticipated with intentionality. The boldness of the community to speak with authority on a decisive issue is only the boldness of trusting that the Spirit[351] who brings unity, faithfulness, and reform brings also the authority and fortitude to discern rightly matters of doctrine and faith.[352]

This is an especially fertile area of convergence between Yoder and Jenson. To a significant extent, they both view the church's life in time as a single extended conversation.

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[350] See Yoder's essays collected in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*.

[351] Taken in conjunction with a Jensonian pneumatology, this supposed "boldness" which is "really" humility could lead right back to authoritarian dogmatism and indefectibility, forgetting Yoder's well-worn wariness of the temptations to self-justification and to kneeling before idols of our own minds' making. In my strongest arguments for trinitarian confession, I am not for a moment saying that the decision is itself irreversible or untouchable *in the sense that* subsequent generations of believers need not or cannot question and interrogate it for its scriptural support or aletheic coherence. On the contrary, that is the very task of the entire present work. Indeed, I am making two arguments interwoven as one: that the question the Trinity answers is such that the church must provide *some* answer, and that the answer the Trinity provides is in fact correct (and so should be accepted and made integral to Christian theology and to any faithful ecclesiology). We must, in other words, *stake a claim* in the matter; and that Yoder in his work does not is the aporia which Jenson's work so aptly clarifies, critiques, and supplements. Thus, to return to the original question, I really do mean to say that the church must, on this issue, be so bold as to go out on a limb in the—hopefully humble—trust that the Spirit's lead has been sovereign in the process.

[352] Though not without problems of its own, Luke Timothy Johnson's *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) is an extraordinary constructive contribution to this task.

For our purposes, we may take Jenson's "continuing consultation"[353]—itself a consequence of what he calls "the triunity of truth"[354]—and encapsulate it within Yoder's "pacifist way of knowing" or "nonviolent epistemology."[355] Like the free organic networks of synagogues spread across the globe, and devoid of Jenson's aggregated dogmatic authority, the church is a community of peaceable dialogue across time, unwilling to impose or coerce in order to "win," *while at the same time* equally committed to the willingness to speak authoritatively *out of* that vulnerable position with regard to matters of special importance for ecclesial identity and moral necessity.

Two aspects of Yoder's thought help with this challenge, as well as with the next question having to do with nonbiblical modes of thought. First is the list of personal "functions discharged by various organs within the community,"[356] two of which are "Agents of Memory"[357] and "Agents of Linguistic Self-Consciousness,"[358] that is, scriptural readers and communal teachers. Between these roles a kind of vivid synthesis emerges, such that the space and dialogue between them—canonical interpretation toward *biblical* faithfulness (apostolicity in the first sense), and pedagogical caretaking of speech toward *missionary* faithfulness (apostolicity in the second sense)—is where ecclesial discernment "happens" regarding issues of pressing concern.

The second aspect is Yoder's notion of "looping back" to Scripture as a common bar of accountability and authority for the sake of renewal. As a consequence of including

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[353] Jenson, *ST* I:17.

[354] Jenson, *Essays in Theology of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 93. What he means by this is that the character of God's own life as conversation directs us to the way in which time and discourse—and thus the search for and halting arrival at truth—play out in human political and communal affairs. See *ST* I:223, 228-229.

[355] See the recently edited collection of essays by Yoder, *A Pacifist Way of Knowing: John Howard Yoder's Nonviolent Epistemology* (ed. Christian E. Early and Ted G. Grimsrud; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010).

[356] Yoder, *Priestly*, 28.

[357] Ibid., 30.

[358] Ibid., 32.

the signifier "pneumatic edification" in the newly proposed logic, I suggest an addition also here: not merely looping *back*, as if to some static ecclesial distillation, but rather looping *back-and-through*. In this construal, the task involves first the hard work of returning to the biblical witness *and then* that of making our way on through the twists and turns of the church's history up to the present. This approach has the advantage of being both honest and realistic about the church's past, acknowledging the good and the bad alike, as well as discerning what accumulations and decisions have so far been wise, biblical, and pertinent, or foolish, inconsonant, and fleeting. It moreover happily corrects for tendencies to "reinstitute" some imagined original perfect church.

The fifth and sixth questions ask after the relationship between revelation, Scripture, and tradition, as well as that more specifically between canon and creed. In this area there is actually a surprising amount of agreement between Yoder and Jenson, for each in his own way[359] shies away from complicated notions of biblical inspiration, opting instead for the simple claim that the church's set of scriptural texts is authoritative just because it is recognized as such: it *has* authority insofar as it has *exercised* authority in the community and continues to do so.

In this way the Trinity's being "not itself a revealed truth"[360] is neither here nor there: revelation is not the Bible or propositions drawn therefrom, but the Word enfleshed among us, crucified and risen, set like an axis at the center of the history of God's acts leading to and from this central revelatory event.[361] In fact, Yoder's suggested way of reading Scripture coherently is remarkably potent for the issue of trinitarian confession. His directional

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[359] See, e.g., Yoder, *To Hear the Word* (2nd ed.; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 77-119; and Jenson, "Scripture's Authority in the Church," in *The Art of Reading Scripture* (ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 27-37, and "On the Authorities of Scripture," in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 53-61.

[360] Yoder, *Preface*, 204.

[361] See Yoder, *To Hear*, 80-86; *Preface*, 330-336.

hermeneutic, of finding the course and aim of the biblical story and vision,[362] ought to apply to the church's understanding of God as much as it does to its attitude to war.[363] Thus, just as the movement from Moses to Joshua to Jeremiah to Jesus directs our gaze, not to what may have been approved of at any one time, but to the *direction* of development and eventual fulfillment,[364] so should the gospel narrative and theological thrust of the Old and New Testament writings point us in our ongoing hermeneutical discernment toward articulation of the one God of Israel as triune.

Furthermore, if "the canon is a human, historical thing, fuzzy on the edges," "not a final ruling," "not a revealed canon" or "a subject of revelation," much less "infallible,"[365] on what basis does the church trust these writings as authoritative? Better yet, on what basis did the church make the decision to recognize certain texts as canonical *at all*? According to Yoder, "setting up a canon is . . . the recognition by the church that the texts are of such status as to already have authority over us," thereby acknowledging "the *limitation* on her authority by saying, 'Those are the writings that stand above us. Those are the writings to

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[362] See Yoder, *Preface*, 372-376. For example: "[The Anabaptists] saw the unity of the Bible in the shape of its forward movement from Old Testament to New, from promise to fulfillment, while their adversaries made of the Bible a flat book of which every part was equally final and authoritative. . . . But if there is movement from the Old Testament to the New, it will also be natural that we expect to find smaller movements of the same kind within each of the Testaments and between the New Testament and the present. We test our conformity to Scripture therefore not by asking whether we keep saying the same thing without change, but rather by asking a more difficult question: Is the way we keep moving in conformity with the way God's people were led to move in formative times?" (373).

[363] See Yoder's essay "If Abraham is Our Father" in *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1971), 85-104, where he calls his approach to interpreting commanded or unforbidden violence in the Old Testament "the concrete historical anthropological" (93) way of honoring such ancient texts in their proper (historical) context from the (theological) perspective of the New Testament.

[364] See Yoder's introduction to Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), 19: "The book enables us to study both the events themselves and the various levels of confession, interpretation, memory, and writing through which the praise of Yahweh as warrior passed from the first 'magnificat' of Miriam at the sea to the other victory chant of the other Mary. Is or is not the Son of Mary also validly to be praised as Moses' successor? . . . Jesus brings neither mid-course correction nor divine disavowal of what went before, but fulfillment of Yahweh's shalom-bringing power that was an alternative to 'nationhood-as-usual' or to 'kingship-properly-so-called'—from the very birth of Israel, *even* in the young nation's wars." See also his essay "From the Wars of Joshua to Jewish Pacifism" in *Nonviolence: A Brief History* (ed. Paul Martens, Matthew Porter, and Myles Werntz; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 73-84.

[365] Yoder, *Preface*, 176.

which we cannot add. This is the body of literature under which we stand and from which we take orders.' "[366] In this way "the development of a canon is the beginning of the church's self-critical concern to judge herself by her origin."[367]

But what "church" is it that made such a decision? Could the decision have been wrong? Why is the decision to be accountable to its origins any more legitimate than if the church had decided otherwise? And in what way is the canonical decision separable from the creedal one? Even if the creedal *form* is to be judged lacking, the necessity of its process and the decision it produced cannot be dismissed *a priori* as "unbiblical," much less as lacking authority. As the tautology goes, biblical authority is not itself biblical—which is to say, the recognition of this particular canon and the ascription to it of the status of textual answerability are neither called for nor known by the canonical texts themselves. *Sola scriptura* is a logical contradiction if by it one means the church has no other authority, for where in Scripture is *sola scriptura* commanded?

Therefore we are free and able to say: analogous to the way in which the church's decision to recognize these and not other texts as its universal measure of apostolic faithfulness occurred and remains valid as a historical judgment of critical ecclesial identity, so the church's decision (contemporaneous with the canon's coalescence) to name and confess the one God of Israel as specifically triune was and remains valid today for the church's faith, identity, and worship.

As for the seventh and final set of questions, the answers remain the same: a trinitarian church may or may not be creedal, but a church which seeks to be Christian must be one that worships and confesses faith in the triune God. There are any number of

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[366] Ibid., 175.
[367] Ibid., 176.

practicable proposals for ecclesial polities fitted best for the habitation and cultivation of *both* radical discipleship *and* radical orthodoxy.[368] In whatever particular form such a synthesis takes, I believe it possible and, indeed, mandatory.

Toward that end, it is the contention and argument of this work that the lack of the Trinity in John Howard Yoder's ecclesiology (and in his work in general) is not debilitating, but does demand critical supplement; that the theology of Robert W. Jenson presents just that, in a unique and persuasive alternative perspective;[369] that discipleship to the slain but living Lamb *and* robust trinitarian faith are *alike* biblical and requisite for the life of the church, and are *not* opposed but complementary to each other; and that, as I stated the matter in Chapter 1, the Christian church is and must be at once the church of the triune God *and* the church normed by the politics of Jesus. Or perhaps: the church normed by the politics of the crucified and risen Jesus *who is none other than* the Son of the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit.

My conviction remains, then, that the vision of the church as worked out and articulated by Yoder is the most comprehensive and faithful vision on offer. I conclude now in the confidence that, like Jerusalem's temple which somehow housed the very presence of Israel's Lord, the triune God's entrance into and inhabitation of Yoder's church will not

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[368] I take this way of putting the matter from Joe R. Jones' marvelous essay "Yoder and Stone-Campbellites: Sorting the Grammar of Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Discipleship," in *Radical Ecumenicity: Pursuing Unity and Continuity after John Howard Yoder* (ed. John C. Nugent; Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2010), 107-128. Note that Jones' use of "radical orthodoxy" has nothing to do with the theological movement associated with John Milbank.

[369] Two other notable examples, each a member of "baptist" ecclesial traditions and explicitly influenced by Yoder, yet also much more systematic than he ever was, are the aforementioned James McClendon and Joe Jones. Within their substantial bodies of work, see McClendon, "The Identity of God," *Doctrine: Systematic Theology: Volume II* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 280-323; and Jones, "The Triune God," *A Grammar of Christian Faith: Systematic Explorations in Christian Life and Doctrine* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 149-232. As an anecdotal buttress to the present project, note the blurb by Stanley Hauerwas—he the herald and propagator of Yoder—for Jones' book: "I believe that *A Grammar of Christian Faith* is destined, along with the work of Jenson and McClendon, to be the book that signals the recovery of the Christian voice in modernity."

finally rend or ruin it, but will instead secure and establish it, and sanctify it through and through.