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PATIENCE AS HERMENEUTICAL PRACTICE: CHRIST, CHURCH, AND SCRIPTURE IN JOHN HOWARD YODER AND HANS FREI

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"Patience is God's nature."[1]

Since Tertullian at least, Christian theology has understood patience to be a human virtue and an attribute, if a somewhat neglected attribute, of God. Karl Barth wrote that God's patience is "His will…to allow to another…space and time to develop in its own existence," which suggests that divine patience characterizes not only God's entire gift of and to Creation, but also the relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[2] However, unlike other virtues such as charity, patience has received little attention in the area of interpretation and hermeneutics. What does it mean for Christian communities to read Scripture with patience? What sorts of community produce patient readers? Such questions sound strange and unfamiliar. However, if God has not yet finished speaking out of the words of Scripture, then patience is a requisite Christian virtue of reading. Patience in reading fits itself expectantly to the patient, continuing work of God in Scripture and is, at the same time, itself a formation into the image of Christ. The patience of Christ is both the method and goal of Christian reading.

In pursuit of such a hermeneutic, I trace this theme of patience through the work of John Howard Yoder and Hans Frei. While in many ways an unlikely pairing, Yoder and Frei can be viewed as working on parallel arms of a shared project—the

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[1] Tertullian, *De Patientia*, III.

[2] "We define God's patience as His will, deep-rooted in His essence and constituting His divine being and action, to allow to another – for the sake of His own grace and mercy and in the affirmation of His holiness and justice – space and time for the development of its own existence, thus conceding to this existence a reality side by side with His own, and fulfilling His will toward this other in such a way that He does not suspend and destroy it as this other but accompanies and sustains it and allows it to develop in freedom"; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols, II/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-1975), 409, 410.

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cultivation of patient and self-critical readings of Scripture in Christian communities.[3] In Part I, Yoder's reading of the New Testament and his articulation of the role of Scripture in the reform of church communities serve as springboards for my account of patience. However, Yoder's readings—and life—test the limits of the patience in his work. Both Yoder's method of interpreting Scripture by articulating the trajectory he discerned behind particular passages and his relentless focus on the shape of the church limited the confrontational liveliness of Scripture in Yoder's hands even as he sought to render the church more open to its challenge. He failed to read in the spirit of the reformation he championed, just as he himself failed to be reformed. In Part II, a brief reading of Hans Frei's work on hermeneutics provides not only a helpful historical analysis that clarifies the difficulties in Yoder, but also an account of the presence of Christ to the reader that thickens and broadens Yoder's emphasis on discipleship as integral to the interpretation of Scripture. Toward the hermeneutic identified by Yoder and clarified by Frei, I conclude with a reading of the Emmaus road story from the Gospel of Luke in order to explore how the reading habits of Christian communities might be formed by the patience of the risen crucified Christ.

Part I: Yoder's (Im)patience

In Yoder's work, patience—defined in the cross and resurrection of Christ—is the central Christian virtue. Indeed, it might be described as the heart of Christian life. Patience is the divine response to the sinful human will to domination. In "The War of the Lamb," the final chapter of *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder states,

> Christians in our age are obsessed with the meaning and direction of history…. Whether a given action is right or not seems to be inseparable from the question of what effects it will cause. Thus part if not all of social concern has to do with looking for the right 'handle' by which one can 'get a hold on' the course of history and move it in the right direction.[4]

What Yoder rejects is not the human capacity for planning, but rather the will to dominate. Yoder's rejection of "governing history" distinguishes his pacifism in *The Politics of Jesus* from strategic pacifism "which would say that it is wrong to kill but that with proper nonviolent techniques you can obtain without killing everything you really want." In contrast, he states,

> What Jesus renounced is not first of all violence, but rather the compulsiveness of purpose that leads the strong to violate the dignity of others. The point is not

[3] Both Yoder and Frei wrote explicitly about patience. Yoder did so throughout his work, most explicitly in the essay whose title inspired this article, "Patience as Method in Moral Reasoning," in Christian Early and Ted Grimsrud, eds., *A Pacifist Way of Knowing* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010). Frei's most explicit writing on patience is an unpublished paper given at a 1986 conference in honor of Jürgen Moltmann entitled, "God's Patience and Our Work," in "Hans Frei, Unpublished Pieces, Transcripts from the Yale Divinity School Archive," edited by Mike Higton. Available at <http://divinity-adhoc.library.yale.edu/HansFreiTranscripts/>

[4] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972, 1994). 228. Or, as Frei put it, "We do not have ultimate responsibility for history"; "God's Patience and Our Work," 1986.

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that one can obtain all of one's legitimate ends without using violent means. It is rather that our readiness to renounce our legitimate ends whenever they cannot be attained by legitimate means itself constitutes our participation in the triumphant suffering of the Lamb.[5]

This rejection of domination is not some high-handed withdrawal, but is grounded in the concrete victory already won by Christ's cross and resurrection. In one of his most-quoted lines, Yoder maintains that "the key to the obedience of God's people is not their effectiveness but their patience…. The relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship of cause and effect, but one of cross and resurrection."[6] God's victory has already been won. By living into the shape of that victory humans may participate in its arrival in full. Patience yields control, not in abdication of responsibility (or hope) but in obedience to the way things will be, and indeed, the way things truly are.

A patience that yields control has several edges. It is, Yoder would insist, a simple obedience to God's voice in the words of Scripture, an obedience that is the beginning and end of Christological pacifism. Such obedience to God also requires yielding to the communal discernment and conflict that defines the life of the church. The "binding and loosing" described in Matthew 18, as Yoder often argued, reveals that "to be human is to be in conflict" but also shows that "to process conflict is not merely a palliative strategy for tolerable survival…but a mode of truth-finding and community-building."[7] The patience described by Yoder must take time both to witness and to accept rebuke, because the victory of the truth is not in its hands. Put differently, this patience *acts*, responding to the command of God in Christ, in Scripture, and *waits*, open to the judging force of God's new word coming out of Scripture as it is read in the community of believers and refracted in all creation.

"More Light and Truth": Scripture in the Ever-Reforming Church

"The real issue is not whether Jesus can make sense in a world far from Galilee, but whether—when he meets us in our world, as he does in fact—we want to follow him…. That we don't have to is the profoundest proof of his condescension, and thereby of his glory."[8]

Yoder situated his calls for the church to face and embrace the politics of Jesus within an ecumenical posture he called "radical reformation," constituted by a perpetual openness to the normative judgments of Scripture upon the sins of the church in the present. Though the witness of the early churches of the New Testament functioned strongly in Yoder's work as a normative model, the goal of his posture of

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[5] Ibid., 237.

[6] Ibid., 232. Yoder's descriptions of patience follows from the early Anabaptist virtue of *Gelassenheit* often translated "yieldedness." See Yoder, *The War of the Lamb* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), 106.

[7] Yoder continues, "That is true in the gospel; it is also true, *mutatis mutandis*, in the world"; *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 13.

[8] John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984, 2001), 39.

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reform was not to recreate or repristinate those communities, but rather to allow the continued encounter with the death and resurrection of Jesus at the heart of Scripture to revive and reform the present life of the church.

Remembrance is necessary, Yoder maintained, because the church needs—and always has and always will need—to be reformed of its errors. "We are not plagued merely by a hard-to-manage diversity…. We are faced with error."[9] Yet Scripture is not, Yoder maintained, a constitution or a set of rules that straightforwardly diagnoses the sins of the church. Rather, Scripture exists as witness to the origins of the community. As the church continues to engage with that witness the Spirit will lead the church to discover and repent of its sins. "The most important operational meaning of the Bible for ethics is not that we do just what it says in some way that we can derive deductively. It is rather 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."[10] Thus the growth of the Christian tradition ought not be a story of triumph, but of continued repentance and reformation.

> Far from being an ongoing growth like a tree, the wholesome growth of a tradition is like a vine: a story of constant interruption of organic growth in favor of pruning and a new chance for the roots. This renewed appeal to origins is not primitivism, nor an effort to capture some pristine purity. It is rather a "looping back"…a rediscovery of something from the past whose pertinence was not seen before, because only a new question or challenge enables us to see it speaking to us.[11]

Yoder's program is well captured by the reformation slogan *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*. Yet the need for correction is not in itself something to be mourned; rather, it is our "claim to bypass that need, as if our link to our origins were already in our own hands" that constantly upsets the capacity of church communities to be reformed. This is all the more troubling since Scripture is itself a remembering and reformation. "What we find at the origin is already a process of reaching back again to the origins, to the earliest memories of the event itself, confident that that testimony…will serve to illuminate and sometimes adjudicate our present path."[12]

Further, the guidance that Scripture gives cannot always be specified in advance, but arrives as particular contexts, particular questions, and the movement of the Spirit elicit new answers from its norming witness. "A new question permits the old event to respond in ways that earlier patterns of questioning had not made self-evident or perhaps had hidden."[13] The fresh answers were always there in the texts, Yoder insists, but are only fresh because of a transformed capacity for hearing. "The

[9] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 69.

[10] Ibid., 70. "Scripture comes on the scene not as a receptacle of all possible inspired truth, 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"; Ibid., 69.

[11] Ibid., 69.

[12] Ibid., 70.

[13] Ibid.

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Bible was always a liberation storybook: now we are ready to read it that way."[14] Rather than "a systematized compendium of final answers, to be applied with compelling deductive logic to all future settings," the Bible, Yoder maintains, is more like "a repertory of more or less pertinent paradigms, needing to be selected and transformed trans-culturally in ever new settings."[15] This sense of flexible contextual transposition is part of what Yoder means when he says, quite frequently, "The Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his holy Word."[16]

Crucially, for Yoder, moral discernment is the prerogative of the entire gathered community, whose shared political life is both a prerequisite to and result of the breaking forth of light and truth "from his holy Word." The validity of the results of communal moral discernment depends just as much on the "procedure of the meeting" as on the "principles applied."[17] The community "whose very self-definition is its corporate aptness for the hermeneutical task…would need to be a community committed to the ministry of first-fruits, prefiguring in its one life the kingdom…"[18] Part of this ministry of first-fruits is an openness to those outside the community. While the *distinction* between church and world is crucial for Yoder, the *boundaries* between insiders and outsiders are inherently unstable. Yoder states,

> This hermeneutic role of the community is…by no means an exclusive possession…. When the empirical community becomes disobedient, other people can hear the Bible's witness too. It is after all a public document. Loners and outsiders can hear it speaking, especially if the insiders have ceased to listen. It was thanks to the loner Tolstoy and the outsider Gandhi that the churchman Martin Luther King, Jr.…was able to bring Jesus' word on violence back into the churches. It was partly the outsider Marx who enabled liberation theologians to restate what the Law and the Prophets had been saying for centuries, largely unheard, about God's partisanship for the poor.[19]

Openness to outsiders is not merely a civil thing at which the believing community might occasionally aim, but is constitutive of its continued capacity to become faithful.

In Yoder's view, this model of persistent, patient reform was true for historiography in general, and not merely hermeneutics. A truly "nonviolent historiography" would, according to Yoder, cultivate perennial re-engagement with the past as a guard against our own drive for mastery, and would do so because of the dignity of the past as other, not merely out of a sense of thoughtless opposition. "A nonviolent revisioning of events, especially of the events of empire, is…not moved by kneejerk contrariness but by reverence for the events in their thereness."[20] Yet, even while the

[14] Ibid., 71.

[15] John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 92.

[16] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 88. Quoting John Robinson, Puritan minister, in a farewell address to the crew of the Mayflower, 1620.

[17] "Were all free to speak? Was every speech heard and weighed?"; Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 22-3.

[18] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 92.

[19] Ibid., 93.

[20] Yoder, "The Burden and Discipline of Evangelical Revisionism," in Louis Hawkley and James Juhnke eds., *Nonviolent America* (Newton, KS: Mennonite Press, 1993), 29. J. Alexander Sider has done more than anyone else to shed light on Yoder's historiography. See his *To See History Doxologically:*

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reforming community's remembrance will always bring newness from the past to its present shared life, this task of remembering and reform will also, precisely in its resistance to our self-affirmations, have a certain quality of sameness and similarity that can only be summarized as Christological. "Jesus. . .is the same now and tomorrow, as yesterday. The ministry of remembrance, which is the task of the historian, is thus at heart a Christological task. Its vocation is to trace the sameness of Jesus across the generations."[21] Because Jesus is always the same, we will always be surprised.

Yoder's Reading Habits

However, Yoder's own way of working with Scripture—both his style and the content of his reflections—suggested a finality and an abstraction from the texts that sit uneasily with his commitment to the patient, persistent reform of the church in response to fresh witness from Scripture. Yoder described his method of reading Scripture as "inductive." In practice, this meant that he articulated the meaning of particular passages of Scripture by discerning the shared logic behind them, and the trajectory of that logic in the canon as a whole. The trajectories and logics he so discerned always pointed to the emerging social shape of the people of God throughout Scripture. Scripture, in Yoder's hands, always referred to his ecclesiology. Yoder's method of approaching Scripture tends not to permit multiple readings because each particular is bound up in a single, specific reading of the canon as a whole. While the force of Yoder's challenge to contemporary church communities lies partly in the persistent clarity of his exegesis, it is precisely that persistence and consistency in Yoder's entire work that is problematic. For those who think Yoder's ecclesiology is a badly needed corrective in many contemporary church communities, such methodological impatience may not seem like a problem. However, Yoder's posture of reading cuts against the grain of his arguments about Scripture as a perennial resource for creative renewal. Both his hermeneutical method and disposition often undercut the best of his work.

My pursuit and exploration of this complaint will involve several observations about Yoder' method. First, I will observe Yoder's self-conscious reflection on method. Next, I test my claims about the limitations of his method against four of Yoder's works. Yoder's exegetical reflection, I find, was most fruitful the more it used biblical images and figures, centrally the cross, to articulate the logic behind a group of texts, rather than the conceptual shape of the people of God. The unity wrought by the cross, or other biblical images and figures, is a unity both more effective and more resistant to the manipulation of any single interpreter.

Much of Yoder's work, on both Testaments, consists in demonstrating the coherence of Scripture by showing how apparently quite different passages in fact achieve

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History and Holiness in John Howard Yoder's Ecclesiology (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011). For a closely related expansion of Yoder's epistemology, see Christian Early and Ted Grimsrud eds., *A Pacifist Way of Knowing* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), a collection of Yoder's essays. Early and Grimsrud argue that Yoder's work evidences a particular epistemology characterized by patient witness. Chris Huebner explores similar themes in his *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 2006).

[21] John Howard Yoder, "Historiography as a Ministry to Renewal," *Brethren Life and Thought* 42, no. 3-4 (1997): 216.

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analogous things, and then articulating the form of that analogy so as to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of the Scripture in question. Early in his career, Yoder associated his work with "biblical realism," a mid-twentieth century method in biblical studies that, in Yoder's words, assumed minimally that the text "contains a coherent testimony that it is the reader's task to disengage" and maximally that "a 'biblical worldview' once discovered and systematically exposited will have such a timeless coherence that theological change ought to stop."[22] This theological movement was associated by Yoder with a variety of figures, including Oscar Cullman, Markus Barth, Hendrik Kraemer, Hans Rudi-Weber, and Paul Minear.

While Yoder described "biblical realism" as a "failed school," he saw his own work as carrying on this approach—in method, if not as a self-conscious school. By way of explaining this approach, Yoder suggested that one way of validating a text could occur "when separate components…interpreted each in its own terms, turn out to be parallel in their underlying thought structure, even though quite different in setting, vocabulary, and superficial propositional content."[23] If multiple texts "say in diverse ways what is in some deep structural sense, 'the same thing,' that is the demonstration that said commonality transcends the…texts' diversity."[24] As has already been noted, Yoder argued that the Bible provides paradigms for the church to internalize and recreate in new ways. "What the culture-critique and culture-creating power of the Bible demonstrates…is a long and rich history, and a generous but finite number of tested paradigms. These may with sensitive analogical reasoning be transposed to other times, other places, even other issues."[25] Yoder's work was an effort to articulate the links between biblical paradigms, stories, and teaching, express that analogical link as a challenge to contemporary church communities, and venture hypotheses about possible faithful new iterations of the same theme.

This hermeneutical posture is exemplified throughout Yoder's writings. Three essays and a short book are particularly useful to examine here. First, Yoder's reflections on the sixth commandment in "Thou Shalt Not Kill," from around 1980, shed light on what it meant for Yoder to discern a series of paradigms that moves and develops over the course of the canon. After comments on the context and startling brevity of the commandment not to kill, Yoder suggests a connection between the holiness of the mountain around which the people Israel gather and on which Moses meets God, and the life of the neighbor they are instructed not to take. "The terrifying 'touch not the mountain' of 19:15 is mirrored in 'touch not the neighbor's spouse, his life, his goods'.…Why killing is wrong cannot be said more briefly, more pointedly, than by saying that human blood belongs to YHWH because humanity is created in the divine image."[26]

[22] John Howard Yoder, *To Hear The Word*, second edition, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 76, 75. Yoder positioned himself much closer to the first maxim. Perhaps the clearest examples of "biblical realism" as understood by Yoder are Oscar Cullman's *Christ and Time* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1964) or Cullman's *The Christology of the New Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1964).

[23] Yoder, *To Hear The Word*, 142.

[24] Ibid., Yoder states that the two places in which he has most clearly found such patterns occur in his essay "But We Do See Jesus" and the work which became *Body Politics*; ibid., 143 n. 2,3.

[25] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 85.

[26] Ibid., 40.

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Yoder moves on from these observations about the relationship between the divine image and killing to suggest that this prohibition is best understood as an early crystallization of a trajectory of restriction of violence that expands throughout Scripture. After all, the commandment is problematic because of its ambiguous juxtaposition with divine injunctions to put to death certain offenders just verses later. This ambiguous relation, Yoder suggests, is best understood as the gradual restriction of revenge-based killings. He states, "this centralizing of life's protection in the covenant as the new political context fits with the struggle to make Israel a community of judge-mediated law, rather than prolonging into the settled life of national Israel the simple clan-based retribution patterns of an earlier culture."[27] Thus, the meaning of "Thou shalt not kill" is bound up, forever, with its position as a single step in the development of the morality of Israel.

Yoder traces this trajectory into the ministry and teaching of Jesus. He states, "As the Decalogue had expanded blood safety from the family to the tribe, now the love of enemy and the missionary universalizing of the faith community make the concept of outsider or outlaw an empty set."[28] He concludes, "What had been going on, on the path from Sinai to the early Church, was organic growth and fruition."[29] While much of this has the ring of a certain brand of straightforward supersessionism, Yoder identifies this trajectory also in the Jewish community both after, as well as before, Christ.[30] "Later Judaism extended restraints concerning number and the quality of judges and witnesses to the point where capital condemnation became quite improbable." Noting this trajectory, Yoder then asks, "Does the notion of the unity of the canon support or undercut our taking the line of movement we have discerned, from Sinai to Jesus and Jochanan, as itself 'canonical,' in the sense that its direction should continue to be our own? Or does the Church (or the Synagogue) in changing circumstances retain the liberty to 'reach back behind' that direction of fulfillment marked by Jesus (or by Jochanan) for resources deemed more fitting?"[31] Yoder suggests, given the way Christians have expanded commandments about adultery and theft, that such a trajectory is indeed itself canonical.[32] The meaning of the commandment lies in the ultimate social shape given to it in the trajectory expanding through the history of Israel, the Prophets, and the New Testament.

Similarly, in "The Original Revolution," an essay from the early 1960s, Yoder locates the meaning of the call of Abraham in the expansion and fulfillment of that call in the social form of the church. In the essay, Yoder narrates the continuity between calls for "revolution," Mary's Magnificat, Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God, and the call of Abraham. Out of the Magnificat, Yoder draws the conviction that God's action will radically benefit the poor and downtrodden; it is "the language not of sweet maidens, but of Maccabees."[33] Yoder then suggests that "revolution" might be a fitting rendering of "gospel" in his contemporary context—

[27] Ibid., 43.

[28] Ibid., 44.

[29] Ibid., 45.

[30] "Later Judaism extended restraints concerning number and the quality of judges and witnesses to the point where capital condemnation became quite improbable"; ibid., 44.

[31] Ibid., 46.

[32] Ibid. Though he poses the issue as a question, it is hard to imagine it as anything but rhetorical.

[33] John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1971, 2003), 14.

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"an event," like the "end of the Vietnam War," which "not merely...makes some of us happy, but one which shapes our common lives for the better."[34] The event that Jesus brought was the "judgment of God upon the present order and the imminent promise of another one...in which men may live together in love." In fact, what Jesus really did, Yoder discovers, is precisely what God called Abraham to do.

> Abraham was called to get up and leave Chaldea, the cultural and religious capital of the known world in his age.... He could not know when or whether or how he could again have a home, a land of his own.... He was told that it was through him that the nations of the world would be blessed. In response, Abraham promised his God that he would lead...a life different from the cultured and the religious peoples.... This is the original revolution; the creation of a distinct community with its own deviant set of values and its coherent way of incarnating them....[35]

Like this counter-cultural Abraham, "Jesus created around Himself a society like no other society mankind had ever seen...voluntary...mixed racially...both rich and poor... forgiving... suffering ...a new pattern of relationships between men and woman, between parent and child, between master and slave, in which was made concrete a radical new vision of what it means to be a human person."[36] In short, "the original revolution" is the kind of life inaugurated by Abraham and brought to completion by Jesus.[37]

This early essay exemplifies a tendency in Yoder's reading toward moving from the particulars of the text to a sociological account of the church. The unity of the Scriptures, in Yoder's hands, is constituted by their pointing to a certain program of action, "the creation of a distinct community with its own deviant set of values." The *meaning* of Abraham's call was the creation of a community that had a certain generalizable political shape—not the particular relationships between God and Abraham and Sarah and their descendants.[38]

The style and content of much of Yoder's Scriptural reflection work against his emphasis on the communal vulnerability of the church before Scripture that Yoder named as radical reformation. Yoder's specific method of inductive reading tended to produce a narrative trajectory reinforcing, again and again, his (timely and appropriate) vision of the politics of the church. This is not just to critique the forceful

[34] Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 15.

[35] Ibid., 27, 28.

[36] Ibid., 29.

[37] To drive home the point that the gospel is—before anything else—a politics, Yoder concludes that while the gospel might indeed remedy a variety of human problems, including "anxiety and guilt," "intellectual confusion," and "moral weakness...*all of this is not the Gospel*. This is just the bonus...the everything which will be added, without our taking thought for it, if we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness"; ibid., 32. Here Yoder uses all capital letters to indicate emphasis, not italics.

[38] Yoder would rightly resist such a dichotomy, but drawing this binary distinction reveals the nearly complete lack of attention paid by Yoder to God's enduring election of Israel in Scripture. Michael Cartwright notes how "striking" it is that Romans 9-11 plays no role in Yoder's work and concludes, "However peaceable his pedagogical approach may have been in the way he engaged just-war theorists, the way Yoder goes about establishing the link between Christian and Jewish 'vocations' to peacemaking is to create a new set of dichotomies to replace the Constantinian assumptions that he seeks to supplant"; Michael Cartwright and Peter Ochs, eds. *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 227, 215.

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certainty of Yoder's writing. Certainly Yoder would have been better served by a larger dose of authorial humility. But patience need not be passive, and it is dangerous to fault Yoder's confidence, as if his conviction about the rightness of his position itself somehow warranted our suspicion.[39] More precisely, I am concerned that Yoder's method tends to reduce the solidity of Scriptural particulars in favor of trajectories whose fulfillment is necessarily in the ideal present politics of the church. Yoder's method, not just his disposition, was impatient. This method clashes with Yoder's often stated approach to Scripture as the source and occasion of church renewal. It is more difficult to cultivate openness to Scripture if the figures of Scripture are situated as paradigms of an implicit model or trajectory articulated by the knowing readers, because the Scriptural figures then have no relation to each other except *in* the model or trajectory articulated by the readers. This approach gives to readers an authority above the text as though, in Yoder's own cautionary words, "our link to our origins were already in our own hands."[40] The radical reformation Yoder articulated cannot be sustained by a hermeneutics that reads the text as a bounded set of paradigms.

Yoder resisted this reduction most effectively when he united the "paradigms" of Scripture with Scriptural imagery rather than ecclesial ethics. In "But We Do See Jesus," an essay from 1983, Yoder explores the analogical among between five New Testament proclamations of the lordship of Christ. Yoder frames the essay as an exploration of the problem of "particularity" and truth, or between the truth claims of a minority community and the wider world of which it is a part. Yoder asks, "How can particular truths be proclaimed publicly?"[41] As a way of examining that question, Yoder takes five New Testament texts that, as Yoder describes them, enter "wider" language worlds with the particular message of the gospel. He examines in turn the prologue to the Gospel of John, the account of Jesus as high priest in Hebrews 2, the discussion of Christ and the powers and principalities in the letter to the Colossians, the first vision of John in Revelation 4, and the kenotic Christ-hymn in Philippians 2. Unsurprisingly, he finds that all the apostolic writers are, in a certain sense, doing the same thing. The texts all share a strategy of intercultural engagement. "We could call it a syndrome or a deep structure." Each writer accepts the categories of the given language-world, but places Christ "above the cosmos, in charge of it," and then finally confesses that this very lordship has been accredited and accomplished only by rejection and "suffering in human form."[42]

"But We Do See Jesus" reveals a similar method of "inductive" reading visible in "Thou Shalt Not Kill" and "The Original Revolution," but here Yoder's approach is different. As in other cases, Yoder articulates the form of the analogous relation among these texts, but here he expresses the form of that analogy primarily in Christological rather than ecclesiological terms. It is the image of the crucified Christ raised to triumph, not the broader missiology that Yoder extrapolates from these five texts, that Yoder uses to bind these texts together as a challenge to contemporary

[39] Patience, as Peter Blum argues, "is by no means incompatible with the strong conviction that one's views are in fact true"; "Yoder's Patience and/with Derrida's *Différance*," in Peter Dula and Chris Huebner eds., *The New Yoder* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 116.

[40] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 70.

[41] Ibid., 49.

[42] Ibid., 53, 51.

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church communities. (This strategy defines Yoder's greatest challenge to the church, in *The Politics of Jesus*, where Yoder argues that the New Testament consistently presumes that "only on one subject—but then consistently, universally—is Jesus our example: in his cross."[43]) In a similar way, "But We Do See Jesus" is most compelling as an attempt to articulate a cruciform epistemology and missiology, rather than as a movement behind Scripture to lay bare the logic of its proclamations—though both methods are present.

Yoder's *Body Politics*, published in 1992, wanders between the dynamic in "But We Do See Jesus" and the approach of the earlier two essays I have described. In *Body Politics* Yoder discerns a pattern in the political realities of baptism, Eucharist, "binding and loosing," the "fullness of Christ," and "the rule of Paul." In each case, "the will of God for human socialness as a whole is prefigured by the shape to which the Body of Christ is called."[44] This summary seems productive, not reductive, because the relation of fulfillment—between sacrament and society, text and practice—remains certain but unspecified, and so cannot entirely overwhelm the texts. These practices of the church are conceived as anticipating a later fulfillment whose shape is beyond us.[45] At the same time, Yoder's discussion of these practices is reductive just insofar as Yoder lays forth the true meaning of, say, Eucharist as "basic economic sharing among members of the messianic community."[46] Here Yoder can be read either as relativizing Christian claims in favor of an original politics *or* showing how Christian claims are always inherently political.[47] His work is most fruitfully read in the latter way, but because of his hermeneutical method this ambivalence is embedded throughout his writings from beginning to end.[48]

Recent Criticism

Several other voices, most clearly Peter Ochs and Alex Sider, have challenged Yoder's work in similar ways. Ochs, in *Another Reformation*, appreciates the way that Yoder's attempt to find resonances within exilic and rabbinic Judaic and free church ecclesiologies breaks down traditional supersessionism.[49] Yoder's strong assertion

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[43] Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 95.

[44] Yoder, *Body Politics*, ix.

[45] Frei states something quite similar around the same time. "To be Christian is to live in hope that a missionary church, for which the North no longer predominates (its own area perhaps turning into a mission field) may become a paradigm, a beacon among the nations for the cause of justice, mercy and human equality, without holding out the hope of universal human liberation this side of the Kingdom of God"; "God's Patience and Our Work," 1986.

[46] Yoder, *Body Politics*, 21.

[47] David Cramer has compiled a typology (very much in Yoder's style) of those influenced by Yoder—who indeed encompass a staggering range from traditionalist evangelicals, Christian anarchists and radical democrats, to Hauerwasian postliberals, postmodern skeptics, and liberal revisionists; "Inheriting Yoder Faithfully: A Review of New Yoder Scholarship," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85, no. 1 (2011): 133-46.

[48] My interest here is not in showing how Yoder changed over time. Paul Martens argues that Yoder began his career by arguing that Christological convictions entailed a politics and ended by showing how that politics was a kind of universal humanism that Christ exemplified; Paul Martens, *The Heterodox Yoder* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012). It is more useful in my view to frame the issue as the way Yoder related particulars—Christological, Scriptural, or historical—to his ecclesiological vision. On this issue I am quite content to assume a very consistent level of ambivalence throughout Yoder's work (indeed, this is part of the problem) rather than only a later loosening of his Christological moorings.

[49] See the characteristics listed by Yoder in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, 187.

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that the Jewish-Christian schism "did not have to be" is, on its face, nonsupersessionist.[50] However, exactly insofar as Yoder outlines the traits of diaspora living in proto-rabbinic Judaism as *essential* Judaism, Yoder, Ochs says, reads back onto the Jewish tradition a directionality which can only find its fulfillment in his free church model, and is therefore "*non*-nonsupersessionist." In Ochs' analysis, "Yoder's praise for one dimension of Judaism has the effect of condemning another dimension as if it were 'not worthy of being Jewish'... it valorizes only the one variety of Judaism that anticipates Yoder's free church."[51] Put in terms of a Scriptural hermeneutic, Ochs states, "Yoder appears to have replaced the ongoing practice of Scriptural reading with an effort to generalize the conclusions to which his reading has brought him."[52] Yoder knows in advance what Scripture and history will tell us.[53]

In *To See History Doxologically*, Alex Sider examines Yoder's historiography, and like Ochs, he teases out a tendency in Yoder to read history primarily as a confirmation of his ecclesiology. Sider pays particular attention to Yoder's use of the distinction between "Constantinian" and "non-Constantinian." Sider does not argue with this basic distinction. To the contrary, he contends that Yoder's way of tracing the beginnings of the "Constantinian shift" failed to attend to the unresolved ambiguities of early Christianity and that his narrative condemnation of "Constantinianism" therefore at times itself slips into a "Constantinian" reading of history. Yoder oversimplified the differences between the "martyrs" who died for Christianity and the "apologists" who outlined Christian faith in the Hellenistic context as a way to tell his story of acculturation and corruption so that "the Constantinian settlement appears as but the logical outworking of the apologetic tradition—Tertullian sets the stage for Theodosius."[54]

The very commitment to "non-Constantinianism" requires greater care in telling the past. The heart of Sider's argument with Yoder is that the history of Constantinianism is "our" history, not "their" history—a lesson he learned in part from Yoder. Sider states, "Rather than conceiving of holiness as a matter of 'getting it all straight' right now...Yoder conceived of doxology as a series of practices that cultivate patience" that "prompts the perhaps painful recognition that this past of disavowal and apostasy is effective for us."[55] Even (or especially) radical reformers must confess that

[50] See Yoder's "It Did Not Have to Be" in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*.

[51] Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), 147. See also Paul Martens, "On Being an Olive Branch: A Critical Reading of Ochs' Critique of Yoder," *The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 13, no. 2 (2014).

[52] Peter Ochs, *The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited*, 159. Like Michael Cartwright, Alain Epp Weaver argues that Yoder's impatience was related to his failure to address divine election. "While Yoder showed that Jewish and Christian understandings of the life of God's people in exile can converge, his theology was insufficiently exilic insofar as it was not open to disruptive difference," which "can be traced to his decision not to...provide a theological account of God's enduring relationship with the Jewish people"; Alain Epp Weaver, *States of Exile: Visions of Diaspora, Witness, and Return* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2008), 35.

[53] Sometimes Yoder's own translations of Scripture seemed to know more than they could. His translation of Jeremiah 29:8 is "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you, and pray to JHVH on its behalf," which completely elides "into exile," a particularly significant omission for Yoder, given his positive account of diaspora; Yoder, The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited, 183-4.

[54] Sider, *To See History Doxologically*, 111. In the same way, for Yoder, David and Solomon set the stage for Constantine, or at least "Solomonic" is a synonym of "Constantinianism." See Yoder, *For the Nations*, 83.

[55] Sider, *To See History Doxologically*, 100, 101.

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"Constantinianism is us."[56] Despite Yoder's failures, Sider is confident that Yoder's writings point in helpful directions for overcoming his—and our—tendencies toward manipulative self-confirmation and domination. The church historian, in Yoder's words, must have a "patient and thorough willingness to reassess the stories we have inherited about Constantine's legacy." After all, Yoder continues, this is "the only history we have," and it is the same history through 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."[57] Patience with the past, then, is not a blanket affirmation of its ambiguity, but a willingness to shoulder the difficulties we find there as our own.

"Shouldering the difficulties of the past" is one way to summarize Yoder's work. However, it is impossible to utter such a phrase and not note the horrors in Yoder's own past. Yoder sexually harassed or abused over a hundred female friends, students, and acquaintances in the guise of pursuing a Christian counter-cultural sexual ethic.[58] Those who believe that Yoder's writings might still bless Christian communities—not least in ways that make them better able to respond in love and discipline to lives like his—are often quick to point out that practice and theory are inextricably connected. But this necessary observation has for too long functioned as a kind of shibboleth that, once uttered, simply permits Yoder scholarship as usual—which to my discredit is more or less what this article has been. As Rachel Waltner Goosen has argued in her account of Yoder, his victims, and the actions and inactions of the Mennonite Church, "as long as Yoder remains the key actor in this story, the perspectives of women who challenged his sexual violence and identified its detrimental costs are sidelined."[59] In a recent surge of attention to Yoder's abuse and Mennonite Church leaders' responses, some, including Goosen, have begun the challenge of piecing together his work and his life in ways that do justice to his victims. All I can suggest is that I see the same kind of determined impatience in his life mirrored—hazily—in the way he read texts. Yoder failed to read like a reformer and failed to be reformed.[60] That his readings were also creative, generous, and life-giving only suggests that, in certain other ways, his life was as well. More must be said and heard—about that life, the connections between his abuse and his work on singleness and marriage, and most of all from those for whom he was a source of suffering—but each of these deserves a better reading than I am capable of giving here. Finally, though I contend that Christian patience entails robust resistance to evil, it is surely á propos to include the following words of Hans Frei here: "To

[56] Ibid., 121.

[57] Ibid. Sider is quoting from Yoder's discussion of how Christians might understand both the importance of the creeds, and the messy politics that played a role in their production; John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 223.

[58] This, with some caveats, is the figure given by Rachel Waltner Goosen, "'Defanging the Beast:' Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89, no. 1 (2015). This issue of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* was devoted to Yoder's abuse and institutional power, church sexual abuse, and survivor resilience more broadly.

[59] Goosen, "'Defanging the Beast.'"

[60] Yoder's contrition toward the end of his life is a matter for debate, but it is certainly difficult to read him describe "the 'collegial' patience of the outvoted theologian" in his posthumously published essay on patience and not see it as an attempt to paint himself as a gracious martyr; Yoder, "Patience as Method in Moral Reasoning," 119.

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accord patience primacy among virtues is perhaps, as things cultural stand, a habit to be encouraged in men but not in women."[61]

It is to Hans Frei that the second half of this article now turns. Like his life, Yoder's reading was deeply flawed. At worst, Scripture became in Yoder's hands a collection of paradigms whose trajectory went beyond the particulars of people, events, and images and landed in his account of the politics of the church. Difficult as they are to receive, those readings of Scripture are gifts not to be thrown away. In placing Yoder's work alongside Frei's careful attention to hermeneutical method I hope not only to lend greater clarity to my criticism of Yoder but also to point to a certain close resonance between Frei and Yoder in their approach to Christ, Scripture, and its readers, and thus to venture more fully a hermeneutic of patience—which, contrary to Frei, might be available in hope for all.

Part II Politics, Presence, and Scripture: Frei and Yoder

"You don't fix the Bible…it fixes you."[62]

"Hans Frei certainly never thought of himself as a 'great theologian,' but he did have a central passion, a central idea…He grew convinced that nearly the whole of modern Christian theology, from the radical to the fundamentalist, had taken a wrong turn."[63] That wrong turn, as William Placher noted, consisted in a shift in the way the Bible was read. In his best known work, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, Hans Frei carefully carries his readers through a wide-ranging exploration of eighteenth and nineteenth century hermeneutics, from a time in which readers situated their own lives within the world of the biblical text, joined together by figural relations, to a time in which those same texts referred primarily to external worlds of history and experience.

On closer inspection, Frei's work in its entirety was not simply an exercise in historical theology but also a call to greater attentiveness to the demands of the text, and indeed the demands of Christ, on the reading disciple. His work, though apparently far removed, bears a certain resonance with that of Yoder's. Given this resonance, Frei's historical analysis and hermeneutical proposals can clarify the difficulties of Yoder's reading habits that I traced in the first half of this article. This second half follows the theme of patience as a mode of Christian reading through Frei's historiography and Christology to show how Frei's hermeneutical proposals can thicken Yoder's emphasis on discipleship with an account of the presence of Jesus to the reading disciple, concluding with a reading of the Emmaus road story from the Gospel of Luke. Patience, as Yoder argued, is both obedience to the demands of Christ in Scripture and a perennial willingness to be reformed by God's fresh word from Scripture. Frei shows that, like the risen Christ "opening the Scriptures" to the disciples, God's work in Scripture is unfinished. "Patience," in this article, names the human response appropriate to this divine persistence.

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[61] Frei, "God's Patience and Our Work," 1986.

[62] Shepherd Book, the enigmatic preacher figure in "Jaynestown," Episode 7, *Firefly*, Fox. Aired October 18, 2002.

[63] William Placher, "Hans Frei and the Meaning of Biblical Narrative," *The Christian Century*, 106, no. 18 (1989): 556.

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A History of Reading

Frei begins *The Eclipse* with three facets of precritical Bible-reading in Western Christianity. First, *if* a "biblical story was to be read literally" then "it followed automatically that it referred to and described actual historical circumstances."[64] That is, "the true historical reference of a story was a direct and natural concomitant of its making literal sense" and not the other way round. Second, precritical reading was marked by the use of figural interpretation of biblical stories in order to join the biblical texts into a single narrative, since "the real historical world described by the several biblical stories is a single world of one temporal sequence."[65] Figural reading was thus "a natural extension of *literal* interpretation," because it was "literalism at the level of the whole biblical story and thus of the depiction of the whole of historical reality."[66] Finally, since this single, interconnected world of biblical narrative was the real world, it was the "duty" of the reader to "fit himself into that world" by figuration.[67] The events of the readers' (or hearers') lives were themselves also "figures of that storied world."

However, Frei states, "this mode of interpretation…broke down with increasing rapidity" in the eighteenth century. The meaning of Scripture came to consist in its reference to real things outside itself. On the conservative side, this reality was the history literally recorded in the text and the real world events said to be prophesied by the text.[68] On the liberal or radical side, a greater skepticism about the coherence of historical fact and textual description forced commentators to suggest a harmony between the biblical texts and the universal concepts, truths, or experiences which they illustrated. In either case "the direction of interpretation now became the reverse of earlier days," says Frei. With figural and typological meaning no longer accessible, it became necessary to show a consistency among the biblical texts of conceptuality or experience or history.[69]

The Eclipse is not a simple narrative of decline. While Frei may have viewed the failures of modern commentators to grasp the "realistic narrative" quality of the biblical texts as avoidable, that movement from precritical to critical was irreversible. The "breakup of the cohesion between the literal meaning of the biblical narratives and their reference to actual events" cannot simply be undone.[70]

Indeed, Frei's other main work, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, might be viewed as a proposal for how Christian communities might go on reading Scripture in continuity with the historic practices and styles of Christian reading *after* the irreversible

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[64] Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 2.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

[67] Ibid., 3.

[68] "This kind of prophecy, rather than an anachronism, was the sign of a new cultural development, for its emphasis was on the events, on their likely course, and on the hidden signs and references to this 'real' world of past and future history, spread through the Bible"; Frei, *Eclipse*, 4. The phenomenally successful *Left Behind* books and movies are the most obvious of this still widespread conception of biblical prophecy.

[69] "The fragmentation of a unitary canon was at least as grave a threat to the traditional status of the Bible…as was the direct assault on its historical reliability," and this unity and reliability came to depend, in large part, on ascertaining that the Bible's "meaning is the same throughout"; Frei, *Eclipse*, 162.

[70] Ibid., 4.

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changes of modernity.[71] In Frei's reading, the "realistic" character of the gospels are such that they lead the reader from identifying Jesus by other titles, names, and histories, to a reversal in which Jesus redefines and lends his unique identity to them, and to his readers. It is in the cross and resurrection, Frei says, that Jesus is most of all himself, when we recognize who he is. And here, in Frei's careful phrase, the story is "most clearly history-like."[72] In that eternal moment it is Jesus who lends identity to the symbols, history, and people who first lent him theirs.[73] "He claims them for himself in his very identity as Jesus of Nazareth."[74] And just what is Jesus of Nazareth like? Obedient. (Patient, Yoder would say.) Jesus "becomes who he is in the story" by "consenting to God's intention and by enacting that intention in the midst of circumstances that devolve around him as the fulfillment of God's purpose."[75]

What follows from this reading of the Gospel stories is the reality that "we cannot know who he is without having him present."[76] Jesus' presence and identity are given to us together. First, this is simply to say that the character "Jesus" rendered to us by the Gospels is most climactically *himself* in being crucified and raised, by virtue of which he must therefore be present after his death. Thus, "to think of him dead is the equivalent of not thinking of him at all."[77] If the Jesus of the Gospels was real, he must now be present to us. Second, Jesus' identity is the foundation for all other discrete identities. Jesus is both the one who is sure in his identity—because, by the cross and resurrection, his presence abides—and the one in whose unique identity all others find their persistently unique identities. Who Jesus is, is inseparable from his continuing presence in and for the world. To know Jesus is to know him present.

While Frei's work might be accused of reducing the Gospels to their literary form, this is to misunderstand the way Frei relates the presence of Christ to the reader and the presence of God to Scripture. Frei states that his position, like Barth's, is that "Scripture presents a perspicuous, coherent, and 'followable world,'" but it would be "a mistake to derive from its followability anything as systematic or as final as a 'biblical point of view.'"[78] Thus it is not through a particular style of reading that

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[71] A work strikingly parallel to Frei's in this regard is Daniel Weiss Halivni's *Revelation Restored: Divine Writ and Critical Responses* (SCM Press, 2001), which grapples with the "maculated" form of the received Torah as itself revelation—of the faithfulness of God, the sins of humanity, and the example of Ezra the prophet and scholar.

[72] Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 169.

[73] Frei, *Identity*, 171.

[74] Ibid. "Because there is at least one man, Jesus, who has an identity, others have identities also; for he, as the first of many brothers, gained that possibility for them in dying and rising in their behalf"; ibid., 173.

[75] Ibid., 149.

[76] Ibid., 67.

[77] Ibid., 180. Frei goes on, in commenting on the question of historical fact, to suggest that "if the resurrection is true, it is unique, but if it is false, it is like any other purported fact that has been proved false" but "until such evidence comes along, however, it seems proper to say that there is a kind of logic in a Christian's faith that forces him to say that disbelief in the resurrection of Jesus is rationally impossible"; ibid., 183.

[78] Ibid., 73-4. This is in contrast to Yoder's "biblical realism" at least in the sense that the biblical world keeps moving. In his recent work on Frei, Jason Springs writes that, despite Frei's straightforward emphasis on the direction of interpretation—toward Scripture rather than away from it—this directionality was more complex in his work. "Fallibility and internal contradiction present problems only if one makes forceful claims for Scripture's absorption of the world. *Unidirectionality* invests Scripture with a kind of inflexibility that risks becoming an idolatrous displacement of the Word…. If, by contrast, we recognize

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coheres with the literary form of the text—or the inculcation of a "biblical worldview"—that Christ will be made present to us, but rather through the action of God in Christ by the Spirit. Frei states, "The witness of Scripture to God is sure, not of itself, but because the witness of God to Scripture is faithful and constant."[79] There are better and worse ways of reading, but the efficacy of Scripture is finally in God's hands, not ours.

Because of this, reading Scripture can be understood in Frei's account to be itself a *participation* in the biblical stories. Just as Christ "became who he is" by his patience, Scripture becomes meaningful for us as we take on his patience, and so Scripture can become a "followable world" within which its readers can find themselves to be figures. Frei states, "the shape of the story being mirrored in the shape of our life is the condition of its being meaningful for us"—though our lives only "reflect the story as in a glass darkly."[80] God, in God's freedom, meets readers anew at every reading of the words of Scripture and their capacity to signify is a divine gift on each occasion. Human patience—the willingness to meet and be met, to keep mirroring the shape of the story—is the analogy of such attentive divine freedom.[81] Our patience is a reception of God's patience.

Presence and Politics in Frei and Yoder

In the first half of this article, I argued that Yoder's programmatic readings of Scripture sit uneasily with his articulation of the patience necessary for the constantly reforming life of the church. The flaw I traced was not only a matter of disposition, but also of method. Frei's language enables a more precise complaint. In Frei's terms, Yoder's reading tended to place and explain Scriptural figures and events in a wider world—the social form of the church—rather than describing the practices of the church by and within those Scriptural figures and events.[82] For Yoder, Scripture's meaning was bound up with its reference to this wider plane. This is not to say that Yoder did not read carefully and attend to the historical and linguistic particulars of

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Scripture as an historically immanent means in and through which God's Word indirectly, but nevertheless authentically and realistically, manifests God, then the very notion of Scripture and the 'Christian world of discourse' acquire a certain flexibility and, perhaps more importantly, unpredictability." Springs goes on to suggest, as he does gently throughout the book, that this is "a primary point at which Frei's thinking bears out Barth's influence in a way that Lindbeck's does not"; Jason Springs, *Toward a Generous Orthodoxy: Prospects for Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 73. Emphasis original.

[79] Frei, *Identity*, 194.

[80] Frei, *Identity*, 199.

[81] Or, as Tertullian puts it, true patience is not some false humility, but rather a reflection of God's perfect love. "To *us*, no human affectation of canine equanimity, modelled by insensibility, furnishes the warrant for exercising patience; but the divine arrangement of a living and celestial discipline, holding up before us God Himself in the very first place as an example of patience; who scatters equally over just and unjust the bloom of this light"; Tertullian, *De Patientia*, II. In contrast, Frei argues that divine patience is *not* always to be imitated. "God's patience toward his creatures does not involve as logical consequence that we ought under all circumstances to exercise patience or only patience. That is not how we ought to think in relation to the divine perfections. God's patience is that aspect of his grace by which he permits and sustains his creatures in being and grants them their own span of time, limited though it be, and their own social location, which is not a universal home"; Frei, "God's Patience and Our Work," 1986. I side with Tertullian insofar as Christian patience reflects and corresponds to, but is not identical with, divine patience.

[82] Bear in mind Jason Springs' attention to the flexibility of Frei's account of the biblical world embracing and absorbing the wider world. See n. 70 above.

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the texts he faced. Rather, Yoder's extraordinarily careful attention to such particulars often proved the means by which they were eclipsed by the practices and attitudes with which he sought to confront Christian communities. Particulars, for Yoder, were always representative. At best, Yoder showed how following Jesus is bound up with a set of practices embedded in a community's ongoing relationship with Scripture. At worst, those practices eclipsed the "unsubstitutable individuality" of Jesus in his ongoing witness in and to Scripture read in the gathered community.

Frei's only explicit work on patience is an unpublished essay, "God's Patience and Our Work," he wrote for a conference in honor of Jürgen Moltmann. In a comment about the problematic clarity of Moltmann's dialectic of time and eternity, Frei stated, "To be reserved about dialectical thinking as the single clue to Christian thinking is to *believe* that God's kingdom holds the human future but not to *know* how it will supersede the present; in fact, to know very little about the future for sure."[83] Frei would likely argue that while Yoder (and Moltmann) carefully makes room for the ever-present distance of the eschatological future, his clarity about the social shape of the kingdom of God supersedes not only the present church, but also the figures of Scripture that ground that shape.

One key hermeneutical disagreement between Yoder and Frei related to this deserves attention. While Frei sought to contextualize the modern emphasis on authorial intention and illustrate its problems in relation to explicating the literal sense of Scripture in community, Yoder maintained that "a text should be read for what its author meant to say and what its first readers or hearers would have heard it to say," and seemed to estimate the possibility of biblical scholarship achieving that end quite highly.[84] As a result of this emphasis on intentionality, the unity of the canon consisted, for Yoder, in its steady and developing reference to a certain way of being in the world, defined most fully by Christ, that the church must embody. Scripture hangs together insofar as it points to the politics of the cross.[85] This approach to textual "meaning" and to the canon is a crucial difference between Yoder and Frei. (Why Stanley Hauerwas, influenced by both Yoder and Frei, has not acknowledged this, given Hauerwas' repeated dismissals of an emphasis on "the original sense" in theology and preaching, is a mystery.[86])

[83] Frei, "God's Patience and Our Work" 1986. Emphasis original. Similarly, Frei states, "The promise of God is a miracle [and] the anticipation of a miracle rather than the fulfillment of a blueprint." This both recalls Yoder's argument about the function of the Bible and militates against his ecclesiological reading of the Bible.

[84] Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 78. Yoder updated *The Politics of Jesus* in a twenty-fifth anniversary edition to account for relevant changes in biblical studies because he saw the book as an attempt to summarize what "is now generally visible throughout New Testament studies"; *Politics*, 2. However, Hauerwas apparently "tried to convince [him] not to 'update' the scholarship'" because Hauerwas did not think that what Yoder had accomplished in *Politics* was a summary of scholarship; Stanley Hauerwas, *Working with Words* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 101 n. 18.

[85] John Nugent, in his work on Yoder's approach to the Old Testament, has effectively summarized Yoder's approach to Scripture as a whole as "canonical-directional." In sum, Yoder, a "biblical realist," understood the best interpreters to be those who "approach Scripture with the best available tools for interpreting the author's original intention and trusting that all the texts in their canonical form will hang together and present a coherent message." This method both rules out and renders unnecessary figural (or allegorical) reading. "Exegetes need not find allegorical ways to read Christ into the text; the text is already inseparably caught up in God's work in history which finds its fulfillment in him"; John Nugent, *The Politics of Yahweh* (Eugene OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 11.

[86] For Hauerwas on authorial intention see his *Unleashing the Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993). "There simply is no 'real meaning' of Paul's letters to the Corinthians once we understand that

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Two examples will demonstrate the important differences between these methods. One intriguing example of Yoder's canonical trajectory method that illustrates his approach to the unity of the canon and textual meaning is Yoder's interpretation of the Genesis 4 account of Cain and Abel. Karl Barth's reading of the same passage contrasts and aligns with Yoder's in illuminating ways. (Barth is Frei's model of a mode of exegesis most appropriate to the biblical narrative in the contemporary world.[87]) In a late essay on the story of Cain and Abel for a conference on environmental ethics, Yoder theorized that, though the text gives no reason for God to have rejected Cain's sacrifice and accepted Abel's, we may nonetheless assume that Abel's lifestyle as a nomadic herder was more in line with God's intentions than was Cain's farming. He states,

> Cain had been going on doing what his father was condemned to do, namely tilling the soil.... Abel on the other hand is a throwback.... The shepherd who does not break open the soil, who shrewdly and submissively adapts his flock's movements to the vegetation that mother earth has already provided, is... less estranged from the original Edenic covenant than the farmer. Cain was unwilling to recognize the priority of his brother's life style.[88]

Yoder goes on to note that, though Abel's lifestyle is inaccessible to us, it has a priority that demands our recognition—a recognition Cain refused to give.

> The sin of Cain—and therefore my sin, for we all live ultimately from breaking open the soil—was not that he tilled and harvested. It began when he refused to recognize that his brother Abel was closer to the beginnings and closer to the God of the natural than he was. But he deepened that offense and estrangement, and made it irrevocable, when he chose not to share in Abel's sacrifice of a sheep from the flock; instead, in a macabre parody of the killing of an innocent sheep, he sacrificed his innocent brother. That bloodshed made even his fields hostile to him.[89]

Yoder's exegesis is both similar to and different from the figural reading of this passage given by Barth. For Barth, "the distinction between the two [Cain and Abel] is not based on any previous mark of distinction between them, but clearly and from

they are no longer Paul's letters but rather the Church's Scriptures.... If Paul could appear among us today to tell us what he 'really meant'...his view would not necessarily count more than Gregory's or Luther's account"; ibid., 20. And on the instability of the very idea of authorial intention, Hauerwas writes more recently, "I assume even if the author was available he or she would have as much trouble saying what he or she intended as I would have trying to say what I intended by writing this paragraph"; Hauerwas, *Working with Words*, 99 n. 12.

[87] Frei's work can be seen, in part, as reflection on what made it possible for Barth to read the way he did. Comparing Yoder and Barth here is warranted not only because of Frei's attention to Barth, but also because Yoder studied under Barth at the University of Basel. For an excellent critique of Barth's treatment of war, and appreciation of his ecclesiology, see John Howard Yoder, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003) which Yoder wrote and delivered to Barth during his time at the University of Basel.

[88] John Howard Yoder, "Cult and Culture In and After Eden: On Generating Alternative Paradigms," in *Human Values and the Environment: Conference Proceedings* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1992), 56-62. This context—a conference on environmental ethics—must also have guided his exegesis.

[89] Yoder, "Cult and Culture In and After Eden: On Generating Alternative Paradigms."

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the outset it rests on a decision of God concerning them."[90] Cain and Abel—who receive vocations of life and death contrary to their respective deserts—become figures of divine election and rejection that ultimately find their fulfillment in the elect, rejected Christ. Cain and Abel "indicate this love of God in its twofold nature. And the authorization under which the latter stand as well as the former is to live—in their differing functions—by the fact that God has loved and loves and will love this One, and them also in Him."[91] Like Yoder, Barth sees Cain and Abel as inescapably bound up with Christ. Unlike Yoder, that unity consists not primarily in their shared reference to a (diasporic) way of life, but in direct figural relation within Scripture.

Mike Higton, in an essay on Frei's analysis of Barth's figural interpretation, has suggested that such figural reading allows readers to privilege the text over broader frames of reference.

> The figural relationship is not an expression of some deeper worldly relation between the events which could be exposed with the right analytic techniques; there is no hidden variable to which the figural relationship is epiphenomenal; what God does in Christ is not the activation or fulfillment of some prior potential within history which also lies behind the apparently diverse figures of Christ within history. If that were the case, then to establish the existence of the prior potential would be to find the *real* relationship between figure and figured, a real relationship of which the figural relationship was a secondary form.[92]

Yoder's reading shows up precisely the dynamic articulated by Higton. The story of Cain and Abel is, for Yoder, taken up as Scripture insofar as it reveals the *kind* of human community desired by God and fulfilled in Christ. "Shrewd…submissive" community (that is, patient community) is, in Higton's words, "the hidden variable of which the figural relationship is epiphenomenal." Thus, *both* Jesus and Abel are subordinated to the deeper structure of Yoder's diaspora politics. To be sure, Yoder's reading of the Cain and Abel story is creative and useful. In an age of anthropogenic environmental disaster, it cannot be discarded. Yet in the context of Yoder's whole work, this reading serves only to deepen Scripture's univocal trajectory.[93]

Higton, in fact, worries about precisely the same issue in Barth's exegesis. He asks, in noting the way Barth locates the pattern of election and rejection in his readings

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[90] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2, 340.

[91] Ibid., 354. Paul Dafydd Jones has argued that patience, for Barth, names the connection between "God's being" and "the human action that God awaits." This points toward an analogous rather than identical relation between divine and human patience; Paul Dafydd Jones, "On Patience: Thinking With and Beyond Karl Barth," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, (forthcoming).

[92] Mike Higton, "The Fulfillment of History in Barth, Frei, Auerbach and Dante," in John McDowell and Mike Higton, eds., *Conversing with Karl Barth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 120-41. John David Dawson, in his work on figural reading and Christian identity, describes figural reading in a similar way. "Figural reading is a method of discerning the intelligibility of a divine performance in history without relying on a conception of meaning as a concept signified by a textual signifier"; John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 11. Dawson's work shows how eclipsing the particularity of biblical figures relates to the eclipse of particular contemporary identities, first of all Jewish identity.

[93] The same is true for Yoder's reading of the scattering of Babel as blessing; it is a fruitful reading that nevertheless reduces the story when viewed in the context of his overall project. See John Howard Yoder, "Meaning After Babble: With Jeffrey Stout Beyond Relativism," in Christian Early and Ted Grimsrud, eds., *A Pacifist Way of Knowing* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 106-108.

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of the Old Testament, "Is Barth finally substituting a pattern, a diagram, a conceptual scheme for the history-like narrative? Does his figural practice involve turning away from the unsubstitutable particularity of both figure and fulfillment at the last moment?"[94] Higton suggests that it does, and for good reason. "All figural exegesis"—indeed, all exegesis—"is bound to involve a moment of abstraction…it is inevitable to bracket at least some of the complexity that makes each pole particular."[95] But this "simply means that we…must always accept the possibility of returning and re-reading the poles."[96] And this, Higton suggests, is exactly what Barth did, returning to the same texts throughout his work and finding different relationships between the same figures.

Interpreting a text necessarily involves abstracting from its particularities. Such abstraction is indeed what makes interpretation possible, and this is certainly not an issue unique to Yoder, or to Barth. However, the kind of figural reading described by Frei and performed by Barth is uniquely equipped to respond appropriately. Higton summarizes, "To claim that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of an Old Testament narrative is to commit to this endless paying of attention, this endless finding of patterns which partially confirm our commitment, this endless reading of the Old Testament narrative alongside the Gospels."[97] It "frees us *for* the Old Testament," frees us to be sent "back again and again to read the Old Testament 'in its own terms.'"[98] Figural reading is perhaps not so much a method as a commitment to the relentless and overflowing profundity of Scripture and its internal dialogue. Yoder's exegesis is not problematic because he finds patterns in Scripture; it is problematic because the way he finds those patterns makes it difficult to envision the breaking forth of yet more patterns.

How might Yoder respond to the charge that Scripture, in his hands, was eclipsed by the politics of the church? To critics who protested his method, Yoder often said "Show me where I am wrong."[99] That is, a proper critique ought to involve more thorough argument with the merits of particular readings in and of themselves. In the second place, Yoder might reply that his readings of Scripture were in service to the particular reforms of the church in the present day, and just so were both concrete and *pen*ultimate. That is, if Yoder's work were understood as opening up political readings rather than limiting all readings to his politics, perhaps my difficulties disappear.[100] If Yoder were to turn the question back, he might ask, "must not any

[94] Higton, "The Fulfillment of History in Barth, Frei, Auerbach and Dante."

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid.

[99] For instance, Yoder insisted that the story of Jewish diaspora he found in the biblical texts was there all along. "It is not that I am 'co-opting' Jews to enlist them in my cause. It is that I am finding a story, which is really there, coming all the way down from Abraham that has the grace to adopt me"; Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, 115.

[100] Indeed, Branson Parler has argued that the burden of proof lies on those who view Yoder as reducing Christian theological claims to ethics. He states, "we should take Yoder as an expansionist (not a reductionist or antagonist) except in areas where we have good textual or contextual reasons to do otherwise." I hope, however, that I have provided such reasons here. Branson Parler, "Spinning the Liturgical Turn: Why Yoder is Not an Ethicist" in John Nugent, ed., *Radical Ecumenicity: Pursuing Unity and Continuity After John Howard Yoder* (Abeliene, TX: Abeliene Christian University Press, 2010), 180.

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reforming reading be impatient?" More pointedly, is what I call "patience" in fact a skepticism that simply plays into my own sensibilities?[101]

I am not entirely sure how to answer such charges. As for the first, I share what I take to be Yoder's reforming ends and am all the more convinced that different reading strategies would have fit those ends more effectively and more faithfully.[102] Second, while it is possible to argue against particular readings of Yoder, the difficulty, as I have outlined it, lies precisely in the whole constellation of his work. Additionally, while Yoder's method is troubling in and of itself, his canonical trajectory, with its intense focus on church as procedural body, is particularly worrisome insofar as it plays precisely into the assumptions of a bourgeois twenty-first century North American church—liberal or conservative. In a procedural republic, the notion of church as procedural politics is too familiar and too tamable, and is at the same time, almost impossible. This is especially true in Yoder's (and my) Mennonite Church, which has parlayed its historic nonviolence into the trappings of a cultural vanguard even as it is torn apart by disagreement over welcoming gays and lesbians into full membership and leadership. In many ways Yoder's reading is extraordinarily, prophetically challenging to North American Christianity. Yet it is also exactly what we want to hear about ourselves. And it is also exactly what is rendering our shared life intractable. If the church is constituted by the corporate act of "looping back" to be reformed by the witness of Scripture, what happens when the looping gets stuck?

Here again, Alex Sider helpfully summarizes the danger. The problem for "Yoderians" is "how to allow the disavowal of Constantinianism to leave us stranded in our own historicity without strandedness itself becoming a handle on history."[103] How might the church patiently read Scripture without its corporate methodological patience itself becoming a kind of impatience, a way of securing our rightness over against the rightness of the judged and judging one hanging on the cross?

Radical democratic theorist Romand Coles has summarized this danger in Yoder in a way that looks surprisingly like a kind of confluence between Frei's work and Yoder's. In "The Wild Patience of John Howard Yoder," Coles admires that the distinctiveness of Yoder's church is comprised exactly by the form of the church's openness to outsiders. But "how," he asks of Yoder's ever-reforming church politics, "would this root of always particular dissonances, discontinuities, dispossessions, and renewals within the tradition finally avoid being simply another standard (or method) beyond history that would endow with fundamentalist authority those who speak and act monologically in its name?… And might it not then…resemble the very Constantinianism Yoder has so profoundly taught Christians to resist?"[104]

[101] This is the implication of Mark Thiessen Nation's review of Chris Huebner's *A Precarious Peace*. Nation says, "It is important that we realize that our knowledge of the God revealed in Christ is in fact fairly solid"; *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 82 no. 2 (2008): 335.

[102] For example, Ephraim Radner's figural reading of the church as Israel in exile resonates with Yoder's diaspora politics but still preserves the immediacy—and the suffering—of the Scriptural reality of diaspora; Ephraim Radner, *The End of the Church: A Pneumatology of Christian Division in the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 332-54.

[103] Sider, *To See History Doxologically*, 14.

[104] Romand Coles, "The Wild Patience of John Howard Yoder," *Modern Theology* 18 no. 3 (July 2002): 310.

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Coles only states, "*If* Yoder escapes this trap, it is because he understands the church's relation to Jesus as the very incarnation of practices of becoming vulnerable to encounter to the otherness of history."[105] The church is never "finished" reading the Gospels, not merely because of human fallibility, but because the demands of Christ, in the patience of God, are new in every situation, and only concretized there. In this way, the church's relation to Jesus—in Scripture, in community, in friendship, in the world—can resist closure. Both Frei's work and Yoder's have, in just this way, been a constant struggle to let the world of Scripture—gathered around the person of Christ—confront and challenge contemporary readers. Indeed, *The Politics of Jesus* and *The Identity of Jesus Christ* both work, in parallel ways, to challenge the reader to see again the immediacy of the judgment pressed upon them by the Gospels. To say that the Gospels force their readers to a judgment is simply to say that discipleship and reading are intertwined, as both Frei and Yoder argued.

This shared affirmation is a way through the thicket of difficulties in Yoder's readings. Coles—an outsider, in Yoder's vocabulary—reminds us that "the church's relation to Jesus," and not its politics, its methods of reading, or its false humility, is the guarantor of its reading. Frei's formulation that "the witness of Scripture to God is sure, not of itself, but because the witness of God to Scripture is sure and constant"[106] might, in the light of Yoder's work, be transposed: "the witness of our *reading* to God is sure, not of itself, but because the Witness of God in and to Scripture is sure and constant." Similarly, Yoder's statement that "the relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship of cause and effect, but one of cross and resurrection"[107] is, in the light of Frei's work, a claim that the efficacy of Scripture is not so much in the formulae the people of faith effect through it, but rather the forming of that people into the likeness of Christ. We might read it, "the relationship between the *reading* of God's people and the triumph of God's *interpretation* is not a relationship of cause and effect, but one of cross and resurrection." The triumph of patient reading—whatever such triumph might look like—is out of our hands because patient reading is itself a formation into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Given my elevation of figural reading over Yoder's "inductive" style, it may be fitting, by way of conclusion, to suggest a figural relationship for Scripture and its readers. Perhaps Christian Scripture could be understood as the suffering face of Christ on the cross, with its readers gathered around, like Mary and the crowd of women. Such suffering impels our immediate, active response to the body before us.[108] Discipleship is everything that follows from the sight of the suffering Christ, which is simply to say that Mary is the mother of the Church and the model of active discipleship. But readers' response to Scripture, as suffering Christ, is of necessity limited, provisional, nearly futile. If we know Easter morning comes after the cross, we still cannot bring it about. To read Scripture patiently is to be formed into the likeness of the suffering Christ but also to stand by and helplessly wait together

[105] Ibid., 310. Emphasis mine.

[106] Frei, *Identity*, 194. When Frei states this, at the end of *Identity*, he has just spoken of Scripture as itself an analogy of Jesus, the Word of God, whose life is a witness to God yet who, paradigmatically in the resurrection, "is witnessed to by the very God and the very Spirit to whom he witnesses."

[107] Yoder, *Politics*, 232.

[108] I am grateful to Peter Ochs for the image of Scripture as a sign of suffering.

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with Mary, without certain knowledge of *how* the words of Scripture will be redeemed from suffering. This image holds in place the irresolvable tension between speech and silence, between following Jesus onto the cross and waiting beyond hope for the resurrection.[109] Impatient reading—both methodological and dispositional—rejects this tension, and so rejects the way of God in and with Scripture and the world. In reading the Gospels, as Yoder and Frei both show, and in perennially re-reading the rest of Scripture in light of them, readers meet and are transformed by the Jesus who patiently meets them there. Such reading must be deliberative and communal, but its politics are not its end. The question is not how Jesus can be made present, for as Frei argued, "we cannot know who he is without having him present" but "whether—when he meets us in our world. . .we want to follow him."[110]

The Risen Christ, His Body, and the Words of Scripture

> "Patience comes not just from our inability to have the other do our will. . .it arises with the love that the presence of the other can and does create in us."[111]

I close with a reading of Luke 24 and a glance at John 20 in the hopes of learning from Jesus what patience looks like in a world of injustice and learning from Mary Magdalene, the first witness of the resurrection, what it looks like to stand patiently before that Jesus. In Luke's Gospel the scene is this: Jesus has died and been buried. When "some women who had come with him from Galilee" came to anoint his body after the Sabbath, the tomb was empty and "two men in dazzling clothes" told them that Jesus had risen. The apostles thought the women's story "seemed. . ..an idle tale," but Peter ran to the tomb, saw its emptiness, and was "amazed" (24:4, 11, 12).[112] This is when Jesus appears to two disciples who "on that same day" were on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. "But their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (24:15-16). At Jesus' prompting, Cleopas, one of the two, voices their confusion, telling about the friend, teacher, and revolutionary they had lost. "Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. . .and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive" (24:17-25).

Strikingly, the two disciples in this story have all the pieces of the narrative. They know what happened, even the resurrection, but they do not know why.[113] Jesus,

[109] As Rowan Williams says, "Christian speech is forever entering into and re-emerging from inarticulacy. There is not one moment of dumbness or loss followed by fluency, but an unending flow back and forth between speech and silence; and if at each stage the silence and the loss and emptiness become deeper and more painful, so at each stage the recovered language is both more spare and more richly charged. . .. Christ is with the believer and beyond the believer at the same time"; Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2002), 66, 76. Throughout this essay I have been gratefully—but mostly implicitly—indebted to Williams' work on Christ's enduring strangeness.

[110] Frei, *Identity*, 67. Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 39.

[111] Stanley Hauerwas with Charles Pinches, "Practicing Patience: How Christians Should be Sick," in John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, eds., *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 365.

[112] All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

[113] I am indebted to a sermon by Peter Dula for this point. "Education on the Way to Emmaus," Eastern Mennonite University Baccalaureate Sermon, April 30, 2011.<http://emu.edu/now/podcast/2011/04/30/2011-baccalaureate/>

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walking beside them, provides this ordering. "Oh how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then, "beginning with Moses he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the Scriptures" (24:25-27). It is only later, when they share the evening meal that "they recognized him" and, just then, "he vanished from sight" (24:30-31).

What can this story mean? Certainly, as Yoder argued, the disciples have failed to grasp the significance of suffering for the Messiahship of Israel. Certainly we must attend to the way discipleship, hospitality, the Eucharist, right knowledge of Scripture, and the sight of Christ intertwine. Yet all this could become a way of suggesting that this story is about Jesus helping the disciples to finally get it right so that the church can get off the ground without yet another hitch.

Whatever patience is, this is what it looks like. The patience demanded of the faithful community is the patience of its Lord who does not abandon them to their helplessness even when, appearing in his flesh, "they were disbelieving and still wondering," even "in their joy." It is a patience that lets disciples tell the story of Scripture before saying, in love, "Oh, how foolish you are." In watching this patience, we are formed to the patience of Christ who says "see that it is I myself…A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (24:25-41).

This patience has a politics too. At the end of the story the disciples gather together at the temple in Jerusalem, and already there are anticipations of the later testimony that "all who believed were together and had all things in common." There is also, in the apostles' easy and unchallenged dismissal of the women's testimony ("these words seemed to them an idle tale") the bitter tang of sexism. Read in this light, Jesus' appearance to the disciples on the road to Emmaus might even look like a rebuke for their inhospitality and their unbelief.

Christ stands over against the politics of the community, calling, guiding, walking and eating, but in all this remaining other than the disciples and their shared life. On the Emmaus Road, Jesus is patient enough to remain a distance from the disciples, to hold himself back, to be both friend and stranger, disappearing dinner guest and traveling companion. In the words of Yoder—and, with difficulty, they speak to his life as well—"we still do not see that the world has been set straight. We still have no proof that right is right…'*But we do see Jesus*.'"[114] We faithfully work out which ways of saying it are better and worse, which rules we need to keep us from saying what we have discovered we cannot say. I have tried to show that reading as Yoder read is one such way that must be critically emended. But after such midstream correction Christ again meets us on the road and "beginning with Moses and all the prophets" interprets to us "the things about himself in all the Scriptures." We are not given the final relationship between "Moses and all the prophets" and Christ, nor a definitive account of how the form of that relationship necessitated a suffering Messiah. "We still have no proof." Rather, we are given the characters, prophecies, and events that are held together in Christ in ways we are always re-discovering. Once more he is "made known" to his people "in the breaking of bread," and we realize how "our hearts were burning within us while he was talking to us on the

[114] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 61. Yoder quotes here from Hebrews 2:9.

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road." In the endless patience of God, Christ is never done with the church or Scripture or the world, so neither are we permitted to be.

In the gospel of John, Mary Magdalene is the first of the witnesses to the resurrection. She stands outside the tomb and sees her risen Lord, "but she did not know that it was Jesus" (20:14). She supposes instead, the text says, that he was "the gardener," a mistake that inescapably brings to mind an earlier garden, another dawn, and a different mourning. Then Jesus says her name: "Mary!" (20:16). Named, she names him: "Rabbouni!" But when she turns to embrace him there is another surprise and Jesus says—imagine her pain—"Do not hold on to me" (John 20:17). Perhaps in heeding this advice, in letting Jesus be the stranger that he so often is in the gospels, the lives of those caught up in his story might come more closely to resemble his—in patient politics as in patient reading. For it was only without "holding on to him" that Mary could return to the disciples—to politics—and declare to them, "I have seen the Lord!"

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