John Howard Yoder and John D. Caputo:

Love as the Event of God's Power

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A Thesis Presented to the

Faculty of Graduate Studies

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF ALBERTA

In Partial Fulfilment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Biblical and Christian Studies

April 2015

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Abstract

If God is revealed in Jesus, how is God's power to be understood? It is the argument of this thesis that the work of John Howard Yoder reveals God's power as the simple event of love. A close reading of Yoder's project locates a tension between his stated understanding of power and the implications of his broader project. The non-violence that characterizes his project operates according to a parallel "means *to* ends" logic to that which he critiques. While Yoder attempts to articulate a notion of power counter to a common paradigm—one that is non-violent and not governed by effectiveness—he ultimately frames his concept of power within a paradigm that seeks to control. Yet, his emphasis upon the *agape* love of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, insists that an alternative paradigm of power is at work. Utilizing the work of John D. Caputo, an alternative reading of Yoder's notion of power is developed. Caputo's concepts of hospitality, call, and event, are applied to Yoder's project in order to reveal the "means *as* ends" (or, means *without* ends) logic operating within it. The result of such a discussion of Yoder's project is the establishment of a paradigm of power that adheres to the broader argument of his project and redefines the notion of power itself. Through the work of Yoder and Caputo, the event of love is revealed as a paradigm of power understood by its occurrence and not its effect.

Introduction

Power is the undercurrent of John Howard Yoder's project. His defining work, *The Politics of Jesus*, establishes that the church follows Jesus by taking part in Creation's redemption. Such a task is nothing less than a discussion of power. While Yoder discusses the notion of power itself in *The Politics of Jesus*[1] and several less-known works,[2] he does not offer a comprehensive understanding of the notion of power from which he operates. This lack of explanation is not to be unexpected. Yoder's intent was not to form a theological system but to encourage the church toward faithfulness to the Lordship of Christ. Nonetheless, Yoder's project suffers because he does not convey the underpinning logic of his concept of power. He depicts Christ as having revealed an alternative way to the normative pattern of this age by enacting a life that contradicted the logic of the Powers and Principalities and their penchant toward violence. Yet, he does not articulate how this alternative way of Christ impacts the events of history. In his delineation of the church and the world and through his criticism of Constantinianism and Christendom, it becomes obvious that Yoder has an alternative notion of power in mind but does not make his concept clear. Because Yoder does not develop this notion, his concepts of power can be read through a normative, fallen paradigm that is established by the logic of the rebellious Principalities and Powers. However, it is evident that Yoder has an alternative understanding in mind.

This paradigm of power is a spectrum that spans between a power that coerces and dominates to a power that is non-coercive and serves. Such a rendering ensures that the notion of power within Yoder's work is a negation—violence and non-violence or coercion and non-

[1] See: John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Oster* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), chapter eight, "Christ and Power."

[2] John Howard Yoder, "Jesus and Power", *Ecumenical Review* 25, no. 4 (1973): 447-454. Also, John Howard Yoder, "The "Power" of "Non-Violence"" (November 18, 1995).

coercion—that reacts to the dominant patterns of life. While these notions of power are of opposing polarities, they are of the same form, bound to a paradigm of means directed toward particular ends. Each is measured by effectiveness—a notion Yoder is particularly critical of—a criterion favouring the strong forces over weaker alternatives. When Yoder is read through such a paradigm, his project places Jesus at the non-violent end of the spectrum and God, who is traditionally understood to be domineering, at the violent end of the spectrum. Furthermore, Jesus is understood to be living in obedience to God's *agape* love by revealing this non-violent character of God to humanity, but such a task is problematic according to a normative paradigm of power.[3] This thesis argues that Yoder provides an alternative notion of power that is not understood according to means-and-ends logic and cannot be judged by its effectiveness. Such a paradigm of power is implied by Yoder's broader project but operates behind it, perhaps unbeknownst even to him. This thesis will establish that operating within Yoder's project is an alternative paradigm of power that can be understood simply as love.

To parse out this paradigm of power within Yoder's project, this thesis will carry out a close reading of a variety of his texts. Because Yoder does not explicitly establish his notion of power, it is necessary to discover this notion within his broader project by identifying where it characterizes the nature of his argument, though it is not the topic of emphasis. As such, attention is paid to his development of power relationships, be they between church and state or internal to the church itself. Chapter one of this work will discuss the major themes within Yoder's project with a particular sensitivity to how power is portrayed. The chapter begins by establishing Yoder's notion of power according to the non-violence of Jesus and argues that this dominant theme of Yoder's work is best understood as the fruit of a commitment to not coerce the other.

[3] The normative paradigm, defined by a means-and-ends logic, would see love instrumentalized ensuring that it is no longer love. This will be developed in the third chapter.

This theme is carried into Yoder's view of the church, which is fundamentally shaped by his reading of the New Testament Church and the Believers' Church. Finally, the concluding portion of this chapter will discuss Yoder's emphasis on the Powers and Principalities, contending that Yoder's notion of power stands in contrast to the way these Powers operate. This first chapter will establish that Yoder's notion of power, as understood through a normative paradigm of means-and-ends logic, is best articulated as a non-coercive power.

The second chapter discusses major themes in the work of John D. Caputo and provides an alternative perspective on power and God. Emphasis is placed on *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*, wherein Caputo carries out an alternative reading of the Christian tradition and frees it from commitment to a domineering, violent power. Caputo argues that within the Christian tradition, God is conceived of as power *par excellence.* Such power is understood as strong and coercive, supportive of oppressive hierarchies that both occur within the church and result from the church. In contrast, Caputo establishes a notion of God that is alternative to orthodoxy and argues that God does not *exist*, God *insists*; God is not understood as a being but as something akin to a desire. Crucial to understanding Caputo's project is *the event,* which is reviewed first as a concept, then illustrated at work in Caputo's understanding of God and the Jewish man, Jesus. Caputo's project provides a way to conceive of God and power that helps to loosen our reading of Yoder. This work does not argue that these two projects are congruent with one another, for this is not the case. However, it is true that both projects have a common emphasis on the life and love of Jesus, and both reveal a confounding notion of God when contrasted with our normative conceptions of power as coercive.

Chapter three illustrates how Yoder's project auto-deconstructs, revealing the power of God as love. Non-coercive and coercive power are shown to be in adherence to the same means-

and-ends logic. Thus, this binary can be understood as the paradigm that confines our understanding of power and is obedient to the same desire for control evident in the Powers and Principalities. Yoder's project is revealed to be in tension with itself. Developing a notion of power that runs counter to the paradigm of the Powers, though still structuring such according to the same logic. Love will be revealed as a notion of power that operates toward no particular (worldly) end and can be understood as pure means. This new paradigm of power will develop through Caputo's notion of the call, hospitality, and the event. It will be established—grounded in Yoder's reading of Jesus' life and the workings of the church—that God moves history through love. Following Caputo, such a power does not seek ends aside from the arrival of the event, "love." The power within Yoder's work is best understood as a power that achieves love through the act of love.

Chapter One: John Howard Yoder and God's Non-coercion

John Howard Yoder is one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century. His work is an important engagement with the ethics of the church and the way the followers of Christ relate and witness to broader society. While Yoder's project is not systematic, it is prolific, speaking to many areas of Christian theology. This chapter provides a provisional development of Yoder's project, focusing on the aspects of his work related to the notion of power and its relationship to Jesus Christ and God.[4] It is not intended to reconcile all aspects of Yoder's project or provide a systematic reading of his work. My overall interest in Yoder is in his depiction of a non-violent Jesus who reveals the non-violent character of God. The task of this chapter is to introduce Yoder's understanding of God through Jesus Christ and to discuss the implications for Yoder's understanding of the power of God. This task is pursued by engaging Yoder's work pertaining to the New Testament but foregoing discussion of his Old Testament writings.[5]

To develop Yoder's depiction of a non-coercive God, this chapter addresses three particular aspects of Yoder's work. First, I begin by addressing Yoder's understanding that Jesus

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[4] As Craig A. Carter states, "Yoder wrote no major systematic treatise in which the comprehensiveness, logical rigour, and originality of his theology could be readily ascertained." Craig A Carter, *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), 17-18.

It was not Yoder's intent to provide a rigid and systematic theology, his interest was not in having the final word but in fostering conversation. Koyles rightly asserts that Yoder's work reflects his theological conviction, "Yoder resisted writing a comprehensive treatise because he saw such work as eliminating conversations. He believed his style [or primarily essays] better communicated this desire to cultivate dialogue and the eschewed of writing a comprehensive treatise was a derivative of this commitment to writing in dialogical terms." John Patrick Koyles, *The Trace of the Face in the Politics of Jesus: Experimental Comparisons Between the Work of John Howard Yoder and Emmanuel Levinas* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, Pickwick Publications, 2013), 10.

[5] This is clearly an important area of research, but it is beyond the scope of this work. While I will trace Yoder's conception of a non-coercive God, standing in the background is Yoder's Old Testament work that sees God actively involved in the wars of Israel, fighting on their behalf. Indeed, this is a conflict within Yoder's work itself, one which would entail the entirety of this thesis to come to terms with. As such, I will refrain from a direct engagement with these ideas. For a comprehensive engagement with Yoder's OT writings, see John C. Nugent, *The Politics of Yahweh: John Howard Yoder, the Old Testament, and the People of God* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, Cascade Books, 2011). For a critical engagement with the apparent dichotomy in Yoder's work, see Ray C. Gingerich, "Is God Nonviolent? The Shape of the Conversation", *Conrad Grebel Review* 21, no. 1 (2003): 50-55. and Philip E. Stoltzfus, "Nonviolent Jesus, Violent God?" in *Power and Practices: Engaging the Work of John Howard Yoder* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 2009).

reveals God's non-coercive character, and that such a character is related to maintaining and fostering the dignity and freedom of the other. The next section explores Yoder's understanding of the church, focusing on his use of the Believers' Church and emphasizing the voluntary nature of this community. The final section develops Yoder's notion of the Powers and Principalities. These Powers and Principalities are counter to God and God's character, functioning according to a coercive logic that Christ denies through his life and death. This chapter makes it clear that Yoder depicts God in contrast to the logic of this world. Yoder demonstrates that the means by which God operates and the method of power that God "moves" history with is not coercive power, but non-coercive power.

Yoder and God

John Howard Yoder does not rigorously develop an understanding of the character of God, nor does he have the patience for a deep, philosophical explanation of the Trinity.[6] However, regardless of whether Yoder affirms the Trinity as revealing God ontologically (threeness in oneness), or God economically (three in one revealed in God at work), crucial to his understanding is its revelation through the life of Jesus.[7] This conviction is evident throughout Yoder's project and articulated in several places: "the authoritativeness of the incarnation [is] the only fully valid point at which we can know who God is."[8] And, "in the specific Christian case, [the] ultimate court of appeal in the corrective use of theology is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ…apart from revelation in Christ we would not know which God or what kind of God to

[6] He clearly articulates such a sentiment in *Theology of Mission* while responding to his brief exploration of the trinity, "I can sympathize if you do not have the philosophical imagination to find this conversation very meaningful. I do not either." John Howard Yoder, *Theology of Mission: A Believers Church Perspective*, ed. Andy Alexis-Baker and Gayle Gerber Koontz (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2014), 132.

[7] Ibid., 131. Also, see *Politics of Jesus*, 233. Here Yoder makes this sentiment explicitly clear, "this will of God is affirmatively, concretely knowable in the person and ministry of Jesus."

[8] Yoder, *Theology of Mission*, 144.

whom we are appealing."[9] In each of these quotes, Yoder aligns the character of God and more specifically the human understanding of God with the life of Jesus Christ. As such, though Yoder does not develop a systematic understanding of God—leaving much room for ambiguity—we can proceed understanding his view of the character of God through the life of Jesus Christ.

I employ the term *way* regarding the life of Jesus, and it is important to establish the meaning, and reason for the use of this term.[10] This term is employed to suspend particularity and certainty regarding the life of Jesus. Yoder is identifying an ethical way of life, not the establishment of particular ethics. While Jesus is a particular man, who is understood through the particular events of his life, Yoder is emphasizing the general direction, or orientation, of this man's life, not specific rules. Yoder is addressing the disposition that Jesus lives and from which the particular events of Jesus' life are derived from.[11] The use of the word *way* is an attempt to ground this disposition or orientation in the life of Jesus, while also leaving it open to the potential of such a life lived in contexts to come. To contain Jesus' ministry in the particular events of his life is to close them off to the future and deny the potential of enacting Jesus in contexts beyond the scope of that which he inhabited.[12] Jesus gestures toward such potential when he calls upon his followers to daily take up their cross.[13] If the cross is limited to a literal, fixed event, it has no future. It is significant only as long as crucifixion is practiced. Conversely, if the cross is understood as the result of a life lived in self-giving love, which I argue is the

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[9] John Howard Yoder, *To Hear the Word* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 74.

[10] I will be utilizing this word throughout the remainder of this work to characterize the general essence of Jesus life. In using this word I am following James Wm. McClendon, Jr., who employs it because it was used to distinguish the earliest "Christians" as following a life in pursuit of Jesus, as following in his way. See James Wm. Jr. McClendon, *Systematic Theology Volume 1* (Abingdon Press, 2002), chapter two.

[11] John Patrick Koyles uses the terms, "posture" and "way of being-in-the-world," which are terms that I would also agree with. Koyles, *Trace of the Face,* 8.

[12] The language utilized here is drawn from John D. Caputo, and will resonate with chapter two of this work. Furthermore, chapter three will provide a further engagement with these ideas. It is sufficient to say that Yoder understood the church to be capable of living as Jesus within the culture it exists.

[13] Luke: 9:23

message of Yoder's project, then this event is translated throughout history. Such an event is reincarnated in various forms as individuals live according to the way of Jesus and are "crucified" as a result. Understanding Jesus' life as a way that generates new contextual practices provides the means to understanding the relevancy of this first-century Jewish life.

Yoder founded his ethics on the way Jesus lived and drew them from the general shape of Jesus' life as revealed by the New Testament.[14] The way of Jesus generates meaning and practice. The message of his life is not bound to a particular event but bears witness to a much larger movement that is carried on throughout history. Yoder does not suggest that those who follow Jesus are to enact a life conforming to the particular shape of Jesus' life. Instead, they should enact the way of Jesus in the context they find themselves in. The way of Jesus, as is discussed in chapter three of this thesis, functions as a call. This call is not defined by the firm content of a command but by the weak force of an invitation. Rather than announcing a particular command, Jesus' life generates a contextual shape that is translated throughout history. Love is the guiding theme of this contextual way. It is through lives structured around love that God is understood and the kingdom of God is ushered in.

Jesus and the Other

The way of Jesus' messiahship, and the power that defines it is understood in relationship to the dignity of the other. While power is often understood as "what it takes to make things happen,"[15] for Yoder, the power Jesus uses is never a power that violates the dignity of the other.

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[14] The focus of this work is God revealed in Jesus, but the methodology employed by Yoder to establish such is also utilized to understand the practices of the New Testament Church. His work *Body Politics* is an illustration of such. This work is an investigation of the shape of the church as understood through practices such as communion and baptism. Such an investigation leads him to ethical conclusions about what is going on within the practices themselves. For example, communion moves from being understood as a metaphysical ritual to the material reality of table fellowship between all peoples. John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2001).

[15] Yoder, *Jesus and Power*, 447-454. A parallel rendering of power is found in: Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 138.

Stated differently, the power of Jesus does not reduce beings to objects of a coercive force. As John Patrick Koyles summarizes, "the other person, even if he/she is an enemy, possesses dignity, and Jesus did not sacrifice this for the sake of a larger cause or justification."[16] Yoder introduced this aspect of Jesus' power in the final chapter of *The Politics of Jesus*, "…what Jesus renounced is not first of all violence, but rather the compulsiveness of purposes that leads the strong to violate the dignity of others."[17] Here we see Yoder connecting violence (the opposite of the power of Jesus) with the dignity of the other (which demands non-violence). In an unpublished work, Yoder provides a richer reflection on violence:

> 'Violence' is linguistically speaking an abstract substantive formed from a transitive verb. 'Violence' is thus meaningless apart from the concept of that which is violated. That which is violated is the dignity or integrity of some being. One may violate law or a custom, a promise or a relationship. In the Latin languages the verb "to violate" is the same as the verb "to rape": it refers to the purity or integrity or self-determination of a woman. In the English language this dimension of personhood is not always present but it is still probably the most basic to think of violence as at the heart violating the dignity of a person.[18]

Thus, as Yoder himself summarizes, "…we can consider that the core meaning of 'violence' resides in the dignity of the one offended."[19] While Yoder does not explicitly state his understanding of dignity, he provides no reason to regard his definition as one that is far removed from a typical understanding: the worth of something or someone; one worthy of respect. According to Koyles, "[Jesus] voluntarily subordinated himself to their power and in so doing demonstrated a commitment to their dignity as human beings."[20] The way of Jesus' messiahship is understood according to a non-violation of the dignity of the other.

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[16] Koyles, *Trace of the Face,* 113.
[17] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 237.
[18] John Howard Yoder, "Fuller Definition of "Violence"" (Unpublished work of John Howard Yoder intended for a reading group at Goshen College, March 28, 1973), 3.
[19] Ibid., 3.
[20] Koyles, *Trace of the Face*, 113.

From this brief reflection on violence, we see that Yoder links human dignity with the capacity, or right, to direct one's own life. Once again, this linkage is made explicit when discussing the Latin language's relationship to rape: an action that is not only physically violent in the sense of the trauma done to the body, but is also a violation to the individual's dignity. There is a disregard for one's "self-determination" inherent to coercion. Here, we must note that the violence Yoder is speaking of is one that coerces; thus the underlying principle at work is coercion, which violence is an expression of. Through this illustration, we see the power dynamics of what I label coercive-power: the individual who is raped is reduced (by the rapist) to an object without rights. While rape is an extreme example, a general understanding of what Yoder has in mind can be derived; that is, an individual ought to have autonomy and be responsible for their life.[21] As Koyles summarizes, "God provides the space necessary for that person to choose to align him/herself with God…God is for the other and so must be his followers."[22] The capacity for the individual to act voluntarily according to the way of God is paramount to the character of God while a deterministic coercion is counter to the character of God.

Yoder's emphasis upon the freedom and dignity of the individual is understood in relationship to community. However, he is not interested in developing a theory of human autonomy and employs these concepts provisionally. Yoder operates with a basic, provisional understanding that is not meant as the final authority but a signpost. One may confuse Yoder's basic use of freedom and dignity as parallel to popular contemporary conceptions (individuals as independent, self-defining, agents), even though such an understanding is surely not Yoder's

[21] This principle will be observed within Yoder's conception of the church, his reflection on God's relationship to human salvation, and his understanding of God's wrath. Each of which will be developed in this chapter.

[22] Koyles, *Trace of the Face*, 115.

intention. This notion of autonomy is an individualism founded upon a mutuality, and a freedom directed toward the other rather than toward the self. The autonomy of the individual is not turned in on oneself, it is used for the good of the other and the flourishing of the community. Yoder states, "as soon as either verbal abuse or bodily coercion moves beyond that border line of loving and enhancement of the dignity of the person, we are being violent. The extremes of these two dimensions are of course killing and the radical kind of insult which Jesus in Matthew 5 indicates is just as bad. This is the core definition: I believe that it is a Christian imperative always to respect the dignity of every person: I must never willingly or knowingly violate that dignity."[23] For Yoder, one's own autonomy is best suited to providing space for the other to function autonomously. In this sense, one's own experience of freedom is used to promote and never cost the freedom of the other. What is experienced is relational autonomy: one does not operate according to individual whim and self-gratification, but according to a commitment to the good of the community in which they are situated. It is in this relationship to the community that one finds liberation. The orientation of one's life is always toward the flourishing of the other and fosters an openness where they too can pursue a similar disposition.

Jesus lived oriented toward the non-coercive liberation of the other. The liberation Jesus fostered was not focused on the material reality of the Jewish people—their expectations— but on the underlying patterns of life that gives shape to what is normative and possible. Jesus was not interested in transforming the outward by bringing about the end of Israel's oppression under Rome. Instead, his intent was to transform the logic that legitimizes subjugation in order that oppression could never be accepted as legitimate. The only way Jesus could have freed his people from the physical oppression of Rome would have been through coercion, the very way

[23] Yoder, *Fuller Definition,* 3. (emphasis added)

of life he came to denounce. If the outside is transformed but the inside is not, then the transformed may be reborn into a new coercive injustice. If the means by which the oppressor operates are not recognized as unjust, the liberated victim may operate according to the same logic. Perhaps the victim would seek vengeance, ensuring the continuing cycle of coercion: a former victim who operates according to the way of their oppressor is no less oppressive than those who oppressed them. Servanthood, subordination, forgiveness and enemy love, defined the way of Jesus' messiahship. These are not the hallmarks of an oppressor, nor are they indicative of a normative conception of power. The way of Jesus denies coercion, liberating the other through non-coercion. Jesus lives the kingdom of God. His life is not only a series of messages providing constructive content regarding a future reality, his life is the establishment of a new order. While the Jewish expectation of this kingdom was an overturning of the previous order by a strong, coercive force, constitutive of this new order is its establishment through non-coercive means. This new order exists in the midst of the old order. While its non-coercive character is expressed through subordination to the old, the existence of this alternative undermines the legitimacy of the old order, which is passing away.

Jesus' life reveals a way of love that debases the established norms and structures that define and determine horizons. The way of Jesus is oriented toward liberation of the other from the patterns and perspectives that bind them. Israel's oppression was clear, though it was not obvious that the Jewish people were subject to an oppression deeper than the might of Rome. Rome sustained itself through coercive power, wielding the sword and crucifying those who dared to stand in the way of "peace." Had Jesus taken up the sword, his message would have abided by the standard logic of overturning domination with domination. While the people of Israel may have been freed of Rome, an unlikely turn of events, they would still have been

enslaved to coercive logic. The message would have clearly affirmed that one must overcome the other and dominate the other if need be, to achieve what one desires. The way of Jesus stood in contrast to Rome: Rome was characterized by fear and domination, and Jesus was characterized by love and servanthood. Jesus' life resonated with an alternative, impossible order, the order of the Kingdom of God. Jesus' life redefined the entire logic of the situation: one does not overcome the other but loves the other, one does not only desire to be free from the other but desires that the other be free from the coercive logic that enslaves. Jesus lived for liberation, and the way of this liberation—love for the other to the point of death—was both the means and the ends of his messiahship.

Jesus and Power

In Yoder's work, the messiah who comes to liberate his people does so according to an alternative kind of power. The notion of power Yoder depicts stands in contrast to the normative equations of power though coercion, which is the hallmark the fallen Powers. In his 1973 article, *Jesus and Power,* Yoder proclaims, "power in the simplest sense of the word was Jesus' agenda."[24] Yoder clarifies the definition of power he is working with, "Etymologically, power is what it takes to make things happen. It usually includes structures to legitimate and obligate, and it distributes the economic and spiritual wherewithal for human fulfilment."[25] Yoder is not condemning power in and of itself, but he has separated the notion of power from the means by which power is wielded. In his much later essay, *Ethics and Eschatology,* Yoder speaks of various kinds of power: "it is not false when people who call themselves 'realists,'…tell us that power comes from the barrel of a gun. That is one kind of power; but the alternative is not

[24] Yoder, *Jesus and Power*, 448.
[25] Ibid., 448. A parallel rendering of power is found in: Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 138.

weakness [absence of power; the inability to "get things done"] but other kinds of power."[26] As an example of the "kinds of power" Yoder is speaking of, he states, "the 'power' (exousia) [Jesus] himself exercises illustrates the broad scope of kinds of power…which are not tied to violence and the state: the power of forgiveness, the power of the pilot experience, the power of peoplehood, of publicity... Jesus did not free His disciples from violence to make them pure and weak, but because He called them to use other, stronger resources."[27] There are ways to "make things happen" that run with the grain of the universe—self-sacrificing love, forgiveness—which also stand in stark contrast to the normative patterns of coercive power that perpetuate oppression and injustice.

The reference to the "barrel of a gun" no doubt runs parallel to the coercive-power manifest against Jesus through the cross.[28] Jesus' non-violent, self-giving love manifested an alternative kind of power. The use of violence to coerce others into adhering to a specific command or standard represents the way of domination Jesus rejected. While this coercive means to power creates apparent control over a specific situation, it also brings about the violation of the dignity of others by the strong, violating the agape character of God.[29] It is this violation that renders coercive power unjust and counter to the kingdom of God. For Yoder, the cross, and thus the use of non-coercive power by Jesus, is the kingdom come.[30] This non-coercive power is "the power of God"[31] and is "God's way."[32] Yoder is not only establishing an

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[26] John Howard Yoder, "Ethics and Eschatology", *Ex Auditu* 6, no. 126 (1990): 119-128.

[27] Yoder, *Jesus and Power*, 453.

[28] It is clear that for Yoder the cross is not something God ordained, it is the result of the life that Jesus enacted, which challenged the legitimacy and claims of the Powers and Principalities. For Yoder, the cross is political punishment, "The 'cross' of Jesus was a political punishment; and when Christians are made to suffer by government it is usually because of the practical import of their faith, and the doubt they cast upon the rulers/ claim to be 'Benefactor'." Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 125.

[29] Ibid., 237.

[30] Ibid., 51.

[31] Ibid., 242.

[32] Yoder, *Jesus and Power,* 454.

ethic for the community of believers, he is also asserting that this mode of being is the actual power of God. While a self-sacrificing love for the other may appear to be weakness (cf. death on a cross) it is, in fact, a mode of power, and this mode of power is how God functions in the world. It denies the allure of "effectiveness," challenges normative rationality, and stands in contrast to the Powers. In summation, Yoder states, "when [Jesus] prefers servanthood to domination, as His path and therefore as [the church's], it is immaterial whether [the church] call that 'powerlessness' or 'omnipotence'; it is God's way."[33] For Yoder, the apparent weakness of the cross is in fact power, though a non-coercive power to be sure.

God as Non-coercive

According to Yoder's rendering of Jesus, God operates through non-coercive power. To be clear, God does not act through coercion. Yoder articulates such a conclusion through his criticism of Universalism (cf. All will be saved). "Universalism denies humanity's freedom to turn away from God…God takes the risk of leaving people free; this is the definition of agape…"[34] and "…God is agape and agape respects the freedom of the beloved…Agape respects the freedom of the beloved even to lose himself or herself."[35] Yoder asserts that God does not coerce humanity into obedience, human beings choose with their own freewill,[36] "…leaving evil free to be evil, leaving the sinner free to separate himself from God and sin against man, is part of the nature of *agape* itself, as revealed already in creation."[37] Yoder understands this in terms of "divine patience." Agape allows humanity to freely choose, and

[33] Ibid., 454.
[34] John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 309.
[35] Ibid., 309.
[36] This does not speak to Yoder's understanding of God's intent; he is not arguing that God does not *desire* all to be saved, but that he does not violate the freedom of the individual to achieve such.
[37] John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1977), 61.

agape does not violate this in defense of himself (cf. Christ), even to save people from themselves. It is through agape love—the cross—that injustice is overcome.

Yoder emphasizes human autonomy when addressing the notion of the wrath of God, "Wrath and hell are the biblical words for the bindingness of our historicity, to put it in contemporary speculative language. The historicity of human nature is that people are what they become. The decisions I make *make* me what I am. I am not anything other than what I have made myself become. What I have decided is decisive."[38] In this quote's context, Yoder argues that what is understood as the wrath of God is actually human rationale for the negative fruits of individual decisions. Thus, what is understood as the wrath of God is not accurate, as it is the natural result—the consequences— of human activities. As the quote articulates, human beings are the product of individual decisions, and all of these decisions have consequences. What is understood as wrath is simply, "…the outworking of the process that ensues when we turn against God."[39] Yoder places a great deal of emphasis upon the autonomy of the individual as a natural capacity and right of the human being. Human beings are to have the capacity to choose, generally speaking, and this choice is categorized as "for God" or "against God." The results of such decisions are "good results" or "evil results."[40]

The idea of non-coercive power developed through Yoder's project raises questions about God's sovereignty. If the way of Jesus' life is understood in accordance with non-coercion, and Jesus reveals God, then how does God assert an ongoing control over the cosmos? The answer is that God does not. The notion of sovereignty operating within Yoder's project is one where God is not in control of the fine details and inner workings of human history. As established, human freedom is fundamental to Yoder's conception of humanity and is a quality that God, out of love,

[38] Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 318.
[39] Ibid., 319.
[40] Ibid., 319.

cannot violate through coercion; such a coercion of the creature by the creator would itself violate the *agape* character of God. Thus, human beings guide the course of history, with varying degrees of awareness and scope.[41] In spite of this view, Yoder's conception of God is not withdrawn and distant from the world. Rather, God is engaged in an operation to liberate humanity from the fallen patterns of the Principalities and Powers. God's power is understood paradigmatically in the non-coercive life of Jesus, which resulted in the cross. Once again, the cross is not a strategy of God, it *is* the power of God. Through the event of the cross, God's power is manifest: God is present not in the violence exerted upon Jesus' body (as if God ordained and orchestrated the event), but in the broken body of Christ (a victim of the Powers of this world). The cross is non-coercive power: the denial of the self in favour of the other. The event of an innocent man, whose life was lived for the other, being crucified because he refused the sword, is the act of God's power. Somehow, paradoxically stirring within this event is the power of God.

These concepts are a paradoxical understanding of power because of our common equation of power with coercion. The logic behind power is that it is a means to achieve one's own ends. A dead man on a cross seems to be the result of someone else's power (Rome), not the expression of one's own (God). While Yoder does not delve into the details of God's power, he recognizes it as more than an action of obedience to God's command. In *The Politics of Jesus,* Yoder provides a hint to making sense of this power:

> Then to follow Jesus does not mean renouncing effectiveness. It does not mean sacrificing concern for liberation within the social process in favour of delayed gratification in heaven, or abandoning efficacy in favor of purity. It means that in Jesus we have a clue to which

[41] Yoder himself states as much, "for part of the freedom granted to man is the power to influence reality, to express himself in history." John Howard Yoder, "A Study in the Doctrine of the Work of Christ" (As given at Domburg Seminar, April 27, 1954). I first encountered this unpublished work of Yoder's in *The Heterodox Yoder.* Thanks to Paul Martens for providing me with his transcription of this presentation. Paul Martens, *The Heterodox Yoder* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, Cascade Books, 2012), 26-33.

> kinds of causation, which kinds of community-building, which kinds of conflict management, go with the grain of the cosmos, of which we know, as Caesar does not, that Jesus is both the Word (inner logic of things) and the Lord ("sitting at the right hand"). It isn't that we begin with a mechanistic universe and then look for cracks and chinks where a creative freedom might sneak in (for which we could then give God credit): it is that we confess the deterministic world to be enclosed within, smaller than, the sovereignty of the God of the Resurrection and Ascension. 'He's got the whole world in his hands' is a post-ascension testimony. The difference it makes for political behaviour is more than merely poetic or motivational.[42]

For Yoder, the cosmos has a particular order, and the form of it is revealed in the life of Jesus. Jesus is the actual logic of the universe; He unveils the true humanity and gives flesh to the way humanity ought to live. Living in the non-coercive way of Jesus stands in contrast to the normative patterns understood as "reality." Living in the way of Christ goes against the dominant grain of our context, but it does go along with the grain of the universe. The fallen order has no ultimate claim; it is the old order that is passing away. For Yoder, the actual order of the universe is revealed as the self-giving love of Jesus Christ.

Yoder has in mind a notion of God's sovereignty that departs from the common conception. We need not explore the intricacies of the notion of sovereignty, as such extends beyond the scope of this work. Let us work with a provisional understanding of sovereignty that accords with a normative, colloquial, use of the word: 1) supremacy or pre-eminence in respect of excellence or efficacy. 2) Supremacy in respect of power, domination, or rank; supreme dominion, authority, or rule. 3) The position, rank, or power of a supreme ruler or monarch; royal authority or dominion.[43] The sovereign is the one with the capacity to act and decide, the one with the power to bring about his or her will. The definition implies coercion with the strict division between the sovereign and all others: the sovereign must be of a superior position,

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[42] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 246-7.

[43] "sovereignty, n.". OED Online. June 2014. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.aec.talonline.ca/view/Entry/185343?redirectedFrom=sovereignty (accessed August 11, 2014).

authority, and capacity, in order that they be understood as sovereign. The omni-God, who knows all, sees all, and has the power to do all, is the paradigmatic representation of sovereignty: an entity with the characteristics to direct and guide reality to the ends desired.

If the sovereign lacks the capacity to bring about the desire of his or her will, then the sovereign would be absent of that which constitutes sovereignty. Implicit to such an understanding of sovereignty is the potential use of coercion: to compel one to do as you desire. While Yoder understands Jesus as sovereign (cf. The Lord) and God as supreme (cf. "He's got the whole world in his hand"), the way of this sovereignty is non-coercive. Whereas our common conception of sovereignty entails the capacity to coerce, for Yoder, the grain of the cosmos conforms to non-coerciveness and the flourishing of autonomy. Thus, God is not directing the course of history by coercing it toward God's own ends. As revealed in Jesus, God has no handle on human history. Such an action on God's behalf would violate the autonomy of the created, the ordained order, and God's loving character.[44]

Yoder and the Church

Yoder's understanding of God lingers in the background of his broader project. His conception is evident in his condemnation of Christendom[45] and the fallen Powers and Principalities,[46] which stand in contrast to the character of God. In Christendom, Yoder sees Christianity functioning according to patterns established by the Powers that are contrary to the

[44] If God operated according to a normative sovereignty, violence would be carried out against the creation and God's own self. God, understood as agape love, sacrifices *God* to liberate the created. This is an ongoing kenotic process: while Jesus was crucified once, God is crucified daily in the life of every victim of injustice. The very idea or notion of God unfolds in its own (the conception) death at the hand of the oppressor, and resurrected (a new conception) in the life of those who glimpse the (non-coercive) power of God in the victim.

[45] According to Oliver O'Donovan, Christendom is "a historical idea…the idea of a professedly Christian secular political order, and the history of that idea in practice." Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 195.

[46] Hereafter referred to as the Powers.

character of God and the form of the New Testament church. Christendom is understood as the unification of Christianity with coercive power, placing the church in the category of a fallen Power rebellious to God. Yoder states, "the cross cannot be communicated by domination, by lordship, even the domination of personal magnetism…The ends and means have to fit. The content and form have to relate. The meaning of the cross is a renunciation of such power as God's way to be reconciled."[47] Yoder has a particular view of the New Testament church, and the medium and message of this body are one and the same. Said otherwise, the church's message is God revealed through the way the church operates. For Yoder, the faithful church rejects coercive-power. Such a characteristic is a defining boundary between that which is and is not God. We can infer the character of God through Yoder's development of the New Testament church and its contrast to the fallen Powers.

Yoder understands the church through the lens of the Believers' Church (Free Church model).[48] This model is developed in contrast to alternative models such as Christendom and Piety.[49] Each of these models are provisional and reflect a conceptual construct that allows Yoder to parse out the underlying principles of the faithful church from the fallen church. For example, Yoder understands the Christian church as being willingly co-opted by the state,[50]

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[47] Yoder, *Theology of Mission*, 110.

[48] As Craig A. Carter asserts, Yoder does not intend to depict the Believers' Church as the one church that believes properly. Carter states, "surely Roman Catholic churches do not mean to imply by using that name that no other Christians are part of the catholic faith. The Christian Reformed Church, by its name, does not mean to imply that it is the only truly reformed church. The point of the term "believers' church" is not to make a negative judgment about the status of members of other churches but to affirm the distinctives held in common by this family of Christians in a descriptive way." Carter, *Politics of the Cross*, 182-83.

Furthermore, Carter discusses the difficult with the term "Free Church" because it takes on a regional meaning. See Ibid.

[49] Carter, *Politics of the Cross,* 184-86.

[50] Certainly the use of the term 'state' does not reflect the governance structure of most of Western History. The notion of the state is a modern construct, and depicts a relationship to governance that differs from that reflected in any Empire up until the recent establishment of democracy. Yoder's aim is to simply assert that the church adopts the interests and methods of the authorities (the Powers and Principalities). Rather than existing as a distinct community within broader society, the church is folded into broader society, at the expense of its faithfulness to the message and way of Christ.

which most clearly began in the 4th century through opportunities provided by Constantine. Where once the church stood in contrast to Rome, it was now complicit with state interests, and straying from the interests of the community of believers as defined by the New Testament texts. In order to illustrate Yoder's position, the following pages will focus on Yoder's identification of the Believers' Church with the New Testament church, then develop his notion of the church as it relates to the Believers' Church model. In other words, according to Yoder, Christendom stands in contrast to the church's proper relationship to God's non-coercive nature.

The Believers' Church

Yoder understands the Believers' Church[51] to be the normative biblical model of church.[52] The New Testament church was free of any allegiance toward, or influence by, the state. Yoder states, "It had no link with the powers of society. It did not propagate itself by any supportive relationship to economic or political powers of the age."[53] Though situated within the broader societal context, by its very existence, the Believers' Church stood in contrast to that society. It was a community defined by voluntary membership, countercultural ethic, and a habit of reaching out to new populations.[54] For Yoder, the New Testament itself is normative, and within its texts is a call for strict distinctions between the state and church, as well as the church and world.[55] The community of believers is defined by its orientation to Christ. The New Testament states, "Jesus is Lord," and such a declaration relativizes all other "lords."[56] Accordingly, the community is defined not by the decree of Caesar (or any other worldly authority) but by the call

[51] Generally, Yoder used "Believers' Church" and "Free Church" interchangeably, and various times throughout his life. For the purposes of this work, following Carter, I will be utilizing the term Believers' Church, though I will not be modifying Yoder's own statements. In the event that "Free Church" is utilized within a quote, consider this to be equivalent to Believers' Church. See: Carter, *Politics of the Cross,* chapter seven: "Yoder's Believers' Church Ecclesiology."

[52] Yoder, *Theology of Mission*, 176.

[53] Ibid., 176.

[54] Ibid., 176.

[55] Ibid., 176.

[56] Ibid., 176.

of Christ.[57] Worldly authorities are bound to individual offices and societal norms such as ethnicity.[58] Whereas a society may affirm that certain ethnicities are to be divided and privilege one over the other, the church, in accordance to the Lordship of Christ, asserts that Jesus has "broken down the dividing wall" (Eph. 2:14).[59] This is illustrated in the traditional division of the Jew and the Gentile, which under Christ's Lordship is no longer upheld; both Jew and Gentile are one in the community of believers. Furthermore, we see in this particular example how the tradition of Judaism shifted in order to translate into the Hellenistic context (cf. Circumcision). The faithful community is not defined by allegiance to particular societal norms, temporal authorities, or traditional doctrines, it is defined by allegiance to the Lordship of Christ.

Yoder's conception of the church is understood as a revolutionary, political community. Yoder describes this community as, "the original revolution; the creation of a distinct community with its own deviant set of values and its [own] coherent way of incarnating them."[60] As Martens asserts, for Yoder the church is a "truly new society," a new people shaped by the call of God that began with Abraham.[61] This society results from the effort of God working through various Old Testament figures such as Moses, Gideon, and Samuel. These individuals gathered God's people around God's word and will, a task that Jesus continues in the New Testament.[62] The church that is evident in the New Testament is the "faithful Church [the] culmination of God's calling of a people," which Yoder first understands through the form of the Believers' Church

[57] Ibid., 176.
[58] The categories that result from the Powers and Principalities that divide humanity one from another.
[59] Ibid., 176.
[60] John Howard Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 28.
[61] Here Martens is narrating Yoder's understanding of the relationship of Israel to the church found in the New Testament. It is this sort of community that God is fostering through relationship with Israel and then the church. Martens correctly demonstrates that Yoder's approach is an attempt at avoiding charges of "supersessionism on one hand…and the affirmation of divinely sanctioned violence on the other…" Martens, *Heterodox Yoder,* 56.
[62] Ibid., 58.

and later interprets with a more overtly ethical understanding.[63] According to Martens, Yoder's understanding of the faithful church of the New Testament can be understood according to three broad qualities: (a) it is voluntary, (b) mixed in composition, and (c) requires a new way of living.[64] Yoder's conception of the church is organized according to Martens' three qualities which are further informed by Yoder's conception of the Believers' Church found in *Theology of Mission: A Believers Church Perspective.*[65]

Fundamental to Yoder's conception of the Believers' Church is the individual's voluntary membership to the community.[66] Each person makes a willing commitment to enter into the community and remain a part of it.[67] The individual, in response to the call of the community, enters into its midst of his or her own volition, as Carter states, "…unless the gospel is experienced as the call to join a new community, the social nature of the faith is obscured by individualism."[68] This is not a decision taken lightly. Rather, it is one made in response to the call of the Holy Spirit and informed by the reality of membership in the community.[69] Here the

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[63] Ibid., 64.

[64] Ibid., 59.

[65] Paul Martens points out that Yoder's understanding of the church progresses from his early work, wherein he understands the church through the Believers' Church construct, to his later work wherein he depicts the church as a political community defined by alternative ethical commitments. These two stages are not in conflict with one another, rather they identify a refinement of Yoder's perspective itself. His early work is more historical in nature and his later work is clearly more theological, it is clear that the Believers' Church understanding is present within his later perspective of the church as simply the New Testament Church. As Martens asserts, the Believers' Church model is the foundation for Yoder's later New Testament Church conception. While there is a refinement that takes place, I will not be differentiating between the two models as Yoder does not draw a clear line of distinction or conflict between the two stages of his own thought. See Martens, *Heterodox Yoder,* chapters two and three. Most clearly developed at Martens, *Heterodox Yoder,* 64-65.

[66] Yoder, *Theology of Mission,* 149.

[67] Carter points out that Oliver O'Donovan completely misunderstands Yoder in this regard, referring to his criticism of Yoder as a "caricature of Yoder's position." O'Donovan likens Yoder's emphasis on the voluntariness of church membership to that of sports clubs, friendly societies, and the like, communities that require no belief in order to enter. For O'Donovan, right belief as the means of entrance is at stake, but according to Carter, Yoder understands that one choosing to enter the church would only do so because they have come to believe the Gospel. Carter asserts that Yoder's emphasis on the choice to join the church is much more than a flippant decision, but one that is derived from glimpsing the reality of the kingdom, the new way of Christ, before entering it. As Carter states, "Faith comes from hearing." Carter, *Politics of the Cross,* 187. See Odonovan, *Desire of the Nations,* 223-24.

[68] Carter, *Politics of the Cross,* 187.

[69] Yoder, *Theology of Mission,* 150.

emphasis is placed upon a point of decision—one accepts membership into the community and takes responsibility for this action—a process that informs faithfulness.[70] The nature of this community ensures the dignity of the individual because they enter and remain a part of the church of their own, uncoerced will.[71] Implicit to this transition into the community is repentance[72] and a swearing of allegiance to the King (Jesus).[73] Membership in the community is independent of membership in other social constructs (be they political, familial, racial); one does not inherit membership, one embraces it by freewill.[74] The community is characterized by the free attendance of those who wish to do so, and their differing national, socio-economic, or racial, backgrounds are irrelevant.[75]

The Jew and Gentile, male and female, rich and poor are all considered to be equal members within the church. This mixed composition of the church is bound to have its conflicts and tensions, but for Yoder, it must be ecumenical, a task that is maintained and promoted not on the basis of agreement but on continued conversation.[76] For Yoder, agreement is not of utmost importance since it can lead to the coercion of the weak by the strong or division of the community. What is imperative is ongoing, relational engagement of the community. Carter

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[70] Ibid., 150.

[71] Carter, *Politics of the Cross*, 188.

[72] Repentance here is best understood as a change of understanding of perspective. It is transformation of worldview that allows one to live according to the way of Jesus and in contrast to the way of this world. See Martens, *Heterodox Yoder,* 59-60.

[73] Martens, *Heterodox Yoder*, 59.

[74] Yoder, *Theology of Mission,* 149.

[75] Ibid., 149.

[76] Carter, *Politics of the Cross,* 190. Additionally, Mark Thiessen Nation points out that Yoder, in the 1957 symposium at Oberlin College, argued that this conversation must be "productive" as demonstrated by a movement toward agreement. See Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 88-91.

Yet, it is clear that Yoder firmly asserts the reality of the diversity between church communities, and renounces any appeal to power that could coerce the views and practices of the other into accordance with one particular communities understanding. See Nation, *John Howard Yoder,* 95.

Regardless, Yoder defers to the local community of the church, each practicing a concrete and particular confession of Christ. See: Nation, *John Howard Yoder,* 105.

summarizes Yoder by saying, "Yoder basically thinks that we should never stop talking and, therefore, never divide."[77]

The church is missional, witnessing to the broader society and enacting a way of life that stands in contrast to its societal context.[78] The community is always reaching out to all who seek repentance and allegiance to Jesus. Because of the unique character of the Believers' Church, it remains distinct from the broader society and exists as a minority in society.[79] Yoder sums up these key aspects of the Believers' Church:

> the Anabaptist vision calls for a Believers' Church. With reference to the outside, this means that the church is by definition missionary... a church which invites [people] into fellowship. Men and women [are] not born into fellowship... [but] are invited to enter it by free adult decision in response to the proclamation of the love and suffering of God. On the inside the Believers' Church means that the adhesion of a member is [by] personal, responsible, conscious, mature, adult choice.[80]

The community of the church is a context where individuals are freed of the various expectations and limitations imposed upon them by their broader societal context.

This diverse community is unified by the new life that Jesus established.[81] The way of Jesus' life is integral as it provides both the content that defines the community and binds what otherwise would be fragmented.[82] The community of the church is a radical departure from the defining roles and categories of society. It is not hyperbole to describe the entrance into the

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[77] Carter, *Politics of the Cross,* 190.

[78] Yoder, *Theology of Mission,* 152-53.

[79] If everyone in the society is considered to be a Christian than there is no need for missionary activity within that society. Yoder here, and throughout his work, as will be illustrated, is condemning the union of Christianity and broader society. In his assertion, this union ensures that the church is subsumed into the society, losing its faithful essence.

[80] Ibid., 20-21.

[81] Martens, *The Heterodox Yoder,* 62.

[82] The individuals that make up this community have lived life regulated by various social norms. Those entering into the community are denying the authority of social roles (gender, race, status, etc.) and embracing the new way of Christ. In light of what has already been discussed, they are repenting of the way of the world and embracing the way of Jesus.

community of believers as a transition into a new reality, as one moves from the way of the world into the way of Christ. As Martens states:

> Jesus modeled and gave the community forgiveness (a new way to deal[83] with offenders), suffering (a new way to deal with violence), sharing (a new way to deal with money), gifts for every member (a new way to deal with problems of leadership), a new order (a new way to deal with corrupt society), and a radical new vision of what it means to be a human person (a new pattern of relationships, including those with the state and the 'enemy nation'). This is a new style of life in which the very existence of such a group is itself a 'deep social change.'[84]

That which defines the community of the church is fundamentally established by the way of Christ. It is not enough to say that the community of believers sees the world alternatively, for they live in the world alternatively.[85] This community is alive with a love for the other, including both those within the community and those outside of it. As Carter states, "the love of God is displayed in the reconciliation in one body of those who are, by nature, enemies or separate."[86]

Thus, there is no coercion of the unbeliever or the dissenter; the Believers' Church will suffer persecution but is never to persecute. Yoder states, "There are groups with this background that pressure dissenters, but at that point they no longer fit the model."[87] The structure of the church is non-coercive and defined by "what the Anabaptist called 'the rule of Christ.'"[88] In essence, this refers to how communal issues are dealt with through conversation. The members of the community hear each other's positions, and the consensus that concludes the

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[83] Martens points out that Yoder's use of the language "dealing with" is not intended to be read as a sign of resignation or resentment, rather it is speaking of the alternative way in which the community will live in relationship to the neighbour. That is to say, it is not possible for such a community to withdraw from society, this language is relational and requires engagement with the cultural context. Martens, *Heterodox Yoder,* 62-63.

[84] Martens is summarizing various Yoder sources here. See: Martens, *Heterodox Yoder,* 62.

[85] Yoder develops examples of practices that stand in contrast to the world and witness to the way of Christ in *Body Politics.* For a summary of this practices, see Carter, *Politics of the Cross,* 194-202.

[86] Carter, *Politics of the Cross,* 194. See pages 192-194 for a full development of how Carter understands Yoder's project to assert that justification is the basis of the church.

[87] Yoder, *Theology of Mission,* 150.

[88] Ibid., 151.Yoder also refers to this practice as the "Rule of Paul" and develops such in *Body Politics.*

conversation is regarded as the leading of the Spirit.[89] This is not a process dominated by the leadership of the community; its participants are those who feel the need to share a word. Implicit to this practice is the place of patience which Chris K. Huebner describes as, "…not idle or passive, but rather an active pursuit of conflict in the sense of being willing to engage in self-criticism." Conversation is not a process that happens on its own, it must be pursued and fostered diligently in order to resist the "violent tendency to silence anyone by virtue of the way the debate is constructed in advance of actual engagement."[90] The organization of the church, including particular leadership roles and structural practices, are always in service of the community. The structure of the church lends itself to the "Rule of Christ" and not the rule of a particular office or doctrine. This is not to assert that doctrine has no place. Rather, as illustrated by Yoder's own approach, doctrine is never to be understood as absolute but always faithfully contextualized by the community and the office of the theologian.[91] This approach stands against rigid systemization, which ultimately coerces decisions and issues into a previously established form.

The Believers' Church has a particular relationship to the state and its coercive tendencies. First, the church does not allow for its own coercion by the state as the inner workings of the church are not propped up or defined by outside power.[92] Thus, the church is not reliant upon the broader society for its shape, function or existence. It is contradictory to the church's message for it to be wedded to the state's interest in empire. As Yoder states, "it is fundamentally problematic that the Christian message should be linked with power—business power, political

[89] The consensus of the community is understood to be the leading of the Spirit. This is not in conflict with a more popular conception of the Spirit (that of the Spirit speaking a particular message), but it does ensure that one inflectional voice is not determining the will of the Spirit for the group. Yoder, *Body Politics,* 67-69.

[90] Yoder, *Theology of Mission,* 110.

[91] Ibid., 153-54.

[92] Ibid., 151.

power or the structure of colonialism."[93] The issue at stake in this quote is not power itself, but the kind of power that is wielded. Is the power coercing the other or serving them? Is the intent to bend the other to one's own standard or work toward their liberation? The way of the church is not to assert a particular form of life upon another individual or culture. Rather, a more appropriate posture is for the Christian community to live in the midst of a culture as servants (to be Jesus in that culture). This posture is taken in order to learn how to properly share the message of the Gospel (both in word and action) within a new context.[94] According to Yoder, the function of the church must bear witness to Jesus Christ, "the church is not simply a vehicle for a message, the events of the church are the message, they are the mission. The church existing and carrying out its practices is a witness to the world."[95]

Christendom

Much of Yoder's early historical work focuses on the events of the Reformation, focusing particularly on the development of Anabapatism.[96] However, the events of this time period and the individual works that Yoder dedicates toward this topic are complex and necessitate more space than can be allotted in this current project. What can be stated is that what began as an internal critique of the church (cf. Luther's ninety-five theses) resulted in the emergence of an alternative body of believers. The reason for these events vary, from Luther's original concerns, to the concerns of those emboldened by his actions, and the historians who look back upon the events, the general narrative is vast. Largely, the concern was with the misused and overreaching

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[93] Ibid., 152.
[94] Ibid., chapter 18.
[95] Ibid., 89.
[96] For example, John Howard Yoder, C Arnold Snyder and David Carl Stassen, *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland: An Historical and Theological Analysis of the Dialogues Between Anabaptists and Reformers* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2004). This work contains Yoder's doctoral dissertation in theology at the University of Basel, which was published in 1962 as *Täufertum und Reformation in der Schweiz I: Die Gespräche zwischen Täufern und Reformatoren 1523–1538,* and *Täufertum und Reformation in Gespräche,* a work published in 1968.

authority of the Catholic Church. Yoder does not identify a singular issue within the church. Rather, he identifies that the various problems apparent at this time are natural consequences of a root condition, "the organizational relationships between the government and the hierarchy, the development of the papacy, and the development of the sacramental system are all the logical outworkings of this fatal alliance."[97] The "fatal alliance" Yoder speaks of here refers to the church's turn from the New Testament form to that of Roman authority. This relationship with Rome became most clear in the fourth century and was made possible by the favour Constantine the Great showed Christianity.[98] The relationship to Rome tightened over time and culminated when Christianity was established as the state religion.[99] Christianity was no longer a religion that reached out (cf. missions). It was now the religion of the state Rome, which embodied Christian civilization.[100] For Yoder, this is the initial root of Christendom. This does not change with the reformation, rather than identifying with the Roman Empire, Christianity is identified with the emerging of regional nation states. Each of these states enforced Christianity as their state religion, and it became the normative way of life for them.[101] Rather than a way of life that is freely chosen, Christianity became a regional assumption.

This alliance of church and state generally ensures that the state is not critiqued by the church. The church identifies itself with the existing power structure, and used such an

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[97] John Howard Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity: The 1966 South American Lectures*, ed. Paul Martens, Mark Thiessen Nation, Matthew Porter and Myles Werntz (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), 11.

[98] According to Yoder, a foundation had already been laid in the second century that allowed for the relationship between Rome and Christianity that emerges in the fourth century. Yoder identifies a trending away from the Jewishness of Christianity as it enters into Hellenistic culture, and a slow movement toward empire allegiance in times between persecutions. See Carter, *Politics of the Cross,* 167.

[99] While historically some have interpreted the arrival of such power and influence as a divinely orchestrated blessing, Nugent summarizes Yoder sentiment: "[it is a] detour away from God's purposes." Nugent states, "The Yoderian narration…documents a consistent and deliberate divinely-orchestrated movement of God's people out of and away from the power postures of the nations around them…That God's people were given the opportunity to [embrace such power] by the Roman Empire does not mean that the opportunity has God's blessing." Nugent, *Politics of Yahweh*, 175-178.

[100] Yoder, *Theology of Mission,* 177.

[101] Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity,* 11.

identification to preserve its own security.[102] With the distinctions between the church and the society disintegrating, the church lost its ability to call into question the normative patterns of society, as it was now complicit with these patterns. While the church gained a certain societal authority and could assert influence in ways that had previously been impossible, societal change as a result of the church did not occur. As Yoder states, "even though placing the church and power together meant the church could call for a certain kind of movement or change by the bearers of that culture's power (for instance, those who carried out the expansion of the Christian Roman Empire or those who later managed colonialism), it did not make for change at the heart of Christendom."[103] A church standing in contrast to society provides the potential for change within that society. A critique is levelled against the normative claims through the existing, alternative practices of the believers. For example, as depicted in the Believers' Church above, membership is not secured through coercion, there is no room for the conquest of an individual or a culture. A church that renounces conquest and functions in a way that denies the power of coercion stands as a critique to that power. As can be observed however, when the church allied itself with Rome—a process played out over time—the use of coercion was no longer deemed to be a method that undermined the meaning of the church. Instead, coercion became a method and means by which Christian civilizations justified effectiveness.[104]

According to Yoder, the Reformation was an "intensification of Constantinianism," and did nothing to deal with the major issues at the core of Christendom.[105] The Magisterial

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[102] Yoder, *Theology of Mission,* 177.

[103] Ibid., 178.

[104] Furthermore, as Carter asserts, a more subtle shift occurred within the Christian image of lordship. The lordship that was demonstrated by Jesus was defined by "the way of service" but that which was modelled by the Emperor and National leaders was "power politics." The elite and the powerful were accepted as those who charted the course of history, and he shape of their power was defined not be prestige and coercive power. Carter, *Politics of the Cross,* 157-58.

[105] Ibid., 169.

Reformation linked the relationship of Christianity to particular geographic locations and ethnicities, and "the Magisterial Reformation hardened the dimension of ethnicity by making the basic ethnic unit the nation or province instead of Christian Europe."[106] The result was the alliance of local Christianity with local authorities. Discrete nations emerged and the notion of a universal church was dislocated. Self-determining, political and religious nations were detached from a classical notion of the Catholic Church. The interests of Christian society were not determined by a concept of the "whole church" but, instead, according to the desire of the nation. With the interests of the church geographically divided, war amongst Christian nations ensued.[107] Yoder asserts that the relationship of church and state (local authorities, be they the prince or city council) was strengthened as the government became an "organ of church reformation."[108] This action legitimized the government and its role within the church, which further distanced the church from a contrasting position and the possibility of witness.[109] Soon, the church ceased to be a distinct group defined by an alternative way of life and began to exist as yet another aspect of society.[110] With no room for criticism, the distinction between church and state was reduced to administrative task and function. Christianity began to service the state by fostering unity amongst the citizens and supporting their *inner* spiritual lives.[111]

Before moving from this discussion of Christendom to Yoder's notion of the Powers and Principalities, I will first clarify the connection between Constantinianism and Christendom.[112]

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[106] Yoder, *Theology of Mission,* 179.
[107] Ibid., 179.
[108] Ibid., 179.
[109] Ibid., 179.
[110] Carter, *Politics of the Cross,* 159.
[111] The Church is no longer independent of the state, and its purpose operates toward the good of the nation by helping to shape good citizens. Carter sums this development up as, "…the Church loses its ethical character." Ibid., 160.
[112] It should not be assumed that Yoder is equating Christendom and Constantinianism. Carter asserts that Yoder theoretically agreed that the leader of a nation could be converted to Christianity and governing in a faithfully

In particular, it is crucial to understand how this shift within Christianity is so problematic according to Yoder. Scott Thomas Prather argues that when Yoder speaks of the "Constantinian turn" or the "Constantinian temptation," he is not speaking of the efforts of the individual Constantine; rather, Constantine is employed to speak to the ideological shift that occurs within Christianity.[113] Yoder is employing this term to speak of a historical age in the same way that the terms Arianism or Pelagianism are utilized.[114] For Yoder, Constantine is the "'symbol of a change in styles of moral discourse,'[115] which has had and has 'far reaching changes in Christian social ethics.'"[116] Consequently, the church aligned with secular power structures, and it was these power-structures that functioned according to ideologies and practices that ran against the grain of the gospel.[117] It is the effect of this union that is most integral to Yoder's analysis and overall project. This union, and the resulting notion of a Christian society,[118] bestowed upon the ruler of the society transcendent authority.[119] The power-bearer of the particular society came to be identified with God's own will. "God's governance of history had become empirically evident

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Christian means, obedient to Christ. Yoder does concede that this turn of events is highly unlikely and impossible in a current context. See Carter, *Politics of the Cross,* 156.

[113] As Nation demonstrates, Yoder points to several "historical manifestations of Constantinianism," Nation, *John Howard Yoder,* 67 n 122.

[114] Carter, *The Politics of the Cross,* 155.

[115] From: John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 9 n 21. Quoted in: Scott Thomas Prather, *Christ, Power and Mammon: Karl Barth and John Howard Yoder in Dialogue* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013), 179.

[116] From: John Howard Yoder, "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," in *The Priestly Kingdom : Social Ethics As Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 135. Quoted in Prather, *Christ, Power and Mammon*, 179.

[117] Ibid., 179.

[118] This notion of a Christian Society brought with it a sense of the arrival of the Kingdom of God. It was as if what had been promised, what is still to come, was present within this particular Christian society. The church began to be identified with the arrival of the Kingdom and not simply as a foretaste of what had yet to arrive. No longer did the society faithfully wait on Jesus for the arrival of the Kingdom because the Kingdom was already present and administered by the authorities of the day. Carter, *Politics of the Cross*, 159.

[119] To be clear, Yoder does not deny the right of the Government to demand obedience, rather he is critical of the Government overstepping its authority and supplanting the authority of Jesus. As Carter states, "…the state must be rejected when it demands ' worship, us' (as when early Christians were commanded to burn incense as an act of Roman emperor worship) or "kill for us" (as when the modern nation state drafts Christians into the army and commands them to kill Christians from another nation-state." Ibid., 157.

in the person of the Christian ruler of the world."[120] Constantine is particularly emblematic of such circumstances as he is the first Roman Emperor to be a member of the church. It was thought that, surely, through him Christ "must be working" because the "Christian" empire is expanding.[121] Prather describes this development as "the assumption that God's own rule has become immanent to a particular and identifiable person or office."[122] An integral nuance to this understanding is that individual "Christian-ness" was not the rational for such expansions and successes. No, it was the "providential blessedness" that was bound to the particular office or institution.[123] Said otherwise, it was the office of power that identified with God, and the particular individual's orientation to God and the church was not important.

A general conflict between Yoder's view of the Believers' Church and the church following the Constantinian turn should now be clear. The church in league with the state functioned according to an order running counter to its fundamental essence as revealed by the New Testament. The implications of such a dissonance can be further articulated when Yoder states:

> The frame of reference of ethical deliberation is that of the person with power; the king deciding whether to wage an unjust war, the merchant deciding whether to set a fair price, the head of household deciding whether to beat his wife or child, the wealthy person deciding whether to lend at interest. The action is to be evaluated not by whether it keeps the rules, or by whether it resonates with the grace of God, or by whether it exemplifies virtue, or whether it coheres with the salvation story, but by whether, when carried out, when generalized [i.e. imposed] through the ruler's power, it will produce the best possible outcomes.[124]

Thus, the issue at stake within Christendom was how society was governed. The issue was not the establishment of a Christian society, but the use of coercion to maintain the society and the

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[120] Yoder, *Constantinian Sources,* 136; Quoted in Prather, *Christ, Power, and Mammon,*180.
[121] Nation, *John Howard Yoder,* 66.
[122] Prather, *Christ, Power and Mammon,*181.
[123] Ibid., 181.
[124] Yoder, *Ethics and Eschatology,* 121; Quoted in Prather, *Christ, Power and Mammon,* 181.

inability of one to voluntarily choose such a society. Such practices run counter to the New Testament Church. Here we have reached the heart of Yoder's project: the Lordship of Christ was no longer the normative standard by which human life was to be determined. The community of believers was no longer the discerning entity which, according to the scriptures and guided by the Holy Spirit, established what a faithful life entailed. The church now functioned according to a means that ran counter to the New Testament. It took its lead from temporal authority and understood humanity to be capable of a righteous determination of history, independent of the Lordship of Christ the posture of the church shifted. Ultimately, the undergirding principles no longer identified with the non-coercive nature of the Believers' Church but, rather, with the pursuit of coercive-power.

Yoder and the Powers and Principalities

Yoder's broader project now begins to come into focus as, within the history of the church, Yoder identifies a dissonance between the church and God. The church's message shifts away from what it was in the New Testament (the Believer's Church). From this point on, Christendom, and the desire to direct societal events implicit to such, depicts the majority of church history. Recalling that Yoder identifies the message of the church with the way the church functions, the concern for Yoder is one of form and content. The church is to function according to the non-coercive pattern of God as revealed in Jesus and stand in contrast to the normative patterns of society. Conversely, the church of Christendom functions through coercion and operates by affirming the normative patterns of society. Thus, Yoder's project is a return to the non-coercive way of the Believers' Church model. Implicit is the church's renunciation of the coercive tendencies of Christendom as it reasserts a firm distinction between the church and

the state.[125] This section discusses how Yoder's notion of the Powers and Principalities represent the governing and fallen forces within society that stand in contrast to God. Consequently, Jesus is depicted as the one who reasserts God's ordained ordering of creation, unmasks the Powers and Principalities, and denies their claim of determining the "normative" shape of society.

Due to Christianity's historical relationship to the state, issues of distinction between the "church" and the "world" are demonstrated through a distinction between "church" and "state." Central to Yoder's understanding of the roles of the church and state is the Pauline concept of the "Principalities and Powers."[126] The Powers, while predominantly spoken of as fallen in the New Testament, were a part of God's good creation and intended as a divine gift (cf. esp. Col 1:15-20).[127] These Powers in modern translation would be roughly equivalent to the term "structures," a term "by which psychological and sociological analysts refer to the dimensions of cohesiveness and purposefulness which hold together human affairs beyond the strictly personal level, especially in such realms as that of the state or certain areas of culture."[128] Thus, while the Powers are abstract in concept, they can be identified with the ordering structures and institutions of human life present to history since creation.[129] God formed creation in an ordered manner and

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[125] This is not simply the retrieval of an original way of church, nor is this an affirmation of something new and novel. Rather, as is parallel to his theological approach, this is the "channeling" of the New Testament church in to the contemporary context. We see this dynamic played out in his discussion of "primitivism": "When used in a more positive light, primitivism is a particular understanding of reformation or renewal that does not assume we can get back to the original pattern but rather says that we can move forward to see anew the original pattern's relevance. That is, the image of the Garden of Eden or of the New Testament church is a criterion for critique within present history that seeks to move us forward and not to deny change." Yoder, *Theology of Mission*, 178.

[126] Harink states that there is much exegetical debate over Paul's precise meaning of the Powers, but that Yoder's perspective has been widely supported on two accounts: 1) "…the powers have some relationship to and influence on the structured character of the cosmos and human society, even where the identification of the powers with those structures is denied." 2) "…the context of Paul's language of the powers is consistently *apocalyptic,* in the sense that it always points to the cosmic — which must certainly include the sociopolitical—scope of the conquest of Christ on the cross." Douglas Karel Harink, *Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2003), 118.

[127] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 143.

[128] John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 8.

[129] According to Pitts, it is impossible to understand Yoder's conception of the Powers without affirming their status as created. For Yoder, the Powers are part of the fallen, good creation, of God. They have intended purpose

declared it to be good, the Powers are no exception to this declaration. The Powers were created as the normalizing systems for creation and all visible reality.[130] Quoting a broad list from Hendrik Berkhof,[131] Yoder provides examples of some of the order the Powers provide such as: human traditions, national interest, the state, and social struggle.[132] Berkhof's list is considerably more extensive, and Yoder divides it into four categories:

a. Religious structures (especially the religious undergirding of stable ancient and primitive societies)
b. Intellectual structures (-ologies and -isms)
c. Moral structures (codes and customs)
d. Political structures (the tyrant, the market, the school, the courts, race, and nation)[133]

Though these structures are ordained by God and have developed over time, what is observed today is not reflective of the good ordering God intended. Creation is fallen to Sin, and included in this rebellion are the Powers.[134] These structures that formerly "served" creation have become the "master and guardians" of it.[135] The state of creation is counter to God's intention, and the normative reality God established has been redefined. The resulting enslaved creation is known in the New Testament, by Paul, as *aion houtos*, "this age" (or *kosmos* in the Johannine writings).[136] Yoder summarizes the message of Paul regarding the Powers in this way:

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within creation, and must be redeemed. The Powers creaturely status, as well as role, ensure that they cannot be understood apart from Jesus. Jesus is the shape to which they ought to accord. Jamie Pitts, *Principalities and Powers: Revising John Howard Yoder's Sociological Theology* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 3-6.

[130] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 141-43.

[131] Yoder's perspective of the Powers is greatly influenced by, and largely worked out through the Hendrik Berkhof's *Christ and the Powers*, a work that Yoder translated. In the *Politics of Jesus* (amongst other places) Yoder provides extensive block quotes from Berkhof's work, citing that he is unable to phrase the content in a way that would add to.

[132] Ibid., 142.

[133] Ibid., 142-143.

[134] As Harink states, "…the powers are…'fallen,' that is, in rebellion against God's purposes. Rather than serving only to share in and mediate creation's goodness, they now also enslave humanity and history. Every form of religious, cultural, social, and political structure is encountered as both an ordering and an oppressive reality." Harink, *Paul Among the Postliberals,* 115-16.

[135] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 141.

[136] Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, 9.

a. All these structures can be conceived of in their general essence as parts of a good creation.
b. But these structures fail to serve as they should. They do not enable humanity to live a genuinely free, loving, life.
c. We are lost in the world, in its structures, and in the current of its development. But nonetheless it is in this world that we have been preserved, that we have been able to be who we are and thereby to await the redeeming work of God. Our lostness and our survival are inseparable, both dependent upon the Powers.[137]

According to Berkhof,[138] the Powers are manifest in human tradition and normative views. Such Powers provide shape and substance to the ruling structures of the day that, in turn, allow space for structure and stability to become a reality.[139] Berkhof unpacks this argument through Colossians 2:8,14ff., and 20ff:[140]

> See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ…He disarmed the *rulers and authorities* and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it…If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, 'Do not handle, Do not taste. Do not touch'? All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings.

In Berkhof's translation, "rulers and authorities" are understood as "Principalities and Powers."[141] With each of these translations in mind, the text depicts a spiritual and material reality manifest simultaneously. For example, when Yoder speaks of the state, he is not only discussing the material apparatus but also the underlying presumptions that give the state normative meaning and legitimacy. Furthermore, Berkhof chooses not to translate the somewhat ambiguous wording of "the elemental spirit of the universe," and rather uses the original Greek

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[137] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 143.
[138] I engage a great deal with Berkhof because his work, *Christ and the Powers*, translated by Yoder, was very formative of Yoder's perspective on the Powers. Yoder himself quotes extensively from this text, See: Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* chapter 8.
[139] Hendrik Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, trans. John Howard Yoder (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1977), 20.
[140] Ibid., 20.
[141] Ibid., 20.

word *stoicheia*. Berkhof recognizes *stoicheia* as "world powers"[142] and argues that *stoicheia* is always used by Paul in connection with "principalities and powers." These two terms bring together a total understanding of the material and spiritual Powers humanity is subject to.[143] Paul shines a light on what threatened to rule over Christians in Collasae and entice them away from Christ.[144] He broadens the critique from the physical structure to the underpinning spiritual structures evidenced by specific "human commands and teachings." Here, Berkhof's translation lends itself to a compelling statement: rather than translating 2:22 as "human commands and teachings," he renders it "human precepts and doctrines."[145] This concept can be further understood as the normative way of life prescribed and accepted by the majority as absolute. Stated otherwise, these are the underpinning principles that structure and inform "reality." These Powers are the presuppositions that evade criticism and concern because they are treated as "given."

A further example from the New Testament texts is helpful to bring these notions into less abstraction. In Galatians, Paul illuminates the depth of human bondage when he further expounds upon the *stoicheia* (world powers). Berkhof singles out Galatians 4:1-11:

> My point is this: heirs, as long as they are minors, are not better than slaves, though they are the owners of all the property, but they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits [*stoicheia*] of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods. Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits [*stoicheia*]? How can you want

[142] Ibid., 20.
[143] Ibid., 20-21.
[144] Ibid., 20-21.
[145] Ibid., 21.

> to be enslaved to them again? You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted.[146]

Paul confronts the Galatians for returning to a way of life rendered void through Christ. This relapse can be assumed to be in regards to the division between Jew and Gentile, a normative way of life within Jewish tradition. In chapter two, Paul reflects on his face-to-face condemnation of Peter who withdrew out of fear from table fellowship with the Gentiles when the "circumcision faction" arrived.[147] With Christ's intervention, the division of Jew and Gentile is rendered invalid. All are subsumed into the body of Christ through faith and not obedience to the Jewish law.[148] Paul dis-empowers the normative categories that divide the followers of Christ from each other when he writes: "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."[149] Against this backdrop Paul speaks of the *stoicheia* by referring to the normative views that ran counter to Christ and enslaved the Galatians. In this light, Berkhof explains the Powers as such: "They encompass, carry, and guide life. The demands of the present, fear of the future, state and society, life and death, tradition and morality—they are all our 'guardians and trustees' the forces which hold together the world and the life of men and preserve them from chaos."[150] These Powers are the "structure of earthly existence" that underpin the way we see the world.[151]

Yoder argues that humanity is most human through its subordination to the Powers. He states, "for if [the Powers] did not exist, there would be no history nor society nor humanity."[152] The Powers are best understood as the invisible and visible ordering structures giving meaning to

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[146] Ibid., 21. Note: I have opted to quote the NRSV version rather than Berhkohof's translation, though I have include the reference to *stoicheia.*

[147] Galatians 2: 11-14

[148] Galatians 2:15-4

[149] Galatians 3: 28

[150] Ibid., 22.

[151] Ibid., 22.

[152] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 144.

humanity. They can be identified within the various systems and ideologies that exist "behind the scenes," and also through the physical manifestations—the institutions— of these unseen forces. Due to the understanding that the Powers are part of the original ordering of society, they are not regarded as innately negative and oppressive. Instead, they exist in a fallen state and function through oppressive means. As Jamie Pitts summarizes, "in other words, physical and social structures are the divinely intended tools by which Christ sustains creation—they are instruments of providence."[153] To be clear, the way human beings understand and organize themselves is askew and in rebellion to God. The structures created to give shape and meaning to human history have turned against God. The normative patterns and normative logic used by humanity to "guide" human history, are fallen.[154] Thus, the Powers are not innately perverse, they are in need of redemption in order to provide their intended purpose and bear witness to God. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Yoder depicts the defeat of these Powers. In the Believers' Church, Yoder sees the Powers properly ordered under the lordship of Christ.

Jesus and the Powers

The Powers are part of God's good creation yet, like the rest of creation, they stand in rebellion to God.[155] Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Yoder identifies the severity of the Powers' rebellion and God's defeat of them. The Powers are present within the narrative of the Gospels through the Jewish authorities and Roman Imperial power. The collusion of these Powers against God is illustrated through the exertion of their authority upon Jesus Christ. While these Powers in their original orientation to God functioned to bring order to creation, the fallen Powers are disordered and enslave humanity by exercising sovereignty through coercive means. The invisible side of creation, the behind the scenes ordering that gives

[153] Pitts, *Principalities and Powers*, 3.
[154] Here we should have in mind the state, and in particular Christianity's collusion with the state.
[155] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 144.

shape to creation, is diametrically opposed to God.[156] The results, as Pitts states, are "that human relations with each other, the rest of creation, and God are now deeply disordered."[157] In their fallen state, these Powers function autonomous of Christ. They deny their intended orientation to Christ and function toward their own ends, resulting in a "pride that wields violence…"[158] The Powers pursue ends contrary to the ordained order of God. These ends are characterized by coercing the other to abide by the Powers rationale (a coercive logic). Their claim to legitimacy is defended by violence that ensures control and quells threat. As Jamie Pitts states, "because the powers are their own ends, they must do violence to any challenger. The violence of the powers against Jesus unveils their true grain."[159] The fallen Powers function in plain sight, according to an accepted order and are unmasked and revealed as false by Christ.

Yoder understands humanity to be in its proper orientation to the Powers when in subordination to them. In *The Politics of Jesus,* Yoder outlines a practical application of what it means to be in subordination to these Powers: "subordination is significantly different from obedience. The conscientious objector who refuses to do what the government demands but still remains under the sovereignty of that government and accepts the penalties which it imposes, or the Christian who refuses to worship Caesar but still permits Caesar to put him or her to death, is being subordinate even though not obeying."[160] Jesus lives out his form of subordination in response to the Powers of "this world." Christ did not compromise the moral integrity of God and refused obedience to the Powers. This way of life drove him to a brutal death on the cross. As Nekeisha Alexis-Baker states, "[the cross] is the result of Jesus' voluntary decision to reject

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[156] As Berkhof states, "the invisible side of the cosmos functions in diametric opposition to its divinely fixed purpose." Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, 63.
[157] Pitts, *Principalities and Powers*, 63.
[158] Ibid., 65.
[159] Ibid., 67.
[160] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 209.

violence, hate, hostility, and non-involvement in confronting the powers."[161] This form of subordination, without moral compromise, brings to light the lies of the Powers who instil fear through the threat of force and violence.[162] In contrast, despite being tempted to utilize force and violence by embracing the way of the Zealot, Christ instilled hope through his subordination. The life of Jesus Christ pointed in a new direction, revolutionary subordination[163] to the point of death, which disarmed the Powers of their lies and threats.

In Jesus Christ, history witnessed a human-being who was not a slave to the Powers of "this age." As previously stated, these Powers are in need of redemption because they are an element of God's good creation and integral to humanity's proper creaturely reality. For God to reassert the proper order to the Powers, their sovereignty had to be broken.[164] Jesus, through his enactment of "genuinely free and human existence," willingly subordinated himself to the Powers, though he refused to "support them in their self-glorification."[165] Stated otherwise, Jesus enacted a way of life that challenged the normative patterns of life that had been established and upheld by the Jewish and Roman authorities, even though he did not carry out disobedience

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[161] Nekeisha Alexis-Baker, "Freedom of the Cross: John Howard Yoder and Womanist Theologies in Conversation," in *Power and Practices : Engaging the Work of John Howard Yoder* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 2009), 87.

[162] It is important to note, as Alexis-Baker does, that this subordination is not simply the context for further subjugation. Jesus confronts and stands against the coercive dominance of the Powers, though he does so in an alternative means to those employed by the Powers. Jesus does not coerce the coercer, and he does not simply acquiesce to their claims and practices. Accordingly, it is not for the oppressed to accept oppression, but to confront it according to a means that does not perpetuate oppression. As Alexis-Baker states, "…Yoder's emphasis on the voluntary nature of the cross enables Christians to thoroughly denounce any and all abuses that are imposed on Black women and other underprivileged groups. When the church understands that Jesus' cross is the response of a hostile world to his freely chosen path of nonviolence, identification with the poor, justice and reconciliation, it is better able to expose, critique, and confront suffering that'd does not fit Jesus' example—whether its racial discrimination, domestic violence, sexual abuse or emotional neglect." Ibid., 88.

[163] Yoder describes his notion of Revolutionary Subordination as, "willing servanthood in the place of domination [which] enables the person in a subordinate position in society to accept and live within that status without resentment at the same time that it calls upon the person in the superordinate position to forsake or renounce all domineering use of that status." Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 186.

Alexis-Baker provides two critiques of Yoder's position, the first being a problem of terms, and the second is a concern that it limits the challenging of domineering systems of power. Alexis-Baker, *Freedom of the Cross,* 92-94.

[164] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 144.

[165] Ibid., 144.

according to normative practices. Harink states, "Jesus' obedience to God even in the face of death is at the same time his freedom vis-á-vis the religious, social, and political structures which crucify him."[166] Likewise, according to Yoder, by not embracing the legitimate patterns of society (cf. coercion) while also disobeying the authorities, Jesus stood in contrast to the Powers and allowed their own response to his actions to be their own indictment. As Yoder states,

> Teaching and incorporating a greater righteousness than that of the Pharisees, and a vision of an order of social human relations more universal than the Pax Romana, he permitted the Jews to profane a holy day (refuting thereby their own moral pretensions) and permitted the Romans to deny their vaunted respect for law as they proceeded illegally against him. This they did in order to avoid the threat to their dominion represented by the very fact that he existed in their midst so morally independent of their pretensions. He did not fear even death.[167]

The message of his life stood as a threat to the Powers and their "…claims to ultimacy and the demands for ultimate allegiance that social and political structures make for themselves."[168] The structures of society, in their physical and metaphysical incarnations, laid claim to the absolute truth and logic of reality, punishing the disobedient through violence and ultimately death. A life running counter to the precepts of the Powers, a life that did not refrain in the face of their authority, refusing conformity to their requirements, stood as an example of a new potential; a new way of life. The life and death of Jesus "…unmasked [the Powers] as the deceptions of false gods."[169]

The threat Jesus represented was not only evident in his disobedience to the Powers, but also in his unwillingness to operate according to the established logic. Jesus led a revolution, though the notion of revolution stands in contrast to his mode. Violence was not Jesus' agenda, and violence is typically synonymous with revolution. Non-coercion is a hallmark of the

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[166] Harink, *Paul Among the Postliberals*, 116.
[167] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 145.
[168] Harink, *Paul Among the Postliberals*, 116.
[169] Ibid., 116.

Believers' Church, a characteristic derived from the life of Jesus. At his disposal was the opportunity to foster a violent upheaval, and he would not have been the first Messiah to carry out such an attempt. Indeed, the Jewish tradition expected that the line of David would overthrow the oppressor.[170] Had Jesus carried out a violent uprising, the cross would not have been a critique of the Powers, and his death would have been legitimate, for he would have been an insurrectionist. Furthermore, such action would have validated the coercive logic of the sword and established the sword as the means by which God's kingdom is ushered in. According to the logic of the Powers, coercion is how humanity achieves peace and order. It is the "effective" way to further one's own ends. Christ shows a denial of such "effectiveness" by refusing the normative parameters of human affairs, and "[renouncing a] claim to govern history."[171] In his denial of coercion and willing obedience even unto death, Jesus enacts a way of life that stands as a critique to the Powers' normative practices and claims. Whereas coercion is the means to achieve one's desires by seizing history by its handles and directing it, Jesus enacts obedience to God denoted by a posture of servanthood unto death.[172] For Yoder, the choice that Jesus made by rejecting the crown and accepting the cross exemplifies the depths of his obedience to divine love. Jesus was willing to sacrifice his life and apparent "effectiveness."[173]

Through Christ's life, the Powers are "disarmed" and "made a public example" as Christ "triumphed over them" (Col. 2:13-15). Yoder again draws on the work of Berkhof to unpack the importance of this dismantling of the Powers:

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[170] Through a reading of Luke, Yoder demonstrates a political reading of Jesus ministry. He demonstrates that throughout his ministry Jesus is tempted by the possibility of a traditional kingship, secured by the sword, and in faithfulness to the will of the people. Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* chapter two.

[171] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 234.

[172] The metaphor "handles" is used following Yoder's use in the final chapter of *Politics of Jesus,* "The War of the Lamb."

[173] Ibid., 234.

> He 'made a public example of them.' It is precisely in the crucifixion that the true nature of the Powers has come to light. Previously they were accepted as the most basic and ultimate realities, as the gods of the world. Never had it been perceived, nor could it have been perceived, that this belief was founded on deception. Now that the true God appears on earth in Christ, it becomes apparent that the Powers are inimical to Him, acting not as His instruments but as his adversaries.[174]

The 'public example' that Berkhof refers to here, he later speaks of as an 'unmasking' and unveiling of meaning that was hidden. The Powers proclaimed ultimate authority, and their actions were perceived to be normative and natural. Jesus challenged this claim to ultimate authority through the cross and resurrection. For Yoder, the life of Christ made it clear that the way of the Powers is not normative in any ordained or cosmic sense. Rather, it runs counter to the normative cosmic order as determined by God. The fear of violence unto death, symbolized by the cross, was defeated. Christ's subordination rendered the threat of the cross—the threat of violence—powerless.

As illustrated, Yoder suggests a radical reordering of what is deemed to be normative. God formed a creation ordered and governed by structures that ensured the livelihood of creation. The incursion of sin into the good and ordered creation ensured that even the structures intended to order creation were in rebellion to God and enslaved reality. Subsequently, the structures deemed normative were in fact a distorted incarnation of what was intended. Christ defeated, disarmed, and unmasked, the Powers through the Cross and Resurrection and freed creation. Through Christ, humanity glimpses the "grain of the universe," which accords to the character of God. The structures that humanity understands as absolute, real, and normal, are lies brought into the light through Christ's obedience.

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[174] Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers,* 30; Quoted in Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 146.

Conclusion

The Church is the site of the Powers' reordering in the here and now; a process yet to be finalized. Jesus demonstrated an alternative way of living that contrasted the dominant, fallen patterns of this age. This alternative life is lived out in the church and bears witness to the world as it incarnates the way of God. As Harink states, "the Church is that place, in the midst of creation and the nations, in which God's redemption of social and political structures begins."[175] The Powers must be redeemed. They are a part of God's good creation and like all of creation, must be reordered into a proper orientation to God. Harink continues, "it is in the church that those various structures or powers—be they religious, cultural, social, economic, political—that make human community possible at all, are reordered to their proper function under the rule of Christ. In turn, the church as redeemed and reordered humanity, presents to the wider world and its structures a picture of the world's own redemptive promise, should it submit to the lordship of Christ."[176] The Church bears witness to the life of Christ, living in a way characterized by servanthood, forgiveness and subordination. The church stands in contrast to the world by denying the allure of coercion and the control that can result. Christendom and Constantinianism are characterized by the desire and ability to dictate certain patterns and rationale, and it is precisely these characteristics that the life of Jesus stands in contrast to.

For Yoder, the cross is not simply an event occurring in Christian tradition to reconcile humanity to God, an aspect of theological doctrine. The cross is the defining event of human history. In his own words, "the cross is not a detour or a hurdle on the way to the kingdom, nor is it even the way to the kingdom; it is the kingdom come"[177] The love of Christ unto death is the way of the community of believers, the grain of the universe, and that which the Powers stand in

[175] Harink, *Paul Among the Postliberals,* 116.
[176] Ibid., 117.
[177] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 51.

contrast to. God is ushering in the return of this love. For Yoder, the believer is to sacrifice worldly power and deny coercive-power and the "effectiveness" it guarantees because this is the way of God. Yoder states, it is "…the concrete social meaning of the cross in its relation to enmity and power. Servanthood replaces dominion, forgiveness absorbs hostility. Thus—and only thus—are we bound by New Testament thought to 'be like Jesus.'"[178] This is the Kingdom of God, it can be manifest now, in part, within the church. This mode of being forsakes dominion for servanthood and sees forgiveness absorb hostility.[179] It is not enacted because God arbitrarily decreed such qualities, it is enacted because it manifests the character of God and marks a return to the original created order that reflected God's self.

The notion of power operating within Yoder's project is understood according to a logic that is not of "this world." Yoder can be read to assert that coercion is not how God operates.[180] According to Jesus, who reveals God, the cross is the means to bring about the kingdom, for it is "…the cross and not the sword, suffering and not brute power [that] determines the meaning of history."[181] Jesus acted in obedience to God by enacting a way of life that defined God. As such, God is not a coercive force but a suffering force. When God enters into history through Jesus Christ, God enters as a human being. As Yoder points out, God is subject to the constraints of a being. "If God chooses to work in history, it means God is taking the risk of incarnation, of being in history. God is choosing to identify with the uncertainty and weakness of existence within history. God is not afraid of history and risks losing God's own self within it, as the other gods

[178] Ibid., 131.
[179] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 134.
[180] This claim is of course conditional upon the reading of God through the New Testament, particularly through Jesus, as has been demonstrated thus far. As will be illustrated in later in this work, some aspects of Yoder's project, particularly his reading of the Old Testament, present challenges to this understanding of God through Jesus.
[181] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 232.

do not."[182] Yoder's project depicts God as operating through a non-coercive power; God does not *command* and determine human events, God *calls* and waits on humanity.

The final chapter of this work will further develop Yoder's understanding of the power that characterizes God. It will be made clear that Yoder has a tendency to articulate his understanding of power according to the same paradigm as the Powers. While he asserts that Jesus is operating according to alternative means, his use of Ghandi and Martin Luther King demonstrate that these means are directed towards the achievement of particular ends and exerting control over human history. Conversely, I argue that the power of God is love, and such is the way God is ushered into existence within history. God, who is love, stands in contrast to the coercive tendencies of this world. It is through love that God is liberating humanity from its slavery to the coercive logic of the Powers, and the need to direct and control human history. Such an argument will be grounded within Yoder's project and articulated through particular aspects of John D. Caputo's work.

[182] John Howard Yoder, *Theology of Mission,* 131.

Chapter Two: John D. Caputo and the Deconstruction of God

John D. Caputo is a contemporary, continental philosopher who has engaged, at great lengths, with the works of Jacques Derrida, Martin Heidegger, and Soren Kierkegaard. From *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics*[183] to Caputo's most recent work *Truth: Philosophy in Transit*,[184] an underpinning theme of Caputo's is the religious life. Situated within a Catholic, Augustinian tradition and having himself lived within a monastic order, Caputo's engagement with the religious life is primarily with Christianity. While he may rightly pass for a Christian theologian (especially in his later works *Weakness of God* and *Insistence of God*), Caputo's mode of inquiry is outside of the confines of orthodoxy. Caputo can be read as operating with an irreverence. However, this tone is not directed toward the tradition of Christianity itself but to those in authority who wish to close it off and contain it. His perspective searches for what is happening *within* the Christian tradition, or what occurs in the midst of what is happening, but is not altogether apparent. This inquiry takes the form of deconstruction[185] and is influenced by the work of Derrida. This posture affords him the freedom to ask questions that go beyond orthodox inquiry and pursue a response beyond the constraints of the institutional Church. Caputo is rightly read as representing a threat to confessional Christianity, but this threat is not motivated by malice, derision, or the pursuit of relativity. Instead, the motivation is fidelity to what is happening in Christianity, the event stirring within it. Caputo's threat is a faithful threat, and one that hopes to push Christianity through the contingent nature of the institution, into a fidelity to the event.

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[183] John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982).

[184] John D. Caputo, *Truth* (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2013).

[185] Deconstruction isn't something one does to a text, it is something happening within a text. As such, texts deconstruct themselves. Caputo's understanding of deconstruction will be developed in the following section.

This study of Caputo is being used toward "loosening" our reading of Yoder. Caputo remarks, "Derrida loosened my tongue, that is to say, he gave me the nerve to write like Kierkegaard."[186] Perhaps Caputo cannot loosen Yoder's tongue, but he can loosen our tight grasp on a traditional understanding of God—violent, domineering, coercively powerful—which we are prone to read into the gaps within Yoder's project. As previously discussed, Yoder does not clearly develop an understanding of God. While he utilizes the name "God" he does not delve into details,[187] so we are left with little overt understanding of Yoder's own perspective and must default to common interpretation.[188] Caputo's alternative view of God, will not be applied to Yoder's project, but will allow us to engage in it creatively. It is not the argument of this paper that Caputo's perspective is equivalent to Yoder's unspoken perspective, but rather to nudge our reading of Yoder through a deconstructive reading. Caputo gives us the nerve to engage the event restless within Yoder's project, to read Yoder in a way that is open to an interpretation treading outside of the boundaries of a common understanding of God and power.

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[186] Here Caputo is reflecting on how he appreciated the voice of Kierkegaard, but did not have "the nerve" to duplicate the style of his "secret-hero." In his own words, "…I would read Kierkegaard secretly at night, after the lights went out, with a flashlight (that's a joke). Kierkegaard was my secret hero–passionate, Protestant and provocatively funny – while during the day and with all due decorum I studied Thomas Aquinas, who was of course angelically calm, cool and Catholic. When I turned to Heidegger, and to his links with medieval mysticism, what I found was more solemn humorlessness, which lay behind his misunderstanding of the comic genius of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Heidegger was incapable of getting a joke. Then I discovered Derrida, a philosopher who said the most deadly serious things with humor, with a joke or a pun, for which he had a serious theory…Derrida loosened my tongue, that is to say, he gave me the nerve to write like Kierkegaard. That means to write as clearly as I could in American English while all the while allowing what I said to be inwardly disturbed by an auto-deconstructing humor which allows my text to put itself in question and not to take itself too seriously. Carl Raschke, "Loosening Philosophy's Tongue: A Conversation with Jack Caputo", *Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory [www.jcrt.org]* 3, no. 2 (2002), §8.

[187] As Stoltzfus states, "In *Preface to Theology*…the early Yoder avoids developing an explicit sense of what his concept of God looks like…The result of such an evasion of theology is that it leaves us open, by implication, to the replication of pre-critical images of a domineering, violent God that the artifacts of popular culture, such as *The Ten Commandments*, loan to is by default." Stoltzfus, *Nonviolent Jesus, Violent God?*, 31.

[188] As Pitts states, "When Yoder writes God, what or who does he mean? How precisely is this God related to Jesus Christ? Because he did not explore the assumptions behind some of his basic theological terms, he muddles the process of moral discernment— do we follow the non-violent Jesus, or the warrior God?" Following a summary of criticisms and concerns for Yoder's lack of critical methodology, Pitts states, "Yoder's avoidance of philosophical inquiry haunts him, as he uncritically embraces an outdated dualism that distorts his reading of scripture." Pitts, *Principalities and Powers,* 109-11.

This chapter will probe Caputo's work to illustrate his understanding of "God." To carry out such a task, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* and[189] *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps*,[190] are the primary texts of reference. This investigation of Caputo's perspective of God begins with his methodology and with a focus upon his understanding and use of the Derridean practice of deconstruction. Understanding the schema of this practice as Caputo articulates it provides a key to understanding his development of a postmodern conception of God and the religious life. This concept is carried out not in contrast to the tradition of Christianity itself but in fidelity to the impossible nature that characterizes it.

Essential to grasping Caputo's argument is to understand what he means by *the event.* By leaning upon Caputo's understanding of deconstruction, section two of this work will explicate his notion of the event. Next, section three will develop Caputo's assertion that "God" is the name of an event and discuss the implications of this concept.[191] Lastly, section four will show Caputo's understanding of Jesus as it relates to the preceding sections and discuss how forgiveness is important to understanding the life and death of Jesus. The concept (event) of forgiveness will also be used to further solidify the notion of God as event. While Caputo operates beyond the familiar territory of confessional Christianity, his perspective nevertheless, and thereby, provides an important, fruitful and critical engagement with the tradition.

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[189] John D Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion, ed. Merold Westphal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

[190] John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps*, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion, ed. Merold Westphal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

[191] For the sake of clarity, when speaking specifically of the name God given to an event, I will state: the event, "God." As will become clear, for Caputo, "God" is a name given to a particular experience of life, a desire. It is a name that is traditionally bound and contextual; the event that it attempts to signify can go by many names, and indeed does throughout the context of humanity.

Methodology

Caputo's project is defined by skepticism concerning the established norms, the horizons that structure our understanding of the world. Throughout his work, Caputo is critical of authorities, the *powers that be*.[192] These authorities are those who determine and defend the particularities of society.[193] Caputo is critical of universals (what is fundamentally true for all) and foundational truths that individuals claim to have access to and know absolutely. We see this early on in Caputo's project, demonstrated in his work, *Radical Hermeneutics.*[194] Here he articulates human life, as life is understood in relationship to the free play of the flux, as a response to chaos, to change, and not a retrieval of a lost order.[195] Said otherwise, life *is*, it *happens*, and the *is* or the *happens* has no relationship to a teleological ordered system (be it in fidelity to, in pursuit of, in rebellion to), because such an ordered system does not exist.[196] Life is not and cannot be settled; it is movement, activity, dynamism — alive!— life is defined by the act of forward motion, of becoming.[197] Human beings tend toward recollection and the recovery of absolutes obscured by time, akin to Platonic *eidos.* Caputo, however, follows Kierkegaard (amongst others) by asserting that there is nothing absolute to recall, and nothing in another time, place or plane to recover. Said another way, there is no perfect order to return to because there is no perfect order.

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[192] This concept can be understood similarly as the Pauline Powers and Principalities found in Yoder's project. Each speak of those authorities, institutional and otherwise, that condition and qualify our experience of life.

[193] The largely unquestioned— normative— structures that govern society.

[194] John D Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

[195] We also see this clearly developed in his borrowing of the term, "chaosmos" from James Joyce. "The world is neither a neat, divinely run cosmos nor pure chaos but what James Joyce called a prophetically 'chasms,' a dance of probabilities sometimes producing improbable results." Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps*, IX. Also see, John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?: The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church*, The Church and Postmodern Culture, ed. James K. A. Smith (Baker Academic, 2007), 52, 123, 137.

[196] Whatever order is perceived in our existence is after the fact, following the event of it, thus it only has the shape of *existence* according to hindsight. This is the folding of an event *into* meaning, for someone like Heidegger, life is simply happening, the event is simply *eventing.* See Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics,* 73-82.

[197] See Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics,* chapter one: "Repetition and the Genesis of Hermeneutics"

Human beings find themselves in the flux—a state of change—contextually situated and striving to make sense of the world. To achieve order we set up models and metaphors which help to bring organization to the chaos. These horizons come to define what is true and false, real and fake, possible and impossible, and various other binaries that distinguish the orthodox, in both philosophy and theology, from the heretical. Human beings find themselves in a certain time, a certain place and embedded in a certain tradition. From within these situations, we try to make sense of the world. In an interview with Mark Dooley, Caputo states, "We are always radically contextualized, in a hermeneutical situation. I speak a language that is not mine, within a tradition that I inherit, that is deeply embedded with meanings and institutions and structures and beliefs and practices that I've inherited. I find myself here, I didn't put myself here."[198] The world as we know it is founded upon and composed of inherited presuppositions. These presuppositions represent fundamental orientations and beliefs that go unquestioned because they are the basis by which we seek orientation and belief. That is to say, they are unrecognized because they are what grounds us within the world and provides the foundation for "meaning." They are the terms by which we pose our questions about the world. Our culture, society and tradition offer a lens to see the world and give the structural pieces necessary to construct it.[199] According to Caputo, the way we see the world may appear to be absolute or universal, but rather, it is relative to our specific place and time. Thus, not only is it impossible to found life upon certainties (because they do not exist), but the means by which we wrestle with this uncertainty is itself always contingent. We are not moving from uncertainty to certainty; rather, uncertainty *is* the condition of life.

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[198] Ian Leask, "From Radical Hermeneutics to the Weakness of God: John D. Caputo in Dialogue with Mark Dooley", *Philosophy Today* 51, no. 2 (2007), 220.

[199] Construction itself is not the problem, it is necessary, it is how any meaning is made to begin with. The problem is when we settle for the construction, believing it to be absolute—idolizing it—and expecting the rest of the world to adhere to such an understanding.

Caputo is both motivating (promoting) and following from (faithful to) a position of openness/hospitality toward the other. He displays a posture or disposition of hospitality that remains ever open to the possibility of the other. Here, the other is not simply that which is not I but is, more accurately, that which resists reduction to any universal explanation. The other is that which does not accord to my horizon, defies my understanding of the world and presents the possibility of the world known otherwise. The openness of hospitality ensures one cannot harden around any single claim and universalize it. Thus, one does not desire after certainties that could be wielded like a hammer to coerce the other into affirming one's own horizon. Rather, one is open to the coming of that which destabilizes one's own perspective. Of course, such a coming is never finally possible. The other is always a rupturing event that cannot be expected or anticipated, and yet, the hope is to live open to the otherness. As such, Caputo denies the certainty that characterizes tradition, not because of the lack of *truth* present within these traditions, but because the traditions harden and universalize this truth. Rather than understanding truth as generating truthfulness (truth as contextualized and translated) throughout the generations to come, traditions particularize the truth and fix it in certain historical happenings. For Caputo, these happenings are only expressions of an event alive throughout history that calls the contextual and particular beyond themselves.

Christianity is no exception and is understood by Caputo as having a long history of coercing the other into adherence to a particular orthodox system. For Caputo, Christianity is closed to the possibility of God as other and has settled on a particular, absolute and totalizing perspective: the Sovereign God.[200] This God is stronger (omnipotent), smarter (omniscient) and exudes all things good (morally perfect); this is a being capable of anything. This God is

[200] Ibid., 217-218.

understood as intrinsically interrelated with the plane of human existence, the God of metaphysics who is radically alternative to humanity, yet strongly akin to it at the same time. This God is understood as the Being of beings, the perfect being, at once like humanity but totally other in its perfection.[201] According to Caputo, Christianity, like all truth or traditions, is constructed and, consequently, historically contingent. Rather than having unique access to a foundational and universal truth that is moored by the absolute, Christianity is a response to the unconditional call of the other, namely "God." While traditions are a construction of dominant orthodoxy, it is possible to deconstruct Christianity by interpreting a response to the call of the other that is faithful to that call, yet not obedient to the particulars of the tradition.

Caputo proceeds with suspicion toward those who would close off the event and try to freeze God into a knowable horizon by denying the possibility of the impossible God.[202] It is toward these tendencies that he directs his criticism. While Caputo's tone can read as unnecessarily biting and caustic, he is attempting to jar the reader into glimpsing the situation as it is. Caputo attempts to illustrate that the status quo of orthodoxy is maintained by the 'powers that be' because they have a vested interest in upholding certain institutional realities, a sentiment sprinkled throughout both *Weakness of God* and *Insistence of God*. This can be observed in the frequently occurring gibes that characterize his literary voice, such as: "not to mention of His Reverence, who depends upon God to earn a living."[203] This is not an attack upon the church, it is more fundamentally an attack upon how the church and all traditions operate.

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[201] This for Caputo is the result of mistaking an event to be an entity. See: Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 48.

[202] The word impossible employed here is done so with intent to evoke the understanding of Derrida. For Derrida, *the Impossible* is a technical term that does not describe simply a logical contradiction, but rather speaks to that which is beyond the scope of expectation. It is speaking of the realm of the unforeseeable, not that which we can conceptualize yet accept as improbable, but that which we are unable to foresee at all. Used in this sentence, I am speaking of the God that is beyond our conception, always "existing" within our blind spots, evading conformity to our horizons. For a discussion of *the Impossible*, see: John D. Caputo, *On Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 7-17.

[203] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 24.

They establish their power and preeminence by closing off the possibility of the other and the accompanying hospitality leading to firm lines that are drawn to exclude, deny, and oppress the other. As Caputo states,

> The research and relentless interrogation of scripture, doctrine, and tradition undertaken by such theologians expose the contingency and historical constitution of beliefs and practices that the hierarchy wants the faithful to consider eternal and handed down by God. Such a God, as it turns out, clearly privileges men and excludes women from ordination and just as clearly prefers medieval monarchical power to the community of the Holy Spirit…So let there be no mistake about the 'theologians' who are my special target. They are the ones, as Kierkegaard said, who are making a profitable living off the Crucifixion—while trying keep the dissident theologians out of work.[204]

For Caputo, this form of life and way of relating to God ends in idolatry by mistaking the conditional as unconditional. This is most clearly articulated in *Weakness of God* and *Insistence of God*, which seek to loosen the tight reign of orthodoxy and foster an openness to the event. Emphasis upon the establishment of firm horizons leads to the formation of idols at the expense of experiencing the divine, for Caputo "the religious form of life has to be kept open to the divine."[205]

Deconstruction

Deconstruction, like the postmodern context it is situated within, is a complicated notion to formalize. Although it is set within a hermeneutical context,[206] it cannot be designated as a methodology because it is without rigid structure or form. According to Derrida at the Villanova Roundtable, "Deconstruction is not a method or some tool that you apply to something from the outside. Deconstruction is something which happens and which happens inside."[207] That is to

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[204] Caputo, *Insistence of God,* 25.

[205] Leask, *Caputo in Dialogue,* 224.

[206] Deconstruction is linked with the theory and practice of interpreting texts, and as such it has a hermeneutical nature. That being said, deconstruction does not have a rigid methodology, which runs against the nature of a formal hermeneutical process.

[207] John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 9.

say, deconstruction is not something that one does, and it is not a discipline which one utilizes to plumb a text for its hidden message. Rather, deconstruction is present in the text itself.[208] As such, deconstruction is not systematic or formulaic, and it cannot be distilled down into steps which one follows to "deconstruct" a text. The "hermeneutics" of deconstruction differ vastly from an alternative hermeneutic, such as historical criticism or form criticism. Compared to these more methodological hermeneutics, deconstruction can only be described and illustrated, it cannot be contained in a formula. In order to develop a provisional understanding of deconstruction, this section of the paper discusses key themes in Derridean thought concluding with Derrida's reading of Justice and the Law as a paradigmatic illustration of his method.

Derrida describes deconstruction as follows, "It is an analysis which tries to find out how [the author's] thinking works or does not work, to find the tensions, the contradictions, the heterogeneity with their own corpus."[209] Given this, to what end does Caputo's deconstruction work? Caputo asserts that deconstruction operates to broaden or expand the meaning of the text being analyzed.[210] He states:

> …everything in deconstruction is turned toward opening, exposure, expansion, and complexification, toward releasing unheard-or, undreamt-of possibilities *to come*…The very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things—texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need—do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy.[211]

[208] More accurately, deconstruction is present within the text in the form of a 'potential' that can be realized by a reader with a particular eye for it.

[209] Ibid., 9.

[210] As will become apparent, deconstruction is not bound to the written or verbal text, but can be found within any constructed "thing."

[211] Ibid., 31.

Caputo's claims situate deconstruction as a child of postmodernism: a "happening"[212] which destabilizes the prevailing understanding of the "thing"[213] and provides access to potential interpretations latent within the text that have gone under-recognized or even suppressed.

Derrida's thoughts on writing are essential to his overall project. Derrida is operating against the horizon of what he terms the "logocentric" tradition of Western metaphysics.[214] According to Derrida, from Plato to Saussure, this tradition has privileged the spoken word over the written, determining the verbal to be the means by which immediate access to "full presence" is achieved.[215] In essence, "full presence" refers to the notion that no barriers exist between what is meant by a word and how it is received in one's mind or as A.K.M Adam states, "the presumption that there are things to which our words refer, to which our thoughts correspond, with which we interact unproblematically."[216] Furthermore, and integrally, speech was understood as directly symbolizing a thought. That is to say, what one was intending to say unmediated. Speech provides a direct representation of the thought with no need for interpretation because the speaker is present to guarantee the accuracy of the intended message. It was thought that the speaker's presence ensured clarity would be brought to any misunderstanding. According to this Suassurean thought, the spoken word is a signifier (word) of a signified (idea). As such, speech is given priority over the written word because the written word is understood to signify a signifier. The written word is representing that which represents the thing itself. Accordingly, the written word is "twice removed from reality" and as such, is the

[212] To echo the previous sentiment of Derrida.
[213] In regards to the 'object' of interpretation, I will only speak in terms of a 'text' from this point forward.
[214] James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 120.
[215] Ibid., 120.
[216] A.K.M Adam, *What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 28.

"site of a degenerative secondarity."[217] Writing holds a "secondary" and "instrumental" position. This privileging of speech over writing, as Derrida states, sees writing relegated to, "Translator of a full speech that was fully present (present to itself, to its signified, to the other, the very condition of the theme of presence in general), technics in the service of language, spokesman, interpreter or an originary speech itself shielded from interpretation."[218]

It is important to note that according to Derrida's notion of "logocentrism," writing requires interpretation, which ensures that the text can take on several meanings, though the spoken word avoids this undesirable phenomenon. Interpretation is integral to the reader's engagement with a written text as the intended content of the author is mediated through the written word. The word represents the author's spoken word operating independent of the speaker's guaranteeing presence. The speaker, no longer present to the text at hand, cannot ensure the intended message will be received, the text now is only understood by the reader according to the context in which it is received. Through his engagement with Rousseau, Derrida located the roots of the Western tradition's understanding of the written word as a corruption: "[A] corruption of the purity of speech, it is *exterior* to language, accidental, on the outside making its way in."[219] Derrida provides a clear picture of how this logocentrist position understands interpretation: it is a necessary result of the unnatural (that is, not original to language) development of the written word and has a corrosive effect upon apprehending the intended message of the author. In sum, this Western tradition of logocentrism, as understood by Derrida, affirmed that speech did not rely upon interpretation, but that written words did, to the

[217] Smith, *Fall of Interpretation,* 121.
[218] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 8.
[219] Smith, *Fall of Interpretation*, 122.

detriment of the intended message. As shall become clear, Derrida understood the logocentric view to be a myth, thus establishing the foundation for deconstruction.

Christopher Norris states, "Derrida sees a whole metaphysics at work behind the privilege granted to speech in Saussure's methodology."[220] In essence, voice becomes identifiable with the truth; "Voice becomes a metaphor of truth and authenticity, a source of self-present 'living' speech as opposed to the secondary lifeless emanations of writing."[221] For Derrida, if one were to follow Saussure's methodology to its natural conclusions, one would see the bias that constitutes its metaphysics (privileging speech over writing).[222] When one says "tree," one means to signify the actual thing, the "tree" that is a thing somewhere in the world. This word "tree" is not innate to the notion of a tree itself; rather, the idea of "tree" is labeled as such and understood in relation to other things that are not a "tree" (i.e. The word tree stands for a tree, not a train or a taxi). Thus, language is a relationship of signifiers: meaning is not innate to a thing but is generated by the interaction of signifiers. The very idea (the signified) one intends to represent with a word (signifier) depends upon its relationship to other ideas: a thing in the world is understood in relationship to one's understanding of other things. Meaning itself is achieved through a system, which is exactly what language demonstrates.

Clearly, Derrida objects to the metaphysical commitment that privileging speech entails.[223] That is, he objects to the affirmation that somehow the spoken word is tied directly to the meaning of the 'thing' itself. As Adam explains, "That there is finally some metaphysical thread connecting words and their referents, signifiers and signifieds, and that if we can only find the right approach (or method, or foundation, or origin, or first principle), we can discern the *logos*

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[220] Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 28.
[221] Ibid., 28.
[222] Ibid., 30.
[223] Ibid., 30.

of the cosmos."[224] In this conception there is no barrier between the spoken word and the thing in the world signified; a notion that has no means of legitimation. Derrida points out that the way one understands the thing itself is already understood through language. The noun, "tree", becomes a signifier for all the "things" grouped together as "tree." In reality, this word stands for a rich diversity of similar looking or functioning "things" abstracted into the word "tree." Adam explains this abstract notion when he writes, "Anything about which we say, 'yes, that is a thing' exists by virtue of our distinguishing it form other things…Identity (the arch foundation of all our philosophical and theological foundations) is constructed when people decide that certain distinctions make a difference, and others do not. There is thus no natural, or innate, or simple 'sameness,' or 'is' -ness."[225]

Derrida deconstructs the notion of a "pure speech"[226] by establishing that all language is writing and as such all language is interpreted. Derrida does not reverse the hierarchy— exalting writing over speech— he establishes that previous to the spoken word was "writing."[227] As Derrida states, "Deconstructing this tradition will therefore not consist of reversing it, or making writing innocent. Rather of showing why the violence of writing does not *befall* an innocent language. There is an ordinary violence of writing because language is first, in a sense I shall gradually reveal, writing. 'Usurpation' has always already begun."[228] Writing is not exterior to pure speech. Instead, it is always interior, precedes the spoken word, and provides the field by which the spoken word could be meaningful, an action Derrida calls "arche-writing."[229] As such,

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[224] Adam, *Postmodern Biblical Criticism*, 28.
[225] Ibid., 29.
[226] Speech as a pure conduit to meaning.
[227] Here writing is not the particulars of the written word, but the notion that meaning is generated by the differential relationship of words. Thus, Derrida is not saying that written word preceded the spoken, but rather that the spoken and the written both accord to the same form for generating meanings. This written form is the free play of signifiers that generates meaning.
[228] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 37.
[229] Smith, *Fall of Interpretation,* 122.

all of language is "mediated" and "representative." James K. A. Smith states, "There has never been anything but writing."[230] The implication is clear, no "pure" form of communication exists, and there are no means to translate the totality of an idea directly from one individual (speaker) to another (hearer). A text's meaning (image, symbol, sound, etc.) is always interpreted and never absolute. Meaning is never circumscribable nor univocal.

The word (image, symbol, sound, etc) is always attempting to signify what it can never finally capture because the meaning of the signified is always in process, contextually bound, always still to come. This is true for both the individual who attempts to articulate the idea and the individual who attempts to understand what is being communicated. Meaning is translated through a system of signifiers and received through a system of signifiers, and it is unlikely that any system is ever identical. Thus, the process of signification itself is always interpretive, and as such always contextual, resulting in the potential for new or different meanings. Referring to what is being articulated as a "thing" or an "idea" is already relegating it to the constraints of logocentrism and contains the notion according to a system of language and preconceived notions that encapsulate it in a nutshell.[231] Deconstruction, Derrida's project, aimed to smash all nutshells and eliminate totalizing ideas so that the *truth* might be achieved; a pursuit never final nor complete.

Derrida uses a notion of the *l'invention de l'autre* to conceptualize such an understanding of truth. Caputo explains this notion as, "the incoming of the other, the promise of an event to

[230] Here Smith is summarizing a quote from Derrida (which he provides in his text) from, *Of Grammatology, 159:* "there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the 'real' supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a tare and from an invocation of the supplement, etc."

[231] Echoing the playful demeanour that Caputo employs throughout his work *Deconstruction in a Nutshell.*

come, the event of the promise of something coming."[232] Derrida's rendering of law and justice is a helpful illustration:

> The Law [can] be deconstructed. There is a history of legal systems, of rights, or laws, of positive laws, and this history is a history of the transformation of laws…This is a history, and a history, as such, can be deconstructed…So, the law as such can be deconstructed and has to be deconstructed…But justice is not the law. Justice is what gives us the impulse, the drive, or the movement to improve the law, that is, to deconstruct the law. Without a call for justice we would not have any interest in deconstructing the law. That is why I said that the condition of possibility of deconstruction is a call for justice.[233]

The law is temporal, constructed over time. Law attempts to capture justice but is unable to contain it. The law is physical and determined, but not absolute; it always embodies justice but can never fully achieve it. As Caputo illustrates, "Before Rosa Parks decided to visit the undeconstructability of justice upon Montgomery, Alabama, for example, it was legal, legitimate, and authorized to force African-Americans to the back of the bus."[234] Rosa Parks refused to abide by this law and by sitting at the front of the bus, expressed justice.[235] As such, justice — the event, the other— compelled Rosa Parks to break the law. The law fell short of justice, the surplus meaning of justice illuminated and redefined the law accordingly. While this is a conceptual or ethical illustration, the principle holds true for examining the text. We understand the concept of "law" by reflecting on the tangible laws in place. These laws have meaning because they exist within a system that gives them meaning, but the laws themselves are contextual. This, for Derrida, is a deconstructable notion. The essence of justice, which the word "law" is trying to capture, causes the understanding of the word "law" to be reconfigured when confronted by the "event" of justice (the incoming of the other). The law reaches for

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[232] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell,* 42.

[233] Ibid., 42. Taking off from Derrida's article: Jacques Derrida, "Force De Loi: Le "Fondement Mystique De L'autorité"", *Galilée* (1994).

[234] Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?,* 130.

[235] Rosa Parks did not enact justice in any final sense, through her action she expressed it. This event is an expression of justice that stood on contrast to the normative understanding, the action did not usher in a new rule of justice, but a new understanding of justice.

justice, but it cannot circumscribe it, and as the context of these laws change, they shift and bend under the oncoming "pressure" of justice. For Derrida, this illustration not only provides a way to glimpse the other through the word's attempt to capture meaning, it also defines deconstruction itself: "Deconstruction is justice."[236]

Deconstruction and the Other/the Event

The other is at the heart of deconstruction, ensuring that deconstruction happens. As stated above, Caputo develops the same notion under the term "the event." Caputo, influenced by Derrida, develops this notion throughout his work, but in particular it is evident in: *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion, The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event,* and *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps.* In *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event,* Caputo extensively explains the event, which is helpful to understand deconstruction. To review, a name (the word signifying) never contains the event (which is signified). As Caputo states, "There is always something uncontainable and unconditional about an event, whereas names, like "God," belong to condition and coded strings of signifiers."[237] The name of God is an ideal example, as it attempts to capture a notion that stretches humankind's capacity to comprehend it. While the name "God" stands for the event referred to as God, it is not the event and doesn't effectively represent the event. Rather, it *provisionally* represents the event. The event (that being signified by the signifier "God") will challenge this name, "God," and reconfigure the way it is understood. Perhaps in time, it will also demand new or additional signifiers.[238] "Events are what names "mean" in the sense of what they are getting at, what they

[236] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell,* 131.
[237] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 2.
[238] For the sake of clarity, according to Caputo, God is not a thing that is to be understood, yet always escapes understanding. God is the name that is given to what compels us to name and understand "God." It is not so much naming a thing as it is naming an experience. The naming of God is a response to a call, to the event, it is not the call

are trying to actualize, the source of their restlessness, the endless ends toward which names reach out, hurling themselves forward toward something, I know not what, toward God knows what."[239] The event is always being revealed, the meaning of the name is always to come. Meaning in an absolute sense never fully arrives. The event always draws the name forward. Deconstruction is the recognition that the response is never equivalent to the call.

The text itself, as Derrida asserts, is not linked to any absolute meaning. The meaning is always interpreted: from the onset (inception of a thought), to expression (communicating to another), to reception by the other. The text has no final and complete meaning. The meaning the text intends to convey is always in response to a call as it tries to capture what is not present, and as such, is always already interpreted. What the text attempts to "mean" is the event that commands an ongoing examination and re-examination. Thus, a text is always open to an alternative meaning. Derrida says, "A deconstructive reading, always settles into the distance between what the author consciously intends or means to say (*vouloir-dire),* that is, what she "commands" in her text, and what she does not command, what is going in the text, as it were, behind her back and so 'surprises,' overtakes, the author herself.[240]" While an absolute meaning may be ascribed to a text by a specific interpretative tradition, according to Derrida the meaning is anything but fixed. Thus, deconstruction loosens the traditional meaning of the text, first showing how the dominant paradigm has opted to respond to the text — the event stirring within the text— in one particular way, then illustrating that there are other possible interpretations.[241] It is a close reading to glimpse the tension or contradiction within the text that may open it up to

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itself (the response does not contain the call). According to the logic thus far, the meaning attached to such a name is always contextual, and thus always translated into the contexts to come.

[239] Ibid., 3.

[240] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell,* 78.

[241] This is not to say that any interpretation is accurate, it is important that the text is engaged with rigorously. Derrida is not speaking of the projection of an interpretation onto a text, as if to co-opt it, rather he is speaking of the possibility that one could be co-opted by an alternative reading of the text that is generated by the text itself.

an alternative reading, one oppressed by dominant paradigms. It is also a double reading; one identifies the dominant understanding and a second deconstructs this understanding.[242] In summation, "…For Derrida, a deconstructive reading is exceedingly close, fine-grained, meticulous, scholarly, serious, and above all, 'responsible,' both in the sense of being able to give an account of itself in scholarly terms and in the sense of 'responding' to something in the text that tends to drop out of view."[243]

The Name of God

In Caputo's project, deconstruction is how God is discussed. As previously stated, deconstruction is the play of names and events: names expressing events and events defying (complete) containment. Caputo is particularly interested in the name God, specifically the event harboured in this name. According to Caputo, theology is the "hermeneutics of the event, its task being to release what is happening in that name [God], to set it free, to give it its own head, and thereby to head off the forces that would prevent this event."[244] Thus, theology is "the logos of the name of God," meaning that it is the "hermeneutics of the event that is astir in that name, for the event is what that name 'means.'"[245] Caputo does not ascribe to any "meaning" in the formal or precise sense, and he is not speaking of "semantic content." Rather, he is speaking of "what a name is getting at; what it promises; what it calls up, sighs and longs for, stirs with, or tries to recall…"[246] The name is an attempt to ascribe meaning to an event, understand and explain it, and locate it within a normative horizon of meaning. Names are rigid, firm, and clear. They lend themselves to impassioned defenses and the defeat of the other for the sake of the "truth." But of

[242] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell,* 77.
[243] Ibid., 77.
[244] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 2.
[245] Ibid., 6.
[246] Ibid., 6.

course, for Caputo, this "truth" is always provisional, partial, and never as clear as the *powers that be* would have one believe. As Caputo states,

> For the name belongs to the world and can gather worldly prestige, which is why it can be taken to be a strong force; whereas the event belongs to the order that disturbs the world with the possibilities of being otherwise, and this by means of its weak but unconditional force. A name can accumulate an army and institutional power, semantic prestige and cultural authority. But the event is not a natural thing, not a part of a natural language; it is more like a ghost, the specter of a possibility. The event belongs to the order of the poor "perhaps," the *peut-etre*, suggesting and soliciting another possibility in a still-silent voice that is all but drowned out by the mundane force of the name.[247]

The event is elusive, it is not an object that can be understood, grasped, or controlled. When Caputo speaks of his interest in the name of God, he speaks of an effort to liberate the event closed off within this name. In particular, influenced by his experience in the Catholic Church tradition, he seeks to loosen the hold that the Christian Church has on the event named "God" and expose this name to the restlessness trembling within it.

While this reads as if Caputo is attacking the tradition— seeking to destroy it— this is not his intent at all. In fact, Caputo asserts the "good news" of deconstruction when he says, "Being 'deconstructible,' is not as bad as it sounds; in fact, my contention is that it is good news, and it arises in the wake of the good news. For something is deconstructible only if it has been constructed to begin with…"[248] Deconstruction does not amount to destruction, it amounts to a loosening of the tight grip on the "truth" that is established over time. Opening the name of God to the event inside is not to deny what is said about God—to undermine the established tradition—but to recognize what the tradition has been grasping at all along. The tradition of Christianity has been operating in relationship to the event, and the constructed tradition is an attempt at fidelity to the event. The natural tendency of the opponents of deconstruction is to

[247] Ibid., 8.
[248] Ibid., 110.

forsake the event for a constructed truth. For Caputo, "Theology keeps its ear close to the heart of the pulses or pulsations of the divine in things."[249] Theology is concerned with ensuring that the divine is not confused with the *things* themselves. Thus, Caputo sees theology proper as desiring after the divine, never content to settle for the contingent, provisional idols erected as *the* representation of God. Caputo's project demonstrates this as it wrestles with a tradition attempting to free the event that is restless within it.

Caputo's project is to loosen theology's tight grip on God. While orthodoxy concretely names God—providing a rigid and clear understanding— Caputo affirms the notion of a promise:

> So my reduction is a kind of promissory reduction, from presence to promise, suspending the oppressive presence of the present and taking up the name of God as a promissory note, as a promise of things to come, while whatever the name of God has signified up to the present is considered strictly reducible, provisional, and tentative, a temporary contraction, an interregnum, an interim placeholder for something coming.[250]

The name of God is always historically contingent and constructed. It is framed according to particular contexts and is always and evermore provisional. The event— that which is not containable— is not a thing (though the event stirs within things). Whereas orthodoxy sees God within a horizon of being, Caputo sees this God as a signpost that (at best) points to the event. "The name of God occurs, not on the plane of being, but of the event; it is the name of a signification or an interpretation, not a substance."[251] As such, orthodoxy needs to be reimagined so it can be in fidelity to God (the event, to be sure). As Caputo states:

> Orthodoxy is idolatry if it means holding the 'correct opinions about God' - 'fundamentalism' is the most extreme and salient example of such idolatry - but not if it

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[249] John D. Caputo, "Spectral Hermeneutics: On the Weakness of God and the Theology of the Event," in *After the Death of God*, ed. Jeffrey W. Robbins, Insurrections: Critical Studies in Religion, Politics, and Culture, ed. Slavoj Zizek, Clayton Crocket, Creston Davis and Jeffrey W. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 49.

[250] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 122.

[251] Ibid., 181.

> means holding faith in the right way, that is, not holding it at all but being held by God, in love and service. Theology is idolatry if it means what we say about God instead of letting ourselves be addressed by what God has to say to us. Faith is idolatrous if it is rigidly self-certain but not if it is softened in the waters of 'doubt.'[252]

While orthodoxy draws firm lines and establishes ridged dogmas, Caputo desires for the event, which is always to come, always promised, and never contained.

The Event

Let us begin by considering the event according to its colloquial sense: an event is a happening. This is true to a point, though more accurately events are *revealed* through happenings. The happening occurs at a particular point in time as a physical thing, be it an instance, a word, an object or a being, and the event is what happens to or within these entities. Events have a tangible reality, a physical manifestation that makes them known. While we can observe particular events (e.g. revolutions, elections), or we gain understandings through particular events (e.g. the naming of a name, the thinking of a concept), what is evident is only a signifier. It is not, according to Caputo, the event itself. As Caputo states, "an event is not precisely what happens, which is what the word suggests in English, but something going on in what happens, something that is being expressed or realized or given shape in what happens; it is not something present, but something seeking to make itself felt in what is present."[253] The event is always uncontainable as a promise yet to be delivered and is oriented toward the future.[254] The event, such as the event "justice," is understood according to historical context, and the meaning is always differed, as it is renewed generation to generation. Events are repeated forward, yet not

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[252] Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 131.

[253] John D. Caputo, "Spectral Hermeneutics: On the Weakness of God and the Theology of the Event," in *After the Death of God*, ed. Jeffrey W. Robbins, Insurrections: Critical Studies in Religion, Politics, and Culture, ed. Slavoj Zizek, Clayton Crocket, Creston Davis and Jeffrey W. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 47.

[254] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 2.

as an act of duplication but the discovery of something new.[255] Thus, the event is always understood in two parts: what is observed and what evokes that which is observed. For example, the act of voting is an expression of "democracy." Casting a vote is an event that illustrates the legitimacy of the governing structure as society participates in the instalment of those who will guide the governmental apparatus. This is not "democracy" *per se*, but it is the call of democracy that gives rise to the event of voting. What is at work within this event "democracy" is a deeper and richer hope, a desire for freedom and justice that is provisionally realized through the casting of the vote and the apparatus of government. Thus, the event "democracy" is realized in part through the casting of the vote, for democracy *calls* for the act of voting. Still, the event "democracy" is always to come and never fully instantiated, and the act of voting may come to be replaced by something that more clearly reveals "democracy."[256]

We should now recognize the aforementioned schema name and event. The name is always attempting to contain some reality, and what it is attempting to articulate always exists beyond the confines of the name. As Caputo states:

> …I would distinguish between a name and the event that is astir or that transpires in a name. The name is a kind of provisional formulation of an event, a relatively stable if evolving structure, while the event is ever restless, on the move, seeking new forms to assume, seeking to get expressed in still unexpressed ways. Names are historical, contingent, provisional expressions in natural languages, while events are what names are trying to form or formulate, nominate or denominate.[257]

The event is realized in the name, yet what attempts to express the event never achieves this expression as the event does not exist until it is expressed. The event achieves its "existence"

[255] A name may collapse under the pressure of what is being called for within the name. Thus what is understood as "democracy" may no longer be suitable to signify that which is being called for. Caputo states, "A name is conditioned, coded, and finite, whereas the event it shelters is unconditional and infinite in the sense of being capable of endless linkings and endlessly productive dissemination. One is a nominalist about names because of ones respect for the event." Ibid., 3.

[256] Universal suffrage is not democracy itself, but the response to what calls from within the idea of democracy. It is a happening (akin to a name) that gives shape to the "event" but does not fulfil the promise it makes.

[257] Caputo, *Spectral Hermeneutics*, 47.

through the incomplete attempts to instantiate it. As Caputo states, "an event is not a thing but something astir in a thing. Events get realized in things, take on actuality and presence there, but always in a way that is provisional and revisable, while the restlessness and flux of things is explained by the events they harbor."[258] Naming an event is an attempt to realize it, make it "real," and inscribe it within our horizon of understanding. This is an attempt to domesticate the excess and madness inherent in the event. The event is always defined by a surplus, an uncontainable something that shakes off and bewilders attempts to contain it since it is never at rest. The event is always displacing its signifier and denying the legitimacy of the signifier's sovereign claim to know it in finality.

The event is glimpsed through what happens but is never grasped; like the kiss of one's partner to make known their love, the event is felt but never made present in any one expression of love. The event is incarnate in the world through words, concepts, and things, and yet, these instantiations are always contextual and provisional. What stirs within the instantiation is always excessive and always calling to be understood anew. As Caputo states:

> What happens, be it a thing or a word, is always *deconstructible* just in virtue of events, which are not deconstructible. That does not mean that events are eternally true like a Platonic eidos; far from being eternally true or present, events are never present, never finished or formed, realized or constructed, whereas only what is constructed is deconstructible. Words and things are deconstructible, but events, if there are any such things (*s'ily en a*), are not deconstructible.[259]

The event is the undeconstructible and unconditional, that which solicits us from somewhere and cries for its advent.[260] Events are not things one can hope to plumb the depths of—to dissect, understand and recreate—rather, they are always the enticing force that calls us to forsake what

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[258] Ibid., 48.
[259] Ibid., 48.
[260] To be clear, "the cries for advent" are never fully realized, the event is always soliciting for its advent, and it never fully arrives. The advent is always partial, it is a response to a call, not the call itself. As such, the call is never silenced.

we "know" so we may know more faithfully.[261] The event is always understood in light of the call; that which we may come to "know" is always subject to the call, always and ever more deconstructible. There are no fixed points, only events (*qua* calls) and responses to them.

Caputo's notion of the event is, to no surprise, influenced a great deal by Derrida. According to Caputo's reading of Derrida, "an event (*évenement*) is something 'coming' (*venir*), something 'to come' (*a-venir*). As something futural (*l'avenir*), an event is something we cannot see coming that takes us by surprise, like a letter that arrives unexpectedly in the mail with news that changes your life forever, for better or for worse."[262] The event has to do with the future, which we have no control over and yet know *it* is coming. The event has to do with what does not exist, which never exists and yet may be present even now in the form of a storm that may or may not arrive.[263] While we may have an unfounded sense that we usher in the future, it is more apt to conclude that the future forces itself upon us and the best we can do is to be open to it.[264] Like the future, the event's arrival is never complete. Caputo states, "in terms of their temporality, events, never being present, solicit us from afar, draw us on, draw us out into the future, calling us hither. Events are provocations and promises, and they have the structure of what Derrida calls the unforeseeable "to come" (à venir)."[265] Always calling us into the darkness, the event draws us from what we know into what is un-knowable. The event calls us to embark upon a journey with no determinate destination but a general hope for where the path may lead (and maybe not even that!)

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[261] A call is never fulfilled by its response, thus one can be "faithful" to a call, but one cannot come to define that call in any final sense. Thus, one does not come to know in any complete sense; rather they inhabit a "faithful" posture.

[262] Caputo, *Truth*, 74-75.

[263] An "event" is never guaranteed to arrive, and the form it takes is by definition beyond anticipation. The "event" may be in the wake of something that is present, or perhaps in the past, or of that which we cannot begin to anticipate. Regardless, the "event" is not that which arrives to support and compliment what is, but rather is that which disorders and disrupts it.

[264] Ibid., 75.

[265] Caputo, *Spectral Hermeneutics*, 48.

The event is always treading upon our carefully constructed world and inserting itself in to the well-ordered and defined notions that give shape and substance to our lives. Events are not of our design and, thus, are not of our ordering. An event is not comfortable within the frame of our horizon of expectation and destabilizes it, rendering what was once firm and familiar to the order of soft and foreign.[266] This is what is meant when Derrida speaks of justice and the law. In the previously mentioned illustration of Rosa Parks, justice demands the reconfiguration of the law. While the law had a particular horizon that gave it shape and substance, the event "justice" stirred and segregation law reconfigured in its wake. This is not to assert that such reconfiguration occurred quickly; rather, it is to suggest that this event "justice" (amongst many others) destabilized the horizon that established segregation as just. In the wake of this event a more just horizon was established as the law was reconstructed. We live now in the wake of such an event, and looking back upon it through our horizon's lens (established as a result of such the event), it is difficult to understand how such laws were understood as just. Indeed, the future will look back upon us, in the wake of events to come and judge us with similar incredulity.

Once more, let us go to the well of deconstruction and draw from it an illustration to further our discussion. Again, on justice:

> When something is said to be 'deconstructible,' then, contrary to the received view, that is not bad news—in fact, if Derrida were of a more evangelical frame of mind, he might even call it (the) 'good news'—for that means it has flexibility and a future, and it will not be allowed to harden over. To deconstruct something, in the terms I am using in this study, is to release the event that is harboured by a name, to see to it that the event is not trapped by the name. The deconstruction of the law is made possible by the structural and necessary gap between the name of the law, which is constructed, and the event of justice, which is undeconstructible, between the law, which is conditioned, and the event of justice, which is an unconditional demand. Deconstruction resists the closure of the law in the name of the event that laws close off and exclude, namely, the singularity of what Kierkegaard called the "poor existing individual.[267]

[266] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 109.
[267] Ibid., 28.

The law is never complete; it is always becoming. To close off the law by etching it in stone is to deny the event "justice," and also the possibility that we are enacting a way of being that is unjust.[268] The event happens. It waits for no one, and it does not acquiesce to anyone's wishes. While there were many—and many still remain— who refused to see the event "justice" in the civil rights movement of the 20th century, the event "justice" could not be denied. Where did this event come from? And why did it come when it did? To speak knowingly of such topics is impossible; all that can be affirmed is that the event came, and the event is to come.

The event is not what can be imagined and has simply not yet arrived, for it is what surprises us and ruptures what we deem to be possible and impossible. As Caputo states, "an event (*événement*) is a certain 'happening' that is 'linked' but not bound causally to antecedent and consequence, not bound by efficient causality to the past or by teleological causality to the future, but is taken for itself, in its own singularity."[269] The *to come* is not guaranteed by what is or has been, and it is not affirming any notion of progress. Such a notion is described by Caputo as the future present: "the future is not a future present, whose coming can be foreseen, but the surprise of a future that as it were, comes out of nowhere, that is not our doing, not within our ken and control, a future *sans voir, sans avoir, sans savoir."*[270] What is coming in the event is not what is anticipated; it is not the logical evolution of what has been and what is now. For the *to come* is in the business of shattering horizons not affirming them. The event comes from God-knows-where. It is somewhere to come, catching us of guard and rendering us, in the least, humbled and confused. Over time, horizons are reconstituted, and the radical and destabilizing

[268] What is just today may tomorrow be revealed as unjust. To be sure, generations to come will judge what we deem to be justice in the same way that we reflect on the "barbarism" of the past.

[269] Ibid., 175.

[270] "The future is not a future present, whose coming can be foreseen, but the surprise of a future that as it were, comes out of nowhere, that is not our doing, not within our ken and control, a future *without seeing, without having, without knowing.*" Ibid., 175.

potential of the event is domesticated for a while. This inscription of the event is always a provisional naming and an attempt to bring the impossible into accord with what is held to be possible. Derrida is not simply making an argument, he is attempting to articulate a way of conceiving and being-in-the-world. The use of the *to come* and the *without*[271] are not only illustrative, they are descriptive. While these turns of phrase demonstrate the lack present within the name, they also function to perpetually inscribe the name with a lack. Derrida's argument is for a way of being open to the event that understands "truth" as deferred and sensitive to the pressure of the *to come*. As such, one might say that Caputo's project, following Derrida, is pursuing a God *without* God by sustaining an openness to the God *to come.*

God and the Event

The crux of Caputo's theological project is the assertion that "God" is the name given to an event.[272] The most integral distinction between Caputo's perspective and a classical perspective is that God does not exist because, as discussed above, events do not exist. As Caputo states, "…God is neither a supreme being nor being itself, neither ontic nor ontological, neither the cause of beings nor the ground of being…neither as a supreme entity whose existence could be proven or disproved or even said to hang in doubt, nor the horizon of being itself or its ground, either of which would lodge God more deeply still in the onto-theological circuit that circles

[271] Derrida employs this in various ways: sovereignty without sovereignty, community without community, power without power. While commenting on his use of without, Caputo explains what Derrida achieves through its deployment, "here I am applying the theorem of the sans in Derrida, that you get the best results with our favorite words, not by unleashing their full semantic force, which will eventually send them crashing into a wall, but by maintaining them in their weak mode, their weak force, by striking them through but not quite altogether effacing them…" By suspending the firm meaning of the word, this clever turn of phrase conceptualizes the *to come*, the here but not yet. While the word evokes a particular meaning, without ensures that the meaning can never be closed, and as such is never final. The word (the concept itself) is used against itself in order to challenge and loosen traditional understandings of the concept in question. See: Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 27.

[272] It is not my intent to suggest that Caputo understands God to be an event in an ontological sense. God is one of the names given to the event "God."

between being and beings."[273] God is not bound to a horizon of understanding seeking to inscribe God into the order of being. Thus, God is not *something* out there, somewhere, who accords to the rationality of the world.[274] God is not a thing at all, and as such, speaking of God is always to speak of a call, of what is harboured within a response, within the name (of) "God."

Caputo and Derrida,[275] look to Augustine in theological issues and are captivated by Augustine's question, "what do I love when I love my God?"[276] This question is taken up as an inquiry into the event stirring within the name God. Caputo elaborates, "what do I mean by God whom I love? What do I love when I speak of loving God? What do I believe when I put my faith in God? To whom do I pray what I pray to my God? Over what do I weep when I weep over my God?"[277] Augustine is searching for what is *within* that which he is invoking, attempting to recognize what is desired when he desires God. For Caputo, Augustine is pondering the unconditional and he is speaking of the name of God as, "the name of everything that we love and desire, with a desire beyond desire, the name of our passion…"[278] God is the name of what we love and what we desire, the very aim of urge itself and a deep calling out to the impossible that each of us have in the core of our being. While the name of God is classically understood as

[273] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 9.

[274] Classical Christianity positions God beyond understanding, yet does so according to a common form. While humanity does not have the perspective of God and is unable to understand God's plans, humanity can be assured by the fact that God has plans. Thus, the mystery is the particular details but the form is congruent with human understanding. What is *unknown* about God is bound by what we *know* we do not know. Caputo, following Derrida, is pushing God beyond what is known, thus "God" is able to take on an image that is other than Being.

[275] For a discussion of Derrida and Augustine, see John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion*, The Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion, ed. Merold Westphal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), chapter six, "Messianic Time: Derrida and Blanchot."

[276] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 183.

[277] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 287.

[278] Caputo, *Weakness of God*, 88.

representative of a sort of being, Caputo, reading Augustine, understands this name to be signifying a longing.[279] Caputo goes further than Augustine though and states,

> the name of God is also the name of everything that desires us, everything that puts us in the accusative, that desires what is best in us and desires what is best from us, that calls us out beyond ourselves, beyond our desire and our being, beckoning us beyond being to the good. God cajoles, God lures—that is the desire of God (*genitivus subjectivus*), God's desire for us. Beyond our desire for God lies God's desire of us.[280]

Thus, for Caputo, the name of God is both the name of what we desire—indeed, the desire itself— and the response to that desiring us. In Augustine, Caputo finds one who is pondering why he desires God at all, and Caputo comes to recognize that we desire because we are desired, and we desire and are desired by the event that occurs in the name "God."

Caputo finds a great deal of inspiration in the work of Meister Eckhart, who is referenced throughout his work. In Eckhart, Caputo finds a kindred spirit and one who desires after the impossible God, plays with language and concepts to loose God from idolatry and poses a threat to the *powers that be*.[281] While Eckhart is referenced throughout *Weakness of God* and *Insistence of God* and is present in the background of much of Caputo's work, the final chapter of *More Radical Hermeneutics*[282] provides a prolonged engagement with Eckhart. In this essay, Caputo runs together Derrida and Eckhart and asserts that each operates with a common spirit as illustrated by such by *différance* and deconstruction. Caputo asserts that Eckhart demonstrates an awareness of the confines and effect of language upon reasoning in general and, in particular, one's conception of God. Caputo states:

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[279] Here Caputo is not straying far from Augustine himself, one cannot help but see the opening of *Confessions* whilst reading this sentiment of Caputo's: "to praise you is the desire of man, a little piece of your creation. You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Saint Augustine, *Confessions,* 3.

[280] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 88.

[281] John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 259.

[282] Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, chapter ten: " The Prayers and Tears of Devilish Hermeneutics: Derrida and Meister Eckhart Conclusion without Conclusion."

> …he had no high confidence in any particular name we sent God's way, like an arrow aimed at God's heart. He argued emphatically that to call God 'creator' was just to mark Him off in terms of 'creatures'; to call God 'cause' was to draw God into relation with 'effects'; to call God 'good', was to name God in reference to the will; and to call God 'true' was to give God a name relative to the intellect.[283]

According to Caputo, Eckhart recognized that according to this schema, God was understood relative to another concept, and neither concept was absolute or clearly representative of Godself. Eckhart asserted that the Church identified God according to a certainty that was not possible, and in its concretizing of provisional concepts, the Church was straying into idolatry.[284] Caputo's project attempts to carry out a similar engagement with the idea of God and articulate a conception aware of its own contingency by perpetually self-deconstructing. This is what he means when he speaks of name and event; God is what is harboured within the provisional and contingent horizon that comes to be understood as in the name "God."

A prayer uttered by Eckhart, "God make me free of God,"[285] expresses, for Caputo, the establishment of the idol and the disavowing of it.[286] This prayer is a declaration of one's desire and a confession of the limitation of such desire. This desire for God is a desire for something beyond the contingent concept of God (the idol), "A deep desire for something more surpassingly *tout autre.*"[287] Eckhart desires to know God, yet he recognizes that he is incapable of such knowledge; moreover, he is aware of the limitations placed upon the divine when one declares that one knows God. As such, this prayer of Eckhart's is not a momentary realization—expressing an instance of elucidation—but rather, an ongoing practice. It is a prayer affirming

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[283] Ibid., 255.

[284] Ibid., 257. It must be noted that Caputo himself is reading Eckhart through the term idolatry, this is not a term that Eckhart himself, according to Caputo, employs. That is to say, that within this text, Caputo does not cite Eckhart as using the term 'idol' and yet understands this to be what Eckhart is getting at. Certainly this is not a stretch, and it would seem that Caputo's characterization is accurate.

[285] Which Caputo often renders as "God rid me of God." For an example, see Caputo quoting Eckhart in Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell,* 1.

[286] Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics,* 250.

[287] Ibid., 250.

the ongoing limitation of human rationality. As Caputo comments, to pray this prayer with Eckhart is "…to confess that we never escape the chain of signifiers, to concede that the trouble we are in is permanent, and to press ahead anyway, praying and weeping like mad."[288] This prayer is a kind of daily devotion, one which must be "kept permanently in place,"[289] so the provisional and contingent God, "cut and fit [into] human proportions," is not absolutized into an idol.[290] Life is flux, and one is thrust into it with no *how* or *why*, stumbling and struggling to make sense of it all. For Caputo, the only answer is to embrace the flux, renounce the stable and secure call of absolutes and embrace the ongoing process of deconstruction: "God, rid me of God."[291]

God is what stirs and simmers within that which we come to affirm as God. From a strictly conceptual or descriptive sense, God is what evokes the descriptors, metaphors and models erected in attempt to comprehend and articulate the event that is named "God." Crucially, God is never contained within these horizons. The event is what is harboured within and yet is always still to come. The event that referred to as God is forever a surplus. Still, coming to understand and know God is not a case of progress as God is not a problem to be solved. God is not a being to be discovered or truth to be uncovered. What we name God is what calls humanity forward into the flux, the unknown and the impossible. This is the problem with systems; they build on what is known and trust that the footing is firm. The system then climbs higher into the sky as a tower of reason reaching for God. God is not the transcendent being to be reached and not a thing any tower can approach. God is that which intercedes unexpectedly, and undermines the tower's foundation, *ad infinitum.* What is known about the event, "God," is that it cannot be

[288] Ibid., 257.
[289] Ibid., 257.
[290] Ibid., 251.
[291] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell,* 1.

contained or known, and it is always calling one forward or backward or to be still and silent. God is throughout the spaces between what is known and the cracks between what is spoken. God is in the silence that expresses what is not said, and that which, perhaps, cannot be said. God is that which draws humanity toward the impossible, beyond what can be conceived or spoken, into a knowledge that is more praxis than principle.[292] Clearly, a mystical spirit underpins Caputo's project, a fact not surprising when considering the breadth of Eckhart's influence. For many, this descriptor is the mark of an impoverished work amuck with flowery language of little substance, indeed of weakness. To such responses, Caputo, with a grin, might well respond: "*Amen.*"[293]

The Existence of God

Caputo's conception of the weakness of God, or weak theology, exposes Christianity to the event "God." Rather than making strong, defensible and foundational claims, Caputo strives for an openness demanded by the flux.[294] Confessional theology strives to capture and contain God, and indeed, the Christian tradition is understood as a firm and secure system that speaks to a known God. Caputo is not condemning of the doctrines and traditions themselves. What he condemns is the lack of acknowledgement provided for the limitations of human reason that result in God being reduced to what can be known and that which "is." Furthermore, the tradition of Christianity mitigates human responsibility because one does not wrestle with the event, "God," or struggle with the implications of the event. Rather, the expectation is that the believer internalizes the particulars of the system and knows the known God on the terms that God has *given* Himself to be known. Caputo, against this notion, understands God as that which creates

[292] To this end Caputo states: "…The call is not primarily a cognitive matter but an existential one." The call is not something to be pondered to great lengths but rather something to be lived. Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 118.

[293] Here, I am loosely characterizing Caputo's playful character displayed throughout his work. An example of such can be found at Caputo, *On Religion,* 16.

[294] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 9.

holes within systems, and the event that shatters all certainties. Caputo's project is one that forsakes the comfort of foundationalism in fidelity to the event, "God." In spite of this, Caputo does not remove himself from the Christian tradition—Catholicism in particular— but understands himself to be entangled within it. For Caputo, given his own biography, it is the necessary "form in which the unconditional takes shape."[295] For Caputo, the issue with confessional theology is that it considers its claims to be absolute, which is akin to idolatry. Caputo's understanding of God hinges upon God's inexistence. Although this is accurate, it is also misleading. For Caputo, God does not exist as a person, "Godself." This is not to say that God does not exist at all, in the sense that God is simply nothing. Instead, such a concept insists that God's "existence" be thought of otherwise. For an event to be known, it must be named. If the event is not given concrete shape via a response to it in the world, it effectively is not anything at all; it does not exist outside of the conditional representation. Let us again recall justice and the law: the law is the instantiation that makes justice real, gives justice teeth and makes justice known. Without the law, justice does not exist because "justice" operates on the plane of the event by calling from elsewhere and desiring to be manifest. The law expresses "justice," yet, never finally or completely. Justice simmers below the surface of the law, giving the law shape, meaning and coherence. The call of justice makes the law necessary, yet only the law brings justice into existence in any real sense. The law, unable to contain justice, is ruptured and laid to waste by it, reconfigured in the wake of the outpouring of justice. Utilizing the same schema, we can parse out God's existence: God does not exist, the response to the call of the event, "God," brings God into being. God, like justice, calls human beings, and human beings, like the law, name, conceptualize and enact God on the plane of being. Thus, the excessive event

[295] Leask, *Caputo in Dialogue*, 219-20.

of God "insists" and human beings manifest God in word and action allowing God to "exist." As Caputo clearly declares, "God insists while we exist…God is a spirit that calls, a spirit that can happen anywhere and haunts everything, instantly."[296]

Here we arrive at the most paradoxical aspect of Caputo's conception: God is not a being, yet God is only known through beings. It is only in the response to the call that God *is.* The event calls, insists, and through the response, perhaps a deed, God enters into the world. "God is what God does, and what God does is what is done in the name of God, which is the birth of God in the world."[297] Through humanity's deeds, the response to the call, God is made to exist. "God is an insistent claim or provocation, while the business of existing is up to us— existence here meaning response or responding, assuming responsibility to convert what is being called for in the name of God into a deed."[298] Only through the deed is God known, and it is through the response of human beings that the event, "God," is given any concrete shape. "The response is what exists and bears the only witness we have to what insists."[299] Caputo proclaims that, according to Kierkegaard, the "name of God is the name of a deed." God is named through the life of those who are open to the event and respond to its call.[300] Once again, this name is never final or complete and always contextual and contingent, though it does resonate with the call. The deed bears witness to God, and it is only through the deed that a witness is possible at all. Following Eckhart, Caputo controversially concludes that, "God needs us to be God."[301] It is only through the deed that God *is* at all. Good or bad, just or unjust, shameful or righteous, God is known only through the response to the call of the event.

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[296] John D. Caputo, *Insistence of God,* 13.
[297] Ibid., 36.
[298] Ibid., 14.
[299] Ibid., 37.
[300] Ibid., 37.
[301] Ibid., 35.

The Call Without Caller

Given this discussion of the call of the event and the response that brings God into being, what are we to say about the call itself? Crucial to understanding the nature of this call is to recognize that the caller cannot be identified. While Caputo's notion of the call would seem to be relatable to a confessional theology, whose doctrines would assign such an action to God, Caputo is unwilling and unable to do so. For Caputo, there is no source that *is* God, and no capacity for God (the being) to call. According to Caputo, "…the call originates from the name of God, from God knows where, from something I know not what— from God, from some World-Soul, or from a dark corner of the unconscious— soliciting us from afar and calling us beyond ourselves."[302] The nature of the call is that it sounds: a yearning, a desire, a force that tugs at human beings. By echoing Kierkegaard, Caputo develops this notion according to the idea of passion, which everyone has.[303] This passion is given voice, and for some the voice is God, though for others this is not the case, "…the name of God is one way—and for many of us, an uncircumventable way—to give voice to this passion. But I do think it's entirely possible to give voice to this passion without using the name of God."[304] The response to the call—the deed—gives shape to the call. According to Caputo, this response is what is at play within the Christian tradition. It stirs within the firm doctrine and institutions and proclaims that the name of God is a desire, a passion and a call without a caller. The emphasis is not on debating from whence this call originates, but to react to it and embody it, bringing the call into existence.[305]

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[302] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 113.
[303] Leask, *Caputo in Dialogue*, 219.
[304] Ibid., 219.
[305] Events are that which calls and that which is alive within the response, but an event is not the response itself. Thus, an event happens but the call is never satisfied, it continues to sound. The call of the event, such us the event "justice," continues to sound drawing justice beyond the contextual instance of such.

The lack of certainty inherent to such a call ensures it is without authority or specificity. Said otherwise, the call is not a command, it cannot be understood as a law to be systematized and instituted. According to Caputo, "the hiddenness of the source is actually constitutive of the call, part of its positive phenomenal makeup, a positive function of its weak force, and a permanent feature of our anarchic and weakened theological condition."[306] Neither the source nor the message can be clearly identified, and a specific response to the call cannot be mandated. The response to the call is its only tangible quality. The call sounds, it takes the form of something like an urge or desire, and human beings must respond in order for it to exist. Thus, the one responding has responsibility for the response because they are an active part of the process. Conversely, if the call is the decree of the being, God, it is constrained to a particular form, and the individual's role is obedience. This is not a response at all, it is simply adherence to an established law.

Furthermore, if the source and content can be identified, it is prone to become a weapon wielded by the *powers that be* toward the ends of obedience. Caputo states, "for if we could identify it further, or definitively, if we could get on top of it, master it, make it our own, then we would not be "called" upon, but would be simply musing over what we want to do."[307] In the case of Christianity, those with authority claim the clear and coherent authority of God and have the power to command a certain way of being which everyone else must acquiesce, for the word of God is present. Said otherwise, if the call is clear in expectation and source, then it would be possible to construct firm hierarchies that oppress and subjugate the material world. Caputo is arguing for something considerably less organized, a context that is more decentralized and anarchical that demands the individual human being (or the community) respond to the call of

[306] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 114.
[307] Ibid., 114.

the event, "God." This posture toward the call demands a great deal more faith as it is not an acquiescence to certain institutionally established doctrines but a wrestling with the call of the event echoing within these doctrines. The call is not something that can be retrieved from the past and lived in the present, it must be repeated forward, understood contextually and lived faithfully.[308] Once again channeling Kierkegaard, Caputo states, "if God were a giant green bird…and regularly and conspicuously appeared thus in the town square, there would be much less skepticism about him, and of course a proportionately less passionate faith."[309] Crucial for Caputo is that God does not show up, does not assert with clarity this or that way, and consequently, the decrees of the *powers that be* are not themselves bound up in God's authority. Rather, such decrees are best understood as particular responses to the call of the event, "God."

The implications of this understanding of God are clear: human beings are responsible for God's existence. Not knowing the caller demands that humanity take responsibility for their response to the call. One cannot defer to God's authority and defend their actions by invoking an absolute decree. One invoking "God's will" does so with much less certainty, recognizing that the will of God is bound to be expressed in the deeds of man, and undoubtedly, the will of man. A more honest rendering would be to invoke, "God's will, perhaps."[310] If the source and content of the call were clear, one would always be able to defer to that authority, and responsibility would not be required, except in the form of pure, mindless obedience. If one is certain about the call's content then, "we can always plead that we are just obeying orders, just doing our duty, and thereby avoid responsibility."[311]

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[308] Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics,* 91-92.
[309] Ibid., 114.
[310] Caputo, *Insistence of God,* chapter one: "God, Perhaps: The Fear of One Small Word."
[311] Caputo, *Insistence of God,* 15.

The response to the call is one's own response— individually or communally—and must be owned by that particular individual or party. While one responds to the call, this response does not express certainty, for the response is only one naming of the event. While this particular response may be restless with the event and astir with its excess, it is only a contextual incarnation of the event. This response, any response, is not capable of containing or realizing the call in fullness. The call continues to sound, and it sounds from within every response to the call (every event). The call is always worked out according to the context and response, and thus, the naming of God is always contingent. For Caputo, no being stands over humanity dictating the proper course of history; this being does not exist and neither does such a course for history. Rather, something like justice (perhaps justice itself, if such a thing can be said) calls upon humanity; humanity responds, and justice arrives in that response. God was here, God is here, and God is still to come, and yet, God never arrives. Human beings embody God, ushering in God's existence and are responsible for the image of God, be it an image of love or hate.

The Weakness and Weak force of God

It is now clear what Caputo means by *The Weakness of God*: God is without capacity to act in powerful ways because God does not exist as a force in the world. Power is relegated to the plane of being. The ability to manipulate and coerce the material world into accordance with one's will is a hallmark of power, and God is classically understood to exude this capacity. It is asserted in orthodoxy that through power, God has created the world (Genesis), and through power, God will rid the world of God's enemies (Revelation). Nothing can stand in the way of such unlimited power, for such a restriction would diminish God's 'godness.' This, of course, is according to a particular order or understanding of power, which speaks of a particular understanding of God. Caputo's understanding of God is radically *other* than that of Christian

orthodoxy. He makes no room for a God bound up in being, and thus, there is no God to intercede in human affairs through any coercive means.

As has been demonstrated, "God" is the name given to an event that calls, and this call carries neither the authority nor the power of a command. While the call "solicits and disturbs what is there, an event that adds a level of signification and meaning, of provocation and solicitation to what is there, that makes it impossible for the world, for what is *there*, to settle solidly in place, to consolidate, to close in upon itself,"[312] it is still only a call. God is the spectre that haunts firm foundations with a voice that whispers openness, but it is not God who has the power or the will to see openness realized. Human beings exist and human beings wield power in the name of God, doing so according to a contingent understanding of God. God is not a being with a plan which humanity is to follow. God is the desire that calls out for the impossible and drives humanity onward. God is a force without power to compel or the particularity to demand; God is a weak force.

For Caputo, at the core of Christianity is a weak force. In his work *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity,* philosopher Slavoj Žižek asserts that at the core of Christianity is the absence of the "big Other," the lack of a guarantee of absolute meaning and order. Žižek states, "when Christ dies, what dies with him is the secure hope discernible in 'Father, why has through forsaken me?'; the hope that there is a father who has abandoned me."[313] What Žižek, following Hegel, glimpses in the cross is the absence of a being who can intercede in the material world. The impotence of the father, prefigured by the account of Job, is

[312] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 39.

[313] Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 171.

on display in Christ's desperate cry.[314] Christianity, as such, is the religion of atheism; a community deprived of the big Other's assurance.[315] Caputo affirms Žižek's basic premise, stating: "…what we learn from [Jesus's] death on the cross is that there is no big Other to save us, so we should get on with our lives."[316] Crucially though, Caputo affirms that this perspective is only half correct and corrects it by asserting, "the other half, what Žižek leaves out, is that in his abandonment there lies the weak force of God,"[317] and furthermore, "the perverse core of Christianity lies in being a weak force."[318] For Caputo, what is unveiled through the cross is that God does not operate according to the plane of being. God has no capacity to intercede through a coercive power and compel the Roman soldiers to cease; this sort of engagement is regarded as manipulation and magic.[319] Caputo does not see God as acting in a powerful way. Such a way would be demonstrated by his intervention, and such a way is evident in the power of Rome that affixes Jesus to the cross. This is a power contrary to the weak force of God; a type of power that runs counter to the eventfulness of God.

Caputo draws upon St. Paul for the biblical foundation of his theological project. In 1 Corinthians, Caputo observes the unleashing of a confounding and deconstructing perspective on Christ and indeed God: 1 Cor. 1:27-28 reads:[320] "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are."[321] Here, Caputo finds the inverted logic constituting the Kingdom of God. In 1 Cor. 1:27, Caputo exposes God's prerogative for those without social power and

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[314] See: Zizek, *Puppet and the Dwarf,* chapter five: "Subtraction, Jewish, and Christian." Throughout this chapter, Žižek is discussing the impotence of God that is on display in the account of Job. Rather than a story about the power and authority of God, this account is a story about Job witnessing God's lack.

[315] Žižek, *Puppet and the Dwarf,* 171.

[316] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 43.

[317] Ibid., 43.

[318] Ibid., 43.

[319] Ibid., 43.

[320] Ibid., 46.

[321] Scripture quoted from New Revised Standard Version.

prestige, those who do not conform to the status quo, the "'outsiders,' the people deprived of power, wealth, education, high birth, high culture."[322] Those who are overlooked and excluded constitute the ironic Kingdom of God, a kingdom *without* kingdom. According to worldly definition, these people are without claim to any influence or power.[323] Most importantly, it is in this scripture that Caputo finds Paul mocking the central concept of Greek philosophy, Being.[324] Paul is placing value and emphasis upon that which has no Being, "the things that are not (*ta me onto*)."[325] Caputo states, "…the essence of Greek wisdom is to ascend to the element of Being and to avoid the black holes and dark corners of non-Being or the shifting sands of becoming. The wise man is wired up to Being, knows his way around what is, can perspicuously sort through what is and what is not, and can always hit the mark of what is."[326] Thus, Caputo sees Paul placing wisdom within that which does not exist; wisdom is found in those who are of no power or influence. This is the weak power of God at work in the Kingdom as understood by St. Paul.

The weak force of God is clear in the cross. What is striking about Caputo's reading of the cross is Jesus' inability to come down from it, even had he wanted to. For Caputo, the notion that Jesus could conjure the means to his freedom is relegated to the domain of the magical, nothing more than the perspective represented by the Romans who taunted him, as they were unable to believe or comprehend his true divinity.[327] Caputo challenges the notion that Jesus was an all-powerful being capable of interceding in the physical events of this world by bending them to his will. For Caputo, the true divinity of Jesus is revealed through "his distance from this request for

[322] Ibid., 46.
[323] Ibid., 46.
[324] Ibid., 47.
[325] Ibid., 46.
[326] Ibid., 47.
[327] Ibid., 42.

magic, in his helplessness, his cry of abandonment, and above all, in the words of forgiveness he utters."[328] Divinity is found in the protest rising up from his humiliating death above the coercive power Rome demonstrated through the cross.[329] Caputo states, "the power of God is not pagan violence, brute power, or vulgar magic; it is the power of powerlessness, the power of the call, the power of protest that rises up from innocent suffering and calls out against it, the power that says no to unjust suffering, and finally, the power to suffer-with (sym-pathos) innocent suffering, which is perhaps the central Christian symbol."[330] Stirring within the broken body of Christ is an event, and this event within the Christian tradition is named "God." The rule and power of God is Jesus on the cross. The weak force of God is "embodied in the helpless body whose flesh is nailed to the cross."[331] Jesus' crucifixion is not the result of God's power suspended or a divine accounting strategy to overcome sin; it is the call of the victim of coercive power.

The weak force of God does not prevent the cross because it could not prevent it. The weak force calls out. It does not command but speaks through the unjust suffering and the forgiveness that ensues. The event, "God," exerts a force, but not one of coercion that determines. Rather, weak force shocks and shatters the way one sees the world. Caputo understands the structure of the event in accordance to Derrida's "sovereignty without force," stating, "By this Derrida means the un-conditional authority exerted by the undeconstructible event—which goes under an endlessly translatable string of names like justice, the gift, forgiveness, hospitality—which of itself lacks force or worldly power, lacks an army or an armature, the material means to enforce its will, that is, to forcibly bring about what it is calling for."[332] This weak force speaks. It is a "summons, call, demand, claim or appeal, as well as a promise and a lure," but it has not the

[328] Ibid., 43.
[329] Ibid., 43.
[330] Ibid., 43.
[331] Ibid., 54.
[332] Ibid., 29.

capacity to bring about an end, for that is a matter for those who exist. The call of God demands that justice flow "like water across the land," yet it has not the force or power to ensure this.[333] As such, God cannot be understood as a being who stands idle as injustice pours forth, for God has not the capacity to stop nor cause such events. Injustice is a result of human action or inaction, and a response is humanity's responsibility. The power of God is not found in the strong forces of the material world that demand blood and coerce the other into obedience. The power of God is weak, found in the "potent possibility that makes the world restless with hope for justice and impatient with injustice."[334] Stirring within moments of injustice, like the stirring within the cross, the event, "God," calls out to the onlookers for a response that is the arrival of God.

Jesus and the Event

If God is not a being who exists but an event that insists absent of the power to intercede in human affairs, then Jesus is understood as a man living in response to the event, "God." Following the work of John Dominic Crossan, Caputo understands Jesus to be a man who became a parable.[335] The parable of Jesus is formed by the followers of the way who are reacting to "the event of which [Jesus] was the locus."[336] In the wake of the life and death of Jesus and in response to the event stirring within it, the followers of Jesus came to understand and express him through a series of stories. For Caputo, this is how the more supernatural aspects of Jesus life can be understood. For example, Jesus—the parable—healed individuals, walked on water and through walls and raised the dead, but Jesus—the human being—was never capable of such

[333] Leask, *Caputo in Dialogue*, 218.
[334] Caputo, *Spectral Hermeneutics*, 64.
[335] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 16.
[336] Ibid., 16.

things.[337] These sorts of works are relegated to the domain of magic and strong forces of Being that bend and manipulate the world. Such super-beings and super-heroes are a conception that prides coercive power above weakness.[338] Jesus does not operate according to this order because he is a human being, and human beings do not wield such capacity. Yet, within these parables stirs an event calling human beings to a response. They are not simply stories that point to the majesty of God and lead humanity to wait on an infusion of power that can be used toward just ends. These stories echo the call of "justice" and beg for its enactment.

The parable of Jesus that was worked out by the followers of *the Way* as they enacted a fidelity to the event, became hardened, codified and institutionalized into Christianity. Caputo is interested in Jesus the man, and he does not speak of Jesus Christ, for he is interested in Yeshua.[339] Neither Jesus the man nor his followers expected Christianity's formation; it was not their interest and likely beyond their conception.[340] Jesus was a Jewish man who adhered to the Jewish tradition, he did not see the need to break away from this tradition or replace it. Jesus would not have understood himself to be a "God-man" as this would conflict with his strict monotheistic perspective.[341] Thus, his message would have been strictly about God and not himself.[342] The tradition of Christianity absolutizes Jesus, turning him from an icon into an idol.[343] For example, Caputo suggests the masculinity of Jesus "becomes something that's

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[337] Ibid., 16.
[338] Ibid., 16.
[339] Caputo, *Insistence of God*, 27.
Of an interesting parallel, Ray C. Gingerich notes "it was not unusual for Yoder during lectures to speak of 'the fully human Jesus,' without simultaneously or in the same context adding, 'and the fully divine.' Commenting on where to place the emphasis on 'Christ,' Yoder notes, 'For this author the humanity is what counts.'—[For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 241 η. 4.]" See Gingerich, *Theological Foundations,* 417 n 1.
[340] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 151.
[341] Ibid., 152.
[342] Leask, *Caputo in Dialogue,* 220.
[343] Ibid., 220. Referring to the distinction made famous by Jean-Luc Marion. See: Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

supposed to be timelessly important instead of testimony to the contingency of the times."[344] Jesus the Jewish man is for Caputo an icon of God, a historical and contextual expression of the event. It is important to note that Caputo sees Jesus as incredibly valuable and an influence in his own life— he states that Jesus is his ethical paradigm— but this should not be confused with any sense of an all-powerful Jesus.[345] For Caputo, this ethical paradigm is largely defined by the contradiction his life presented to the patterns of the world.[346] These contradictions undermined the authority of the *powers that be* and led to the cross.[347] Caputo understands the cross as the result of a life lived with openness to the event, not the divine strategy of God. Such an alternative way of living was in disobedience to the *powers that be* and could not be tolerated by those strong forces.[348]

The most defining and paradigmatic aspect of Jesus life, the pattern of greatest contradiction to the world, was the mode of forgiveness Jesus lived according to. Caputo asserts that forgiveness was a central part of Jesus' teaching. Drawing on Hannah Arendt he states, Jesus was "the master of forgiveness."[349] To parse the revolutionary and *eventive* aspect of Jesus' forgiveness, Caputo engages with E.P. Sanders' work, *Jesus and Judaism*.[350] Sanders asserts that the forgiveness Jesus advocated for and carried out was not directed toward the righteous, those who had repented of their sin. Rather, this forgiveness was given to those who were still in their sin, even the "'professional sinners, those who earn a living by their sin (e.g., usurers, tax collectors, prostitutes)."[351] According to Sanders, Jesus would not have caused a stir if he had

[344] Leask, *Caputo in Dialogue,* 220.
[345] Ibid., 220.
[346] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 234.
[347] Ibid., 234.
[348] Ibid., 49.
[349] Ibid., 217.
[350] E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).
[351] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 217.

ministered to the "common people" such as the righteous who sin no more or even uneducated individuals unable to understand or adhere to the finer points of the law.[352] The forgiveness that Jesus offered was controversial because he offered the kingdom to "the wicked, those who flagrantly disobey the law…to sinners who are still sinning"[353]

Through Sanders' depiction of Jesus in relation to the context of Judaism, Caputo parses out the radical aspect of the forgiveness of Jesus. Caputo follows Sanders and understands Jesus according to his context, as Jewish. This contextualization stands distinct from the narratives that emerged in Christianity during the institutionalization of Jesus' way of life. Crucially, Sanders asserts, "repentance and forgiveness were staples of Jewish theology." He argues that had Jesus convinced these *wicked* individuals to change their ways, "he would have been hailed as a national hero."[354] So, what was so unsettling about Jesus' forgiveness? Sanders' proposal is that Jesus forgave without requiring or insisting upon any form of repentance, which would have been a departure from Jewish tradition (cf. Ezek. 33:15).[355] Jesus likely desired repentance, but he did not demand it.[356] According to the scriptures, Jesus simply called and individuals followed; there is no indication they changed their ways.[357] As Caputo points out, if in addition to this message of forgiveness, Jesus pronounced the sinners priority to heaven, as is depicted in Matt 21:31, then one can understand why forgiveness such as this was so inflammatory.[358]

In this way and others (e.g.,cleansing of the temple), Jesus contradicted the ways of the world and the world exacted its "justice" upon this just man.[359] This is the shape of the cross, "a

[352] Ibid., 218.
[353] Ibid., 218.
[354] Ibid., 219.
[355] Ibid., 220.
[356] Ibid., 222.
[357] Ibid., 220.
[358] Ibid., 220.
[359] Ibid., 234.

prophetic death, not a sacrificial one, that is, the death of a just man who took a hit for telling the truth, for speaking the prophetic word, for contradicting the world and interdicting its hardness of heart with his parabolic stories of the kingdom."[360] Here Jesus, a victim, reigns in solidarity with all victims; here Jesus, a just man, calls out for justice. A body broken by the powers of this world according to the patterns of this world, Jesus is a response to the call of the event, "God,"[361] who cracks the smooth veneer of Judaism and Roman might and exposes the madness of the event within. From the cross, Jesus calls to *Abba* for the forgiveness of those who are still in their sin and are carrying out an unjust crucifixion of this just man. The shape of his forgiveness denies the economic coherence of the forgiveness of this world; there is no formula and no expectation, only release. This is the way "things work in the mad economics, the an-economics of a sacred anarchy, where abuse is returned by love, where offence is met with forgiveness, where Jesus's complexity disarms the Grand Inquisitor with a kiss, where the strict accounting system in the economy of exchange is thrown into confusion and disarray by uncountable, impossible gifts."[362] The event, "God," is never contained. Forgiveness does not bend to any formula, it is not earned, and there is no debt to pay (even the meager offering of repentance). The event forgiveness found in the life of Jesus denies our logic and our sense of justice that demands recompense.[363] This is the event, "God," a justice/forgiveness/love that defies our capacity to affirm it and calls us onward but has no power to compel us; it is never fully realized but is still to come, the impossible.

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[360] Ibid., 233.

[361] More accurately, Jesus is a particularly compelling response to the event, "God." As such, Jesus is a response to the call, but does not fulfill the call. He is an event in the sense that he embodies the event, thus the event is what is restless within the life of Jesus.

[362] Ibid., 234.

[363] A recompense that is, perhaps, not an eye for an eye, however, some amount of action on the offender's behalf, be it only a changed life, is expected

Conclusion

According to Caputo, God is the undeconstructible and is always understood contextually, never completely. The religious life, if it is to avoid idolatry, is best understood as deconstruction. "For what else is deconstruction but the world of analyzing phenomena that contain what they cannot contain in order to release the event they (cannot) contain?"[364] The doctrine, individuals, practices and institutions are all phenomena astir with what they cannot contain, with the event, "God." Caputo's project exposes Christianity to the event to loose it from the constraining contingencies that fraudulently lay claim to an absolute status. In his own words, "I am trying to displace thinking about God as the highest and the best thing that is *there* by starting to think that God is the call that provokes what is there, the specter that haunts what is there, the spirit that breathes over what is there."[365] The material, concrete instantiation is always provisional. God never fully arrives and is always to come. Still, God is present in the midst of the provisional, which bears witness to the impossible. The weak force of God whispers impossible things. It is a call to a way of life that defies the ways of this world and in contrast is counted as madness. The kingdom of the event is without absolute authority or arbiter; it is defined only by call and response.

The kingdom of God is in the order of the event, and humanity can only hope to achieve a posture of hospitality toward the incoming yet present event, "God." The event is always the other: the incoming of what is unexpected, that which is unconditional. Humanity is called to be open to the possible arrival of the other, though such an arrival never occurs. This is the unconditional hospitality that constitutes openness to the event. Such an openness is dangerous because it welcomes not the friend but the other: the stranger, the enemy, the one who is

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[364] Caputo, *Spectral Hermeneutics*, 52.
[365] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 45.

radically different and possibly hostile.[366] It is a denial of certainty and a vulnerability to the potential of the other. This lack of certainty is not a failure, "but a 'negative capability,' a power to sustain uncertainty that strictures the insistence of hospitality."[367] This hospitality and openness is best articulated by the power of 'perhaps,' which is a yes that is not ready to settle on what is present but desires and anticipates the "to come." The event, "God," is restless and nomadic, both unable and unwilling to be contained.[368] Human beings are astir with the event, "God," translated in to various names: love, justice, gift and hospitality. We are unable to rest and settle on the material systems shaping our lives. For Caputo, human beings have a restlessness reaching beyond our horizon, beyond what we can know and articulate and toward the event named "God, perhaps."

In the following chapter I will employ several ideas found within Caputo's project toward the development of Yoder's notion of power. In specific, hospitality and the call will come to describe the relationship of God's power to humanity. I argue that God's power, love, is a call to love, and such a love does not exist until humanity enacts this call. As such, Caputo's notion of God manifest through the response to the call, as an event, is a notion that will be relied upon heavily throughout. While it is clear that Yoder has in mind a being that exists independent of the created order, the relationship of this being, God, to the created order is not clear. Caputo's rendering, while not necessarily congruent to Yoder's conception, helps us to conceptualize of God as revealed in the lives of those who live in response to the call to love, as *arriving* in deeds of love. Thus, whether God exists in a traditional sense (as Yoder seems to follow), or "exists" according to the order of call and response (as Caputo argues), is not the concern of this paper. In

[366] Caputo, *Insistence of God,* 39-40.
[367] Ibid., 40.
[368] Caputo, *Spectral Hermeneutics*, 82-95.

Yoder's project God is revealed through obedient response to the call to love, as paradigmatically illustrated in the life of the man Jesus.

Chapter Three: Love as Paradigm of Power

If power is "what it takes to make things happen,"[369] then the name "God" has come to identify a being with the power to make anything happen. This name is traditionally synonymous with power.[370] Yet, as we have observed within Caputo, this notion of God is called into question by the life of the man Jesus, who the Christian tradition holds to be the Christ. According to Caputo, Christianity is self-deconstructing as a result of this tension within the tradition.[371] Jesus Christ, who reveals God, does so through a call for *the impossible* (to love our enemies, to forgive all those who have wronged us). His life exists as an event that defies our understanding of power and forces us to reconsider the very notion. What Caputo achieves is a reconsidering of God, not on the basis of an exterior motivation, but one that is present within, and defining of, the tradition itself. If we take seriously that this man Jesus reveals God, then what sort of a God does Jesus reveal? And by what sort of power does this God operate through?

Caputo articulates a God who does not accord to our horizons of possibility. A God who is capable of making anything happen is not a God who is impossible, but a God who is the natural extent of what is possible. If power is simply the means to achieve one's ends—what it takes to make things happen—then God is what we imagine when we carry this idea to its limits. What is impossible to conceive of is a God who is revealed in the broken body of a man on a cross, a God whose power is made perfect in weakness not in strength.[372] Caputo provides an example of

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[369] Yoder, *Jesus and Power*, 447-454. A parallel rendering of power is found in: Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 138.

[370] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 7-9.

[371] Deconstruction is not something done to a text, but something that occurs within the text itself and is observed. Recall that Derrida once described deconstruction as,"…an analysis which tries to find out how [the author's] thinking works or does not work, to find the tensions, the contradictions, the heterogeneity with their own corpus." Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell,* 9.

Regarding "self -deconstructing," Caputo also uses the term, "auto-deconstructing" Ibid., 33, 51 and 74.

[372] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* chapter two.

what can occur when God is understood through the life of Jesus rather than through the confines of the tradition that lays claim to this God. The notion of the sovereign, omni-God, unravels not because of outward critique, but because of the event astir within the tradition itself, of which Jesus is particularly resonant with. God has a history of being interpreted by the tradition of Christianity according to a certain understanding of power, yet within this tradition is a restless event that deconstructs this idea of power and as such God. This is the common thread between Caputo and Yoder, each emphasize the life of Jesus as revealing God, and each assert that what is revealed ruptures our horizons.

For Caputo, the power of God is impossible because it defies our paradigm of power. It is this conception that we must carry forward into our reading of Yoder in order to free ourselves of the pressure to read Yoder's understanding of God according to a traditional interpretation but also to provide Yoder with the possibility of an impossible power. For even though Yoder's project articulates an alternative paradigm of power, he seems unable to glimpse it. This power does not fit into a context of power or weakness, or violence or non-violence.

Ray C. Gingerich provides an example of being confined to the common power—weakness and violence— non-violence definition in application to God. He critiques Yoder's notion of the character of God, asserting that Yoder's depiction of God can be understood as affirming a non-violent God in the New Testament and a Warrior God in the Old Testament.[373] While this critique treads into areas beyond the scope of this project, Gingrich's interest in the paradigm of power that underpins God is the matter at hand for this thesis. Gingrich has framed the issue around non-violence and violence which, at the surface level, is most congruent with

[373] His criticism is traced through Yoder's understanding of the Wrath and Vengeance of God reference in the New Testament (421-425) and Yoder's understanding of the War's of Yahweh as foundational to non-violence of Jesus (425-432). See: Gingerich, *Theological Foundations,* 417-435.

Yoder's own rendering of the issue.[374] But as developed in chapter one, violence and non-violence are conditional upon one's relationship to the other. Violence is a particular means one may use to coerce the other but not the only means for such. For Yoder, the concern at hand is the disregard for the agency of the other; that is, the denial of the other's free agency. In either case, under the assertion that Yoder operates with, two notions of God's agency remain: God depicted as non-violent (non-coercive) through the life of Jesus, and God depicted as violent (coercive) in the Warrior God of the Old Testament. Once again, the issue of interest for this work is not the particular imagery Gingerich is taking issue with but the concept of power that underpins each.

For Gingerich, Yoder's rendering of God is logically incoherent, calling for the community to live non-violently while they are also holding onto a violent notion of God. He states, "for me it is a self-evident truth that an enduring ethics of non-violence cannot finally be grounded in a theology of violence."[375] He elaborates, "or if we assume that ethics precedes theology, the axiom may be stated inversely: The praxis of nonviolence will not produce a theology of violence."[376] Not only is this inconsistency a threat to Yoder's project, it does not follow that a community living according to the way of the non-violent Jesus could accept the notion of a violent God. Such a concept of God can only be sustained for so long before Jesus is reframed as simply obedient to a temporal command of God. Gingerich quotes Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer who states, "without roots in the non-violent character of God, Jesus' nonviolence will be dismissed as part of an 'interim ethic' no longer relevant to people of the twenty-first century, or linked to his status and mission as a 'paschal lamb' slaughtered by God as part of an atoning sacrifice, or

[374] See: John Howard Yoder and others, *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2009).
[375] Gingerich, *Theological Foundations*, 417-435.
[376] Ibid., 418 n 4.

superseded by God's violence."[377] For the sake of Yoder's project, there needs to be coherence between how Jesus and God are understood.

To preserve the notion of non-violence, an integral part of Yoder's project, Gingerich asserts that theologians (indeed, humanity as a whole) must conceive of a new understanding of power. Gingerich argues that the Old Testament imagery of God is operating according to the paradigm of the ancient Hebrews, and we must move beyond it.[378] According to this paradigm, ultimate power—the power of God—was defined by violence.[379] Any attempt to establish a concept of non-violence within this paradigm will always be problematic as it results in the eventual affirmation of the need for a violent God (coercive God) and runs counter to the majority of Yoder's project. Gingerich states, what is needed is "a 'new wineskin' that holds within it the power of the Jesus-event, to preserve the new wine of nonviolent 'resurrection' power. [380] This power is grounded in a non-violent God, incarnated by a community practicing the politics of the nonviolent Jesus."[381] Gingerich does not develop a notion of this power, though he asserts, "the task is nothing less than perceiving (constructing) a new reality of power—power as the Nonviolence-of-God."[382] Gingerich's suggestion is not a new paradigm of power; it is a variation of the old paradigm. The intent of the final section of this thesis is to

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[377] Ibid., 420.
[378] Ibid., 434.
[379] Ibid., 434.
[380] It should be noted that in this work Gingerich has previously identified the resurrection with the community of believers and not a physical resurrection of Jesus, "…a nonviolent Jesus whose life and death are vindicated by the resurrection of a practicing nonviolent body of Christ, the new humanity." Ibid., 434.

Those familiar with Yoder will recognize that discussion of the resurrection are conspicuously missing from my development of Yoder, such has been my intent. My concern was that a discussion of the resurrection within the context of a conversation of power would ultimately devolve into the supernatural power of God and its relationship to life and death. Such was not the interest of this project, and would undoubtedly lead to a metaphysical analysis that Yoder himself would have little time for. That being said, the brief rendering of the resurrection provided here by Gingerich does not preclude the possibility of a physical resurrection of Christ, but it certainly places the emphasis on the life of Christ incarnated in the community. Such is not in contrast to the way in which Yoder presents the resurrection in his project.

[381] Ibid., 435.
[382] Ibid., 435.

uncover a new paradigm of power that is already at work within Yoder's project. The first chapter began to interpret Yoder's project through the lens of non-coercive power, which is counter to coercive-power. What I demonstrate in this section is that the binary of non-coercive and coercive power does not go far enough toward establishing a new understanding of power. Within Yoder's project are the makings of such a paradigm of power; being that he does not clearly articulate such, this paradigm may be unbeknownst to even him. Nonetheless, his emphasis upon *agape* love makes it clear that an alternative notion is operating within his project.

Yoder understands Jesus to reveal God; that is, he emphasizes the unity of the life of Jesus and the Character of the Father. Though such an understanding does not coherently establish the power that Yoder understands God to operate with, it does provide us with a frame of reference to do so. I have characterized Yoder's understanding of power as non-coercive: a power that makes things happen according to a means that upholds and affirms the free-agency of humanity. This notion of power is the logical alternative to coercive power as it is the inverse position. For Yoder, Jesus makes things happen; he has an effect upon the world, and yet, his means are contrary to coercive power. This chapter establishes that the alternative to coercive power, non-coercive power, still accords to the logic of means and ends. Thus, these two concepts of power are of the same paradigm and conditioned by a desire to control. This paradigm of power is problematic because it ensures "effectiveness" is the factor that determines the value of particular actions. I argue that, operating within Yoder's project, there is an alternative paradigm that does not accord to means-and-ends logic and cannot be judged by effectiveness. Such a paradigm of power is, borrowing a concept from Caputo, the impossible, because it defies our very understanding of power. What is revealed in Yoder's project is that God's power does not

achieve anything aside from the occurrence of power itself. It exerts no control, and the effect that this power has is simply the arrival of the event itself. This power is love, and it is developed through Caputo's notions of hospitality, call, and event. What is observed is that the power of God is the arrival of God, and this is the *event* "love."

Power Binary

The notion of power itself is difficult to use as the word carries with it connotations that run counter to the understanding operating in Yoder's project. Within our culture, those who have the most power are understood to be those who can achieve the desire of their will. Power is seen to be the means to secure specific ends. Anecdotally, we observe this in our cultural artifacts with superheroes such as: Superman, Ironman, Spiderman, Batman. What makes each of these individuals "super" is their capacity to overcome their enemies through a superior strength, intelligence or cunning. Within the geopolitical context, we witness consolidation of military and economic might in order to withstand and overcome threats to stability. We intuit from our culture that influence and money provide security and power over reality, which also shelters one from threat and provides the means to desired ends. In each of these situations, power is depicted as the capacity to grasp what one wants. As William C. Placher discusses in his work, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God,* this understanding of power is thought to guard one from weakness. Placher states, "human beings seek power because they are afraid of weakness, afraid of what might happen should they be vulnerable, and so the drive for power that looks like the purest expression of freedom proves in significant degree inspired by an enslaving fear that dares not

risk vulnerability."[383] Human beings strive for power in order to have control and fortify and protect their perceived freedom. Thus, power is understood to be the means to achieve and perpetuate freedom, and freedom is the means to lay hold of the object of one's desire.

Power is understood as instrumental: the capacity one has to achieve particular ends, often with intent to control one's future and ensure stability and freedom. Yet, as Placher rightly notes, this understanding of power is in response to fear and guards against vulnerability by "protecting" oneself from love. When using the word, "power," these types of notions condition the understanding one is developing. Domination, control, triumphalism and the achieving of ends through "strong" means begin to saturate the expectations of what *all* power is. Found within the tradition of Christianity is a different kind of power. Placher states: "but suppose God is not like that [defeating enemies through coercion]. Suppose God, more than anything else, freely loves, and in that love is willing to be vulnerable and to risk suffering."[384] While our culture has "a set of assumptions about power utterly at odds with the 'power' of the cross—power based on fear, power seeking domination, power always edging toward violence,"[385] the power God is defined by is the vulnerability of love. According to the scriptures, it is undeniable that Jesus changes the world through his life and ultimately through the cross. Thus, there is a power at work within the life of Jesus, though this power runs alternative to normative conventions and deconstructs these conceptions. In the concluding statement of *Politics of Jesus*, Yoder also expresses similar sentiments; "the cross of Christ is the model of Christian social efficacy, the power of God for those who believe."[386]

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[383] William C. Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 19.
[384] Ibid., 10.
[385] Ibid., 17.
[386] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 242.

Non-coercive power is understood in contrast to coercive-power. Coercive power is what we mean when we think of power. It is the paradigm that all discussions of power exist within. Coercive power has the means and desire to bend a particular situation toward particular ends. This sort of power does not invite the other to respond but, rather, determines the actions of the other. Contrary to the form of the call found in Caputo's work, this power is not an invitation to a collaborative process; it is a command that has firm content and the authority to enforce such content. Such a power is not open to the future (cf. Caputo), and it does not exist in an environment of risk, for the result is fixed. We see an example of coercive power within the life of Jesus where power is not exercised by Jesus but against him with the cross. In Jesus' time, Rome and the Jewish authority made particularly strong claims and demanded obedience. They did not offer a call but a command with the result of disobedience being physical punishment and, in the case of Jesus, the brutality of the cross. Coercive power establishes a firm horizon that determines what is permissible and possible and bends individuals into obedience to this horizon. The other is subsumed into the horizon: the one who stands outside the horizon is brought in to obedience to it through force. In the case of Jesus, Rome and the Jewish authorities intended to bring Jesus' movement into obedience to the normative horizon through his public execution. They believed this would end the movement because of the threat that the cross represented. Here, the command they delivered was, "abide by our ways, or endure the cross." Coercive power was the means used to apprehend, torture and execute Jesus, making him a public display and statement to those who sympathized with him. What this power desired to achieve was stability in the face of the threat Jesus represented, which ultimately can be located in the way of life he enacted and the way it challenged and denied the normative claims of the culture.[387] Jesus

[387] Jesus is understood to be the Messiah, to be identified with God, and as such to be in competition with the

was an event that caught the Roman Empire and Jewish authorities by surprise, and they respond to this threat by coercing it into obedience through the enforcement of "justice."[388]

Had Jesus followed the way of the Zealot and taken up the sword to overthrow the authorities, he would have been operating according to the logic of coercive power. Such *means* would have supported the coercive logic of the Powers and operated toward the *ends* of establishing Jesus' "new order."[389] A revolt such as this would have done nothing to transform the logic that governs revolution, and it would have reinforced the logic in place. The Powers and Principalities operate according to the logic of coercion and proceed as if what is "right" and "true" is achieved through strength (which is the ability to define a situation). The logic of non-coercive power stands as the antithesis of this reason, and its ends are not achieved through strength but through what is perceived as weakness.

Non-coercive power is not a concept readily available to our comprehension because, by in large, it is an underdeveloped notion. We can best understand it through observing its activity. Yoder points to Gandhi and Martin Luther King, and the movements they represented, as examples that operated according to a logic running parallel to his own reasoning of power.[390]

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claims of the Emperor. Furthermore, it is clear in the exchange between Pilate and Jesus that there is a threat to stability by way of a Jewish riot. Jesus is not only a threat to the claims of the Roman Empire, but a threat to peace because of the unrest that he is fostering within the Jewish people. See Matthew 27.

[388] Here I employ the word Justice somewhat ironically. It is clear from Gospel narrative that Jesus was an innocent man—even Pilate indicates that he has not committed a crime warranting death—nonetheless, Jesus is put to death. For the Jewish authority this was certainly seen as the enacting of Justice, and while Pilate does not seem to necessarily believe such he does label Jesus as the King of the Jesus, and as such an insurrectionist worthy of the Justice of the cross.

[389] Which assumes that there would be a particular order to be established. The logic here is that Jesus would overturn one order for the establishment of another order. I argue, as will be clear, that this is incompatible with the logic at work within Yoder's project, because the means and ends of Jesus are one and the same, and they are love. Love is not something that can be programmed or systematized, it can only be acted out. Love accords to the order of the event, it is not bound by particular form or expectation. It is a happening that ruptures our horizons. Thus, Jesus does establish a "new order," but it is new all the way down, it does not accord to a means to ends paradigm, but one of pure means.

[390] Gandhi and Martin Luther King would be examples of individuals who advocated non-coercive power. Each was advocating non-violent programs against oppressive systems and toward particular ends. Yoder himself discusses Ghandi and King as resonate with his (Yoder's) project in: Yoder, *War of the Lamb,* chapter three in

Both Gandhi and King pursued particular ends of liberation and equality through means that accord to the end itself (cf. Non-violence).[391] Thus, an end is being pursued but not at the expense of the other (the oppressor.)

Non-coercive power is also observed in God's involvement within the community of believers, as found in Yoder's book, *Body Politics*. To begin with, Yoder does not differentiate between God's action and that of the church, nor does he speak of God as an agent working through the church that compels the church toward certain ends. Yoder speaks of the efforts of the church as synonymous to God and states, "the community's action is God's action."[392] Within the context of this quote Yoder is speaking to the action of "binding and loosing." In order to understand what Jesus meant when he said, "what you bind on earth is bound in heaven,"[393] Yoder unpacks Matt. 18:15 through Matt.18:18.[394] He argues that what is at stake is "moral discernment and reconciliation," a process wrestled out communally with the intention of restoration.[395] Implicit to this practice is actual and complete forgiveness of the individual and reconciliation of the "offender" to the community as carried out by the community. Yoder establishes that forgiveness can be found within the community, and one is reconciled to God through the relationships of the church community, not through some sort of divine force that operates upon the community.

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particular. Weaver and Zimmerman also engage with Yoder's theology and Ghandi, in: J Denny Weaver and Earl Zimmerman, "Interfaith Conversations," in *John Howard Yoder: Radical Theologian*, ed. J Denny Weaver (Cascade Books, 2014), 288-291.

[391] Of King, Yoder quotes Richardson who states, "In order to overcome this kind of evil, faith does not attack the men who do evil but the structure of evil which makes men act violently. Hence there must be an *asymmetry* between the form in which evil manifests itself the form of our opposition to evil. We should meet violence with nonviolence." John Howard Yoder, Paul Henry Martens, Matthew Porter, and Myles Werntz, *Nonviolence: A Brief History: The Warsaw Lectures* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2010), 37.

[392] Yoder, *Body Politics,* 3.

[393] Matthew 18:18 quoted from: Yoder, *Body Politics,* 1.

[394] Yoder quotes Matt 18:15 as, "If your brother or sister sins, go and reprove that person when the two of you are alone. If he or she listens, you have won your brother or sister." Ibid., 1.

[395] Ibid., 2-3.

Yoder does not distinguish between what God is doing or will do in the future. Whatever notion of agency attributed to God by Yoder is carried out through the activities of the church. He does not distinguish what God, the agent, is doing at all. He locates the activities of the church with God's activities. God is not depicted as commanding the church to adhere to particular standards or ordaining particular events. Rather, the community is depicted as living by love for the other. The church carries out God's activities, and these activities are not dependent upon an outside intervention from God, they are understood simply as the routine workings of the community. As Yoder states, "what the believers do, God is doing, in and through human action."[396] Later in the text, he echoes the same sentiment, "[the actions of the community described in *Body Politics*] are actions of God, in and with, through and under what men and women do. Where they are happening, the people of God is real in the world."[397] Thus, there is a sense that God is not coercing the church, but rather, God is manifest within the church. Thus, God is not in control of the community, God is inspiring the community, calling it beyond itself.

In Yoder's project, God does not coerce humanity into a particular standard of life. Instead, the community wrestles with what is "right" according to non-coercive means. Yoder does not assign a static nature to moral principles, for him it is clear that what is understood to be "right" by the community is discerned contextually.[398] This is not to say that each community and each generation starts afresh, but generations to come are confronted with unanticipated

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[396] Ibid., 6.

[397] Ibid., 72-73.

[398] Yoder states, "It is at the same time the mode whereby the community's standards are clarified and, if need be, modified. What in the Mosaic vision was to be done in every locality by 'the elders in the gate' was later systematized in the role of the rabbi, who was not so much preacher or a priest as a steward of the communities moral memory. The ongoing rabbinic process of binding and loosing creates a deposit of precedents and principles known as *halavah*, the 'walk' or the 'way,' the moral tradition. The precise meanings of its guidelines are constantly fine-tuned and updated through the face-to-face exchange about its contemporary application." Ibid., 5.

events and must make decisions in light of these new contexts. As Yoder states, "the Christian community has thereby been endowed with the wherewithal for ongoing moral discernment in the face of questions which could not conceivably have been answered substantially ahead of time."[399] The practice of binding and loosing is how the community of believers wrestles with what is "right" and "wrong." It is a communal discussion where all members have the opportunity to be heard. The process concludes when an uncoerced consensus is achieved, and the result of such a process is determined to be "God's will."[400]

Through conversation with one another, a practice born from the hope of reconciliation, the community discerns when its rules need to be reconstructed. As Yoder states,

> Conversation with reconciling intent is the most powerful way for a community to discover when the rules that have been applying are inadequate, so that they may be modified. Asking whether there has really been offence helps determine which differences need to be resolved by coming to unanimity be means of dialogue and forgiveness and which call for agreement to differ. Having experience forgiveness together enables a community to deliberate in an otherwise inaccessible mode of trust.[401]

This is a community of love; it desires reconciliation and strives for it through forgiveness and a deep engagement with the structures of the community itself.

Here, following Caputo, we find nothing less than openness (hospitality) to the event. The community lives according to hospitality, open to the arrival of the other and the conflict that the other may bring. This process is not unlike Justice and the Law: the law gives shape to justice, yet does not contain it. Justice is restless and realized in events that challenge the law for the sake of justice. The community of believers, like any human project, is governed by certain standards and rules— it exists within a horizon that gives it identity—yet, for the sake of this community, the rules giving shape to the identity are challenged by the identity itself. For the

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[399] Ibid., 8.
[400] Ibid., 67.
[401] Ibid., 6.

sake of love, the community is open to losing itself. It is in the moment that the community opens itself to and welcomes the other that God arrives. This rupturing event is the advent of God and how the community moves throughout time. The community is reconfigured by its love, and this love is the non-coercive power of God.

This community should not be confused with a utopian ideal that sees consensus as being granted to the people magically and without discord. Such unity would affirm an agent who intercedes in human affairs by miraculously achieving harmony despite the interests and efforts of those in discord. Yoder is clear that this communal process is fraught with conflict, but how the community addresses such conflict—motivated by a hope for reconciliation— is of significance. As Yoder states, "to be human is to have differences, not by building up conflicting power claims but by reconciling dialogue. Conflict is socially useful; it forces us to attend to new dates from new perspectives."[402] Furthermore, "to be human is to be in conflict, to offend and to be offended. To be human in the light of the gospel is to face conflict in redemptive dialogue. When we do that, it is God who does it."[403] The emphasis of Yoder's theology and the place where God is found is in the means of how the conflict is dealt with amongst human beings. Not coincidentally, this process bears a striking resemblance to Yoder's understanding of Jesus and the love for the enemy that he lived. God is not found in the coercion of the other toward a particular end; God is found in the discord present in the redemptive dialogue that is derived from loving the other. The community is bound together by a love that overrides the differences that will inevitably arise.

If we recall Yoder's use of the Rule of Paul, as reviewed in chapter one of this work and discussed at length in chapter five of *Body Politics*, this process of conflict is found in a

[402] Ibid., 8.
[403] Ibid., 13.

voluntary community comprising members of equal dignity. Each member has the right to voice their concerns; Yoder states, "Paul tells his readers that everyone who has something to say, something given by the Holy Spirit to him or her to say, can have the floor. The others who were speaking before are instructed to yield the floor to him or her."[404] The floor is open to those who will speak, and while the message is understood to be from the Holy Spirit, there are no conditions placed on what this message should entail. This is openness to the other (cf. Hospitality) through the creation of a space where alternative voices can be heard. If the only voices given audience were those of the same, there would be no conflict. Difference is implicit to the human condition, and the goal of the community is not to suppress these differences but confront the conflict arising when the *same* meets the *other*. The other is not subsumed into the same; they are a part of a new horizon and a new creation, wherein they are unified even in their differences.[405] For Yoder, this is what is celebrated in Baptism, the breaking down of the walls or binaries that divide: Jew/Greek, Male/Female, Master/Slave. As Yoder states, "baptism introduces or initiates persons into a new people. The distinguishing mark of this people is that all prior given or chosen identity definitions [that which divides us] are transcended."[406] Once again, this is not to conflate the differences into a sameness, but to maintain the differences while living in union with one another.[407] The community developed within Yoder's project is something new and something perplexing. As Caputo may say, it is something treading in the realm of the impossible.[408]

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[404] Ibid., 61.
[405] Ibid., 30.
[406] Ibid., 28.
[407] Yoder speaks specifically to this by criticizing Western cultures individualism and "melting pot" integration. Yoder, *Body Politics,* 21-22.
[408] That is to say, it is impossible for a community to live as such, and yet it is this possibility that founds the community, it is living toward this impossibility that defines this sort of community. The idea of a community comprised of differences, unified in spite of their distinctive qualities, is a contradictory notion, yet it is this contradiction that founds the community.

Non-coercive power is at work in this community. Something is happening (getting done within the community) as a result of a kind of power, though it is not an activity controlled by an overriding force, be that force transcendent (God) or present (authorities within the community). It can be imagined that the issues these communities wrestled with are issues of deepest importance. Likely, they are issues about how the community ought to live and what the community ought to believe.[409] The result of such dialogue is not set in stone because there is not a sovereign voice ruling over the proceedings. Perhaps what can be said is that the proceedings are governed by a sovereign will. That is to say, a sovereign love is directed toward the other, making space for the other. According to Yoder's project, by creating a space for the other to speak, the community is open to what may come and exerts no coercive force over the result.

The hope, desire, and goal that this community is striving after is not a particular belief[410] but a particular outcome: consensus. Clearly consensus can be construed as something with a coercive underpinning. Coercion can be easily found in a group where the majority intimidates the minority into accordance with their vision. There is nothing innately open or non-coercive about consensus in and of itself. However, situated within Yoder's project, it is impossible for consensus to be achieved through coercion and remain an action of love. If the community coerced the other into embracing the same idea, they would not be acting in love but priding their beliefs and foundations over that of the other and making the other like they are. This is not the message that runs throughout Yoder's project. Power is not found in the ability to bring the other into proper order but to make space for the other to choose love. Here in the church, Yoder depicts a love that makes space for the other at the expense of the self: the other is welcomed to

[409] Perhaps an example of this is Acts 15 and the issues that had to be dealt with regarding the inclusion of the gentile.

[410] By "particular belief" I mean that the community is not longing after specificity of outcome, but a particular way in which that outcome will be derived. It is the process that generates the outcome; whatever outcome, the *meaning* is in the means not the end result.

speak, whatever will be said will be heard, and whatever will come of it will come. The church that preceded the conversation may come out changed on the other side. In a sense, we could say that the community that was will have died. Through this death, the church will be resurrected: something new will be born through the consensus. It is the commitment of the church to making space for the other that will provide its undoing; yet, it is precisely in this commitment to the other that the church is most itself. Here we see the non-coercive power alive in the Church, moving it forward but not coercively.

Deconstructing the Binary

I have presented coercive and non-coercive power as different kinds of power, but by positioning one as the power of God and the other as characteristic of the world, I have constructed a binary. While this binary does express an alternative (non-coercive power) to the more prominent understanding of coercive power, it still accords to means-and-ends logic. This is problematic because a new paradigm of power has yet to be established. Yoder delineates between the way the world operates and the way Jesus operates, and to characterize his understanding of power according to this binary is not inaccurate, but it is incomplete. Within Yoder's project is a profound reordering of the concept of power itself. To limit the understanding of God's power to this binary is to identify such a power as a negation of an existing concept.[411] Non-coercive power itself is a notion reacting to that of coercive power. It does not question the conditions of coercive power: means to ends. Thus, it is still a power operating toward a particular end by attempting to have a tangible effect and is prone to be

[411] Glen Harold Stassen, "A Nonviolent Public Ethic," in *John Howard Yoder: Radical Theologian*, ed. J Denny Weaver (Cascade Books, 2014), 265.

judged by its effectiveness. On the surface, such a notion seems to offer something new, yet, means are still linked to ends, which ensures that the means are legitimized by what is achieved.

Yoder has in mind a notion of power beyond the simple means and ends relationship of our common paradigm, but he still gives himself over to the validity found in "effectiveness." Yoder states, "thus to follow Jesus does not mean renouncing effectiveness. It does not mean sacrificing concern for liberation with the social process in favour of delayed gratification in heaven, or abandoning efficacy in favour of purity."[412] Yoder argues that there is an alternative causation at work, and counter to the logic of this world, certain *means* can be effective if they accord to the shape God's logic, which is "the grain of the cosmos."[413] He carries this logic forward into his engagement with Gandhi and Martin Luther King by arguing that each was operating according to this alternative causation.[414] While Yoder attempts to distance himself from the legitimation of means by the ends achieved, he ultimately still gestures toward such:

> To say with King, 'love is the most durable power in the world,' or 'there is something in the universe that unfolds for justice,' is not to claim a sure insight into the way martyrdom works as a social power, *although martyrdom often does that.* It is confessional or kerygmatic statement made by those whose loyalty to Christ (or to universal love, or to satyagraha) they understand to be validated by its cosmic ground. Suffering love is not right because it 'works' in any calculable short-run way (*although it often does*). It is right because it goes with the grain of the universe, and that is why in the long run nothing else will work.[415]

Clearly, Yoder is torn. He wants to dismiss the pressure of the expectation to achieve ends, but he also wants to assert that these alternative means have the desired effect. His use of Gandhi and King are at once supportive yet problematic to his project. Yoder can show that the means of non-violence (non-coercion) have an effect, however, his message is blurred by the achievement

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[412] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 246.

[413] Ibid..

[414] Engagement with these individuals can be found in: John Howard Yoder, *Nevertheless,* chapter five.; Yoder, *War of the Lamb,* chapter three.; Yoder, *Nonviolence,* chapter one and two.

[415] Yoder, *War of the Lamb,* 62. (emphasis added)

of particular ends. While Yoder asserts that these non-violent means do not guarantee ends, the examples of Gandhi and King and his understanding of the universe bent in favour of certain means (cf. Grain of the cosmos), suggest otherwise. The question must be asked: if these acts of suffering love did not achieve the intended end each individual was striving after, would they still be effective? Would they still be means worth following?

Thus, we can see a tension in Yoder's text. He wants to argue that means are all that matter, while also claiming the legitimacy of (often) achieving one's desired ends. Thus, Yoder's project is self-deconstructing the notion of power. His broader project points toward a means without ends, which ensures that his attempts to satisfy the legitimacy of "effectiveness" must be recast. While Yoder still aligns his notion of power with a negation that exists within the common paradigm (ex. non-violence), the implications of his project reach beyond such a paradigm.[416] Caputo recalls Derrida reflecting on deconstruction as an "experience of the impossible," which is precisely what we are experiencing within Yoder's project.[417] Yoder refers to power as pointing "in all its modulations to some kind of capacity to make things happen,"[418] a formulation that, with no further clarification, is adherent to means and ends logic.[419] Yet, as observed in his discussion of "binding and loosing" and "consensus," Yoder is not interested in ends, but simply means. What sort of power is without ends? Is this not an impossible contradiction of our logic? How are we to conceive of this kind of power, and how can it be rendered as effective? It would seem that we have reached a limit to our logic, and what Yoder desires after lies beyond us. This is deconstruction.

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[416] As will be discussed, his critique of "effectiveness" in the final chapter of *Politics of Jesus* is a criticism of means-and-ends logic. See: Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus,* chapter twelve: "The War of the Lamb."

[417] Derrida found such an explanation of deconstruction to be the "'least bad' way to define deconstruction." Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell,* 32.

[418] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 138.

[419] "some kind of capacity" is equivalent to means, while "make things happen" is understood as ends.

Inspired by Caputo's project, we are not searching for a notion of power grounded in what we can conceive of, such as something that adheres to our rational systems, but a notion of power that disrupts our systems. Non-coercive power is contingent and relative to what we understand as coercive power, both are grounded in a desire to control. The impossible power, a power of the absolute future, is not a power we can anticipate but that which is unknown and what we cannot see coming.[420] Thus, the new paradigm of power in Yoder's project does not accord to our reason and is destined to be paradoxical and without value. The intent here is not to establish a notion of power that makes firm sense, for such an accomplishment would ensure that we are speaking in the order of our common paradigm. Instead, the desire is to articulate a notion that stretches us, makes us uncomfortable and seems impossible. This is the character of Caputo's project as a whole, and we must proceed with him in mind. Where Caputo's project observes a notion of deconstruction within the tradition of Christianity and articulates a God—the event that goes by the name "God"— existing beyond that paradigm of orthodoxy, we embark upon a similar trajectory regarding the orthodoxy of power.[421] The intent is not to establish a new law or found a new form of power by which the church is to understand God and mandate his rule within the world. No, the intent is to step into the darkness and, in faith, embrace the impossible.

While the power binary expands the notion of power, it is necessary to move beyond this understanding to establish a new paradigm of power within Yoder's project. We are not done

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[420] The absolute future runs counter to the future present (that in which we are trending, what is "here" but has yet to arrive) because it is that which arrives suddenly and without warning, that which "is unforeseeable…that will come like a thief in the night (1 Thess. 5:2) and shatter the comfortable horizons of expectation that surround the present." The domain of the absolute future is "…beyond the domain of sensible possibilities that we can get our hands on, into a darker and more uncertain and unforeseeable region, into the domain of 'God knows what.'" Caputo, *On Religion*, 7-9.

[421] Relating God to the very notion of power, a coercive to notion to be sure, Caputo is also clearly dealing with the notion of power itself.

with the binary of coercive and non-coercive power, though it is merely a transitional state that allows for us to arrive at an alternative view. Non-coercive power allows us to conceive of an alternative to coercive power, but we must past through it to a notion beyond the means and ends logic of this paradigm. The power working within Yoder's project does not accord to the logic of weak/strong and coercive/non-coercive. It transcends these dichotomies and exists as a more radical incarnation. These binaries remain adherent to a common form: means and ends. Accordingly, they are two sides of the same coin, more similar than dissimilar in their essence. While the means may differ to a great degree, each of the concepts of power in this binary is always striving toward a particular end. Yoder's project presents a notion of power that disrupts the relationship of means *to* ends as his is a power of means *as* ends.

We previously discussed power as instrumental: that which allows one to achieve desired ends. This relationship of means to ends ensures that power is not only the capacity to achieve desired ends; it is how the ends will be achieved. According to the power binary, we can say that coercive power achieves desired ends by forcing the entities involved to bend to one's will, while non-coercive power is dependent upon the entities involved to willingly take part in the achievement of the desired ends. In either case, there is a parallel form at work: power is used to achieve a particular end. While each side of this binary may operate in opposing ways, the intention is still the same: achieving a result. Thus, for power to be *power* there must be some sort of tangible effect. The effect is bound up within the end itself and defined by the effectiveness of the power being used to achieve that particular end. Thus, power is a means to effect a particular end, and the goal of power is to arrive at the desired end. Power is necessary when an end has been established, and the end dictates the type of power that should be used.

If power is understood as a relationship of one to the *ends* of their desire, then one must consider how to navigate the distance between the absence and acquisition of the desired object. While the object may be something concrete, such as food or shelter, or vague, such as peace or equality, the end is the reason power is enacted. Thus, the ends determine the need for means to begin with. The binary of power developed in this work responds to a concrete object of desire, and the means to power (coercive or non-coercive) will always be secondary to the end result. When an end is as high and noble as peace, the means deemed justified — the type of power that is understood to be necessary—become subordinate to the ends. Peace can become what we desire to achieve, regardless of the means.[422] Justice can be rendered according to a similar form: in the face of injustice, acts of justice can be accepted through whatever means are necessary to cease the injustice. That is to say, "justice" can be achieved through the death of those who are carrying out the injustice.

Coercive power promises results, while non-coercive power cannot; such logic is typical and leads to the majority of means finding their base in coercive power rather than non-coercive. In this binary, each notion of power desires after the same thing: to effect a situation toward a certain direction (toward a particular end). The distinction is that non-coercive power, as rendered thus far, is unwilling to exert a force upon the situation to guarantee the desired ends. If peace and justice are the desired end, coercive power would see the overpowering of an individual to achieve the desired results as compatible with the ends, while non-coercive power would not. The result of coercive power may ensure "peace" through the death of those who stand in the way, such as the results of a strategic air strike upon a terrorist cell. Non-coercive

[422] The ends can drive individuals to impatience regarding their means. Yoder touches on this in his engagement with Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement, "The firmness of King's commitment to nonviolence began to be disavowed by younger critics, although no such critic ever could contest his leadership stature, or replace him after his death. The impatience of some of them made it harder to keep occasional local demonstrations from erupting into violence." Yoder, *Nonviolence*, 36.

power would judge this act as a further perpetuation of injustice and absent of peace because of the perpetuated violence. Non-coercive power attempts to achieve peace and justice through means like foreign aid or education[423] and would likely appear to have little to no effect in severely cruel and terrifying situations, such as individuals being beheaded or burned alive. In the face of such horrible events, non-coercive power would seem to be working against the ends of peace and justice and would be discarded for stronger and more certain means. Here, the parallel logic is rendered clearly, both coercive and non-coercive power operate toward the achievement of particular ends. The difference between each is also clear: coercive power attempts to control history while non-coercive power denies methods of direct control.

In either case, each of these types of power are utilized toward achieving a result. While coercive power and non-coercive power are structured according to alternative means, each adhere to a means and ends logic. Thus, while the ends are pursued through divergent means, the intent is still to control a particular situation and direct it toward particular ends. The power of Rome and the power of Gandhi may look to be opposite, and according to means, they are, but the form of this power— means to ends— is the same. My argument is not whether one power, coercive or non-coercive, is more effective— the situation Yoder strays into— but rather, that Yoder reads Jesus as showing more radical understanding of power. The power observed within Yoder's project stands in contrast to this power binary and ruptures the logic of means and ends as Jesus enacts means that are, in and of themselves, their own ends.

The key to understanding the power at work within Yoder's project is found in the way he addresses means and ends. For Yoder, means and ends must be equivalent, such an argument has already been established. If one is attempting to bring about justice or peace, the means that such

[423] These examples are thrown out with little development intentionally. They are simply used as placeholders for whatever this sort of power, contextualized, would look like.

ends are achieved through must represent one another. Regarding the church, it must have an inner coherence that aligns with the message it proclaims. It is imperative that the ends that the church desires are achieved through a medium that runs parallel to those desires. Thus, love is not achieved through ends that run contrary to the love itself. A community that seeks to live a Godly life and desires to live in the way of Jesus is a community who must love, and love is not something that is prescribed, determined or forced. Rather, love is something that is felt, responded to and faithfully lived in. The radical move at play within the work of Yoder is the *merging* of means and ends; which is to say, the ends are the means and the means are the ends. The distinction here is that the means are not living toward particular ends; the means are simply living. Said otherwise, the means are not attempting, either coercively or non-coercively, to direct history toward any ends. Rather, the ends are recast as the occurrence of the means themselves. Jesus does not call one to love as a means to achieve certain ends. His call is absent of ends, and it is a call to love for the sake of the act itself. Such an argument, means *as* ends, is beyond Yoder's explicit understanding, yet it is clearly operating within his project.

Let us return to our previous discussion of "binding and loosing." We can now say that observed in Yoder's development is an assertion that the *means* of discernment are of utmost importance. According to Yoder, "…the shape of the people of God does matter. Medium and message cannot be divorced. The New Testament witness is helpful when read straightforwardly but not legalistically. It enables…paths to change without infidelity, fidelity without rigidity."[424] For Yoder, the particular results that the community comes to are not of utmost concern. Rather, it is the means from whence these results are discerned that is of emphasis. Though Yoder does not state such specifically, the inference is that a community who operates according to love will

[424] Yoder, *Body Politics,* 10.

come to the conclusions they "should."[425] This resonates with my development of Yoder in chapter one of this work: the ethics that Yoder draws from the life of Jesus are not specific rules or a particular code but are more akin to a principle, orientation or disposition. Yoder is not interested in a particular standard but how individuals wrestle with what *is* standard and, more particularly, how individuals treat one another.

The details of the community are risky business as it is not clear or predictable what a community will discern and only how they ought to treat one another as they carry out these discernments is described. It is love for the other that animates the community, a love that transcends the societal and traditional differences present. This is the power of God, love that binds the community together and gives birth to the particular practices and beliefs of the community. The rules that will come to structure the lives of those in the church are derived from a desire for the other, from hospitality. The particular rules are not fixed but are contextual. The future identity of the community, aside from its commitment to love, is not absolute. This is a posture of hospitality toward the event: the deeds that give birth to God are always still to come.

In "The War of the Lamb," the final chapter of *Politics of Jesus*, Yoder is very critical of any attempt to command history in a particular direction. This criticism is founded on the basis of the *ends*: whether humanity can discern the suitable ends that history should be directed toward, whether such a direction can be achieved and a concern for how these ends can come to justify contradictory means.[426] Yoder critiques nothing less than our common notion of power.

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[425] Which is to say, they will come to conclusions which accord to love itself. Here I am not intending to suggest that the community is striving after the particular position God would have them uphold, I am suggesting that for Yoder the particular position is love, and all else follows from such.

[426] "If we look critically at these assumptions we discover that they are by no means as self-evident as they seem to be a t first. There is for one thing the phenomenon Reinhold Niebuhr has called "irony": that when people try to manage history, it almost always turns out to have taken another direction than that in which they thought they were guiding it. This may mean that we are not morally qualified to set the goals toward which we would move history. At least it must mean that we are not capable of discerning and managing its course when there are in the same theater of operation a host of other free agents, each of them in their own way also acting under the same

While he pursues this critique through the use of cause and effect language, the logic is parallel to means and ends, which can be distilled into a desire to control the course of history. Yoder identifies that within the Western tradition, from Constantine to Luther,[427] there exists a desire to direct history in the "right" direction. It is in this orientation toward ends that the means can be subsumed.[428] Yoder states,

> One seeks to lift up one focal point in the midst of the course of human relations, one thread of meaning and causality which is more important than individual persons, their lives and well being, because it in itself determines wherein their well-being consists. Therefore it is justified to sacrifice to this one "cause" other subordinate values, including the life and welfare of one's self, one's neighbor, and (of course!) one's enemy.[429]

Thus, the ends are the desired effect of a particular cause (or means), and the ends come to determine whatever means are deemed necessary. In short, the ends justify the means.

The means deemed necessary are governed by their effectiveness. Thus, the mode of power used depends upon how effective it is at achieving the desired end result. Yoder is critical of this logic:

> Even if we know how effectiveness is to be measured—that is, even if we could get a clear definition of the goal we are trying to reach and how to ascertain whether we had reached it— is there not in Christ's teaching on meekness, or in attitude of Jesus toward power and servanthood, a deeper question being raised about whether it is our business at all to guide our action by the course we wish history to take?[430]

Here, Yoder is critical of the very notion of control, essentially stating that: if we could determine that we have achieved our desired ends, are such ends congruent with the Gospel? As

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assumptions as to their capacity to move history in their direction. Thus even apart from other more spiritual considerations, the strategic calculus is subject to a very serious internal question. It has yet to be demonstrated that history can be moved in the direction in which one claims the duty to cause it to go." Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 230.

[427] Ibid., 229.

[428] "Once a desirable course of history has been labeled, once we known what the right cause is, then it is further assumed that we should be willing to sacrifice for it; sacrifice not only our own values but also those of the neighbor and especially the enemy. In other words, the achievement of the good cause, the implementation in history of the changes we have determined to be desirable, creates a new autonomous ethical value, "relevance," itself a good in the name of which evil may be done." Ibid., 238.

[429] Ibid., 229.

[430] Ibid., 230.

already stated, they would not be. It is not simply that we cannot measure our achievement; rather, we cannot even determine what proper ends would comprise. Furthermore, if such ends could be defined and effectiveness measured, it is counter gospel to *direct*— to control— history toward such ends. Yoder summarizes this when speaking of Philippians 2:

> …probably the first meaning of the hymn was the more concrete Godlikeness promised by the serpent to Adam in the Garden, which would have consisted in unchecked dominion over creation. Or perhaps it refers as well to a kind of Godlikeness claimed by Caesar. What Jesus renounced was thus not simply metaphysical status of sonship but rather the untrammelled sovereign exercise of power in the affairs of that humanity amid which he came to dwell. His emptying of himself, his accepting the form of servanthood and obedience unto death, is precisely his renunciation of lordship, his apparent abandonment of obligation to be effective in making history move down the right track.[431]

The power that is exhibited within Yoder's project is not driven by or judged according to "effectiveness." For Yoder, the ends do not justify the means, nor are the ends of importance. Thus, the means are not moving toward any particular future accomplishment. Power does not have a telos. Thus, it cannot be judged by its effectiveness because it is not intending to have any singular effect.[432] The power operating within Yoder's project is not governed by a means and ends form, it is understood according to means alone. Such can be discerned from Yoder's clarification of suffering and the cross:

> We thus do not adequately understand what the church was praising in the work of Christ, and what Paul was asking his readers to be guided by, if we think of the cross as a peculiarly efficacious technique (probably effective only in certain circumstances) for getting one's way. The key to the ultimate relevance and to the triumph of the good is not any calculations at all, paradoxical or otherwise, or efficacy, but rather obedience. Obedience means not keeping verbally enshrined rules but reflecting the character of the love of God. The cross is not a recipe for resurrection. Suffering is not a tool to make people come around, nor a good in itself. But the kind of faithfulness that is willing to accept evident defeat rather than complicity with evil is, by virtue of its conformity with what happens to God when he works among us, aligned with the ultimate triumph of the Lamb.[433]

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[431] Ibid., 235.

[432] At least it is not intending to have any sort of effect that adheres to our worldly rational of the notion *effect.*

[433] Ibid., 237-38.

Here, and throughout Yoder's project, obedience is not adherence to a particular law but is understood as living love. Thus, obedience to God can be understood as living the way of Jesus, which is a way oriented around seeking the good of the other (every other) and open to the shape that may take (cf. event). Such an orientation cannot be mandated or firmly structured, as this would no longer reflect love. The power that Yoder is talking about is defined by the act of love, which is not strategic, programmatic or causal, it is simply event. Any claims toward "effectiveness" must be recast as the occurrence of the event, love. Yoder is not saying that love is an effective means toward specified ends but, rather, that love is the means to love. Love is the effect of love and, only as such can it be understood as "effective."

The power at work within Yoder's project does not simply accord to an alternative means but is alternative to the means and ends schema. While Yoder uses Gandhi and King to show how non-violence can and does have an effect in the world, such movements do not accord to his depiction of the life of Jesus. As developed thus far, Jesus is not an alternative to Rome alone, but also to Gandhi and King. While the shape of Jesus' life may appear as non-violent, bearing resemblance to Gandhi's and King's efforts, Jesus was not operating toward a particular end, as they were. Rather, Jesus lived a life of love and was the ends he pursued. Jesus renounced any claim to control, the hallmark of the worldly notion of power, be it manifested through coercive or non-coercive means.

Love as Paradigm of "Power"

Love is not part of the power binary developed thus far because love cannot be instrumentalized toward particular ends. To call love a power would be to suggest that it can be used to achieve the object of one's desire, however, love is incapable of coercion and is not

something that can be forced. If one is called to love one's enemies and neighbours, they are called to something other than coercion, which leads us to non-coercive power. While one is operating in a way that does not coerce but calls to and inspires the other, non-coercive power is still always working toward particular ends, which runs counter to the essence of love. Love is not a strategy used to achieve particular ends, as this would debase love by conditioning it. One does not love because of what will result from the act of loving; love cares for, serves and sacrifices for the other, not because of the intended effect, but because love finds its existence in such acts. Love is not an economic exchange: one does not love because it guarantees a certain return on investment. While love may hope for reciprocation, it exists despite dashed hopes. Love, as the means to achieve an outcome, undercuts the unconditional essence of love, which gives of oneself without expecting reciprocation. Love is not the means to equality—the power by which social strata are levelled—for love is always unequal and is understood as the lifting up of the other over the self.

To say that love is a non-coercive power does get at one aspect observed in love: that it seems incapable of coercion. However, such a description also does a disservice to love by positioning it as a means and marrying it to the need for ends. Thus, love as non-coercive power would always be understood according to its effect. One could then judge how "effective" love is in achieving a desired end, at which point the act would have ceased to be love. Love cannot be understood as power (according to the common paradigm), because this understanding reduces love to a handle upon history, and a means to steer events toward a specific end. This understanding of love is counter to not only the concept of love itself but also to Yoder's project.

The power of love is conceived of as a means *without* ends. Yoder does not position his project as achieving particular ends. At best, it can be said that he is espousing a disposition of

faith. The power operating within Yoder's project is not a power that desires to achieve anything other than the instance of power itself: love does not desire to achieve particular ends other than the instance of love itself.[434] While the cross is understood through the lens of Atonement, Yoder takes up an alternative reading that emphasizes the life lived by Jesus.[435] For Yoder, through the cross the hindrance between man and God is eliminated which restores the relationship of God and man.[436] This is achieved by the enactment of a life that revealed the existence God had intended for humanity.[437] Thus, humanity is living in either obedience or disobedience to God. The former is faith, which for Yoder means: "…not the mere acceptance of the proclamation that Jesus died because of our guilt. It is rather commitment to the faith-union of obedience made available to us through the perfect triumphant obedience of Christ."[438] Thus, for Yoder, Jesus did not come to achieve a simple or revolutionary end through coercion or non-coercion, he rather came to live *love*. It is through this love (what Yoder understands as obedience to God and

[434] For Yoder, humanity has turned from communion with God. That is, because of the freedom that God has granted humanity, humanity has turned from the love of God. It is only through love that this communion can be reconciled. Thus, the "end" that Yoder describes is equivalent to the means: love. As Yoder states, "We can now state the problem which atonement must solve; i.e. define the lost state. Man, created for free communion with God and obedience in communion, has turned his freedom, Gift of God's love, inside out so that God's love lets him go, as he himself chose. The question is now how God can bring this man back to communion and obedience, i.e., save him (expression of agape) and at the same time leave man free (expression of agape) which includes respecting the hold of his sinfulness upon him. How, in short, to reveal love to man without forcing it upon him which forcing would contradict love." Yoder, *Doctrine of the Work of Christ*, 10.

[435] A clear rendering of Yoder's position on Atonement can be found in John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, chapter twelve.

Of note for the following quotes, Yoder is delineating his alternative attempt at atonement from other theories, particularly Anslem's, which he provides a summary and critique of in Yoder, *Preface to Theology,* 289-307.

[436] This is what Yoder understands as forgiveness, "Forgiveness can then be understood not as the annulment of the sentence pronounced against us by God but as removing the hindrance to communion; the obstacle is our own sinfulness and god's respect for our night to erect that barrier." Yoder, *Preface to Theology,* 312.

[437] "The work of Christ is, at its center, obedience (see Philippians 2). Christ was exactly what God meant humans to be: in free communion with God, obeying God and loving others—even his enemies—with God's love. The Nicene Creed seeks to safeguard this truth. This man Christ Jesus was really God working, was a man in perfect communion with God. Nicaea affirms the reality of God's working in Christ's obedience." Ibid., 310-311.

[438] Ibid., 312.

discipleship) that God works in history, and it is this love that the community can choose to incarnate.[439] Thus, the power of God is love, and the end results are solely love.

Let us turn to Paul for an example: when speaking of the binaries that define the context that the community of believers find themselves in—Jew/Greek, Male/Female, Master/Slave—he does not speak of overcoming them or transforming the system that perpetuates them. Regarding the system of slavery, Paul does not condemn the system, and he does not grasp at the political levers of power to coerce society away from such a system. Such actions would have aspired to a coercive power by desiring the means to bend the system into accordance with a particular perspective, shaping and binding a new horizon. Paul does not even seek to abolish the system through non-coerciveness, nor does he engage the powers and principalities at all. Instead, he speaks about the reality of the kingdom of God and asserts that within the unity of believers, these oppressive systems have no power. The community is defined by love, which is both the power and presence of God. Accordingly, these binaries that divide humanity one from another do not exist. Love does not seek to overcome anything, and it is not defined as a negation. It is the event of love itself that provides no room for the previous coercive conditions. Rather than coercing the context into accordance with particular claims or non-coercively convincing the context of the validity of such claims, the community simply loves, which is the enactment the kingdom of God. These binaries that divided and bound society into certain oppressive roles do not exist within the community of believers. Within this community there is only unity in Christ, that is to say, unity in love. To live with disregard for the systems of logic that structure society is to live as Christ. This is what it means to take up one's cross.

[439] Ibid., 312.

There is no divine strategy in Yoder's work; there is simply the insistence of love. To be sure, love has an effect, but it is the effect of a call. Suffice to say, the effect that love has is secondary to the event of love itself. Yoder does not speak of the community of believers as carrying out particular means toward particular ends. The church is not understood as instituted to achieve anything beyond love and faith, and it is the site where *agape* love occurs.[440] The church happens, it is an event, and it disorders our logic. The power of God, seen paradigmatically in the life of Jesus and glimpsed in the working of the church, is understood as not only void of worldly coercion but also not focused on any particular effect (aside from love). It is a power that is understood as pure means, bound to no ends and measured not by its "effectiveness," but by its existence (which is its effectiveness). Thus, in Yoder's project, the power of God is not weak, strong, coercive or non-coercive, for each of these qualifiers imply relationship toward ends and efforts toward outcomes. Yoder, following Caputo, is talking about the *event,* "love," the surprising happening of love, which arrives without intention and desires only to exist. It is not strategic or programmatic, cannot be deployed toward desired ends and is simply an action for the sake of the action itself; it is a deed done for the sake of the other simply because such is how love comes to exist.[441] The power of God is the power of love and achieves nothing other than the emergence of itself, the insistence of love, the existence of God.

Jesus' revolution is absent of revolution as it is simply a life lived loving both his neighbour and his enemy. What does this achieve? How effective is it? Toward what ends is he living? For Yoder, these are not the correct questions to be asking, as this is not the order of God's power. How we commonly understand power is through its effect, but at work within Yoder's project is a power that does not accord to our logic or to our binaries. At once, the power

[440] Rendered otherwise: the site in which God is occurring.

[441] As Yoder states, "only fidelity to love as means can be an instrument for love as ends." Yoder, *Nonviolence,* 46.

of God developing in Yoder's project is a power that seemingly achieves nothing and everything. It is not measured by its effect but by its insertion into our lives. The power of God is not an effort to achieve a particular outcome; it is the power to live according to a different logic. Love is not lived so justice or peace can be achieved. Rather, love is lived, and perhaps justice and peace will be achieved. Love is structured according to faith; it is a power that is foolishness. One loves not knowing if the other will respond in kind. One loves in faith, even though the other holds the hammer and nails.

Love is the power at work within Yoder's project. As illustrated, this notion of power does not accord to our common, worldly understanding of power. Nonetheless, it is a means to make things happen, though what it makes happen is love itself, such is directed toward no end aside from the emergence of that event. Thus, love maintains a certain relationship to our worldly conception of power, but it is not bound to it and is beyond it. We will set Yoder's notion of power apart and within quotation marks (as "power") from this point on, in order to free it from a worldly, binary notion of power. This is a "power" that has no control over its effect and no desire for a particular effect. Rather than being a force that operates to bring about certain ends—to have a certain effect upon the world—it is a "power" found in its own activity. Love does not desire for anything more than the existence of love. This is the "power" of Jesus, the "power" at work within the community and the power of God. It is an event: defying and disrupting our logic and denying our human imperative to define and control. It is a "power" that achieves nothing beyond the arrival of an instance of love. This is what Yoder has in mind in the final chapter of *The Politics of Jesus;* the cross is not an event that brings about a particular end, it is

the end itself.[442] In the cross we observe the "power" of God. It does not coerce history or direct it to any degree, yet the event of this "power" radically ruptures how we understand ourselves within the world. The cross is an event that results from the love of the man, Jesus, who was unwilling to kill the other and met their violence with forgiveness (Luke 23:34). The message of the cross is love and it calls for more love, not because love will bring about a desired end, but because love is the end that is desired.

The Call, Hospitality and the Event

Jesus lived a life that loved the enemy, the one who put him to death. In doing so, his life was, recalling Caputo, a call that echoes throughout history. Following Caputo, this call is a *weak force* (not a physical force), which does not present another binary (weak force vs. strong force) but rather, lends a name to a force that is other than a physical force (a force that compels).[443] The call that sounds from Jesus' life is in the order of inspiration. It is not a force that guarantees response, but it is a force that asks for a response. Deeds done in the name of

[442] "This will of God is affirmatively, concretely knowable in the person and ministry of Jesus. Jesus is not to be looked at merely as the last and greatest in the long line of rabbis teaching pious people how to behave; he is to be looked at as a mover of history and as the standard by which Christians must learn how they are to look at the moving of history…Thus the most appropriate example of the difficult choice between effectiveness and obedience, and the most illuminating example, is that of Jesus himself. What it means for the Lamb to be slain, of whom then we sing that is "worthy to receive power," is inseparable from what is mean for Jesus to be escheated under the superscription 'king of the Jews.'…The choice that he made in rejecting the crown and accepting the cross was the commitment to such a degree of faithfulness to the character of divine love that he was willing for its sake to sacrifice 'effectiveness.' usually it can be argued that from some other perspective or in some long view this renunciation of effectiveness was in fact a very effective thing to do. 'If a man will lose his…life he shall find it.' But this paradoxical possibility does not change the initially solid fact that Jesus thereby excluded any normative concern for any capacity to make sure things would turn out right." Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* 233-234.

[443] I suggest that Caputo's use of weak and strong forces is rhetorical and not structural. They do not represent literal forces, and the names themselves do not articulate the content of the force in question. He is attempting to speak of a force that exists (strong force) and a force that does not exist (weak force), which is to say, a force that is felt but has no source. Thus, it is not a matter of quantity of force, it is not a spectrum with strong force on one end and weak force on the other rather weak force is a force without capacity. Weak force is akin to the *call* of justice, and strong force is akin to a well-armed and trained infantry. See Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 7-9.

God are responses to the call that resounds from Jesus' life.[444] God is made known through deeds carried out for the other, which are events (cf. Caputo) drawn out of the lives of those who have ears to hear and eyes to see.[445] These deeds do not take the shape of programmatic activities but are rather the event that comes upon us without warning, the act of love that one carries out that was unpredictable. Jesus lived a life committed to the other, and the way of this life is love understood as hospitality: love open to what is coming. God is calling to humanity and understood through the faithful life of Jesus, which reveals God in terms of love and hospitality. Humanity's relationship to God is a response to a call manifest as a deed of love carried out in faith that echoes with the way of Jesus. This relationship ensures that God, however one understands God, is found through openness to what is "to come." Love and hospitality never arrive; they are events that disturb particularities, cloud certainty and are translated throughout history. They are always "to come."

God is not known as a metaphysical power or merely a coercive force, but as the call that solicits from injustices and sounds from works of love. God is the *weak force* that resonates within events of love inspiring onlookers to action; acts that translate love throughout history. They never fully arrive and are never fully certain.[446] It is in these deeds that God is made known. Thus, God is known in the event of love that has occurred, yet, God is also known in the event that is to come, which cannot be anticipated.[447] Yoder depicts God as fundamentally

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[444] Jesus life is not the source of the call; it is the site of response to the call. As such, Jesus life resonates with the call, though it does not contain and close off such. The call continues to sound, and the contextual response to such will vary in form.

[445] Matthew 13:16

[446] Perhaps it would not make sense in your project, but I would say that it is not a hope and never arriving as Derrida may say, we need to also move beyond Derrida and see that the impossible is that it has arrived, yet has not arrive, and this is faith rather than hope.

[447] God has arrived and is also still to come. Jesus called his followers to take up their cross and then he was crucified. The understanding of this call is not bound to his particular crucifixion, but is the crucifixion repeated forward, contextual to contexts to come. Thus, God, like this call of Jesus, is understood throughout time; meaning which has arrived and is yet still deferred.

understood through the cross and according to a "power" that calls from the injustice of this event. God, who is bound by an *agape* character, does not coerce history. In Caputo's project, God is not a being capable of directing history, nor one who can be understood in any definitive sense. God is not a being at all but is ushered into existence through the response to insisting calls. In either case, God is understood through the world, and what is known of God is not found in ordered, rational systems. God is the call that sounds from inequality and injustice. God is found in the face of those oppressed, insisting from the broken bodies of those who are crushed by the coercive powers and certainties of this world. God is *agape* love for the other, a love that carries the potential of being poured out to the point of death. God is an idea, a name and a deed that is always reaching beyond itself toward the "to come." Emptied out, God is always put death and resurrected. To say that God is this or that in any final sense is to erect an idol. God is made known through deeds of love and hospitality that function as icons, astir with the promise of the "to come" and alive with a call.

Yoder does not discuss how the love of Jesus may have an effect upon reality, but we can develop an understanding through parallel reasoning to that of Caputo. Just as God is understood to be incarnate within Jesus, the life Jesus lived is incarnate within the community of believers. Jesus' life is an event—a response to the call of God—it is a call to love. Jesus' life stands as a material instantiation of the call to love—a deed that gives God existence—yet, he did not contain the call, which would have ended it. Instead, Jesus' life resounded with that call and amplified it. Recall that, according to Caputo, events are what happens, but more importantly, they are that which is *in* what happens, that which is translated throughout history. Jesus life is a response, yet it is also restless with a call. This is how God's power is to be understood. It is this form that echoes throughout history: humanity responds to a call to love. The event that stirs

within the life of Jesus calls forth throughout history. It takes root in contexts to come and is incarnated in the generations that follow him.

God is understood according to the events drawn out from the lives of individuals who are open to the call. The hospitable, those open to the other, are the soil from which works of love sprout. As such, God is unfolded throughout history contextually, without a firm or precise incarnation.[448] God, what we mean when we invoke the name "God," is in the order of the event, the "to come," and is that which is uncontainable. For Yoder, this will always be synonymous with enemy love. Yoder, contra Caputo, understands Jesus to be revealing God with more clarity than Caputo is willing to assert.[449]

For Yoder, it is enough simply to state that a posture of love for the other is identifiable with God, and it is this power through which the kingdom is ushered in. In *A Study in the Doctrine of the Work of Christ,* we see an early representation of the ideas that we have been developing thus far:

> But this perfect love in obedience had to be lived in the world of sinners, respecting the liberty of sinners to be unloving. Thus agape comes to mean non-resistance, bearing the other's sinfulness, bearing, literally, his sins. If Christ had done anything in the face of man's sinfulness other than to be nonresistant, respecting man's freedom to sin against Him, His work would have been less than perfect agape. His temptations centered precisely on this point; laying before Him the possibility of shortcuts which would violate man's freedom to reject Him, the tempter hoped to lead Jesus to take back the freedom which God had given man in the first place, rather than go the whole way to save man within his freedom. The temptation to the use of political methods or of violent self-defense was one aspect of this possibility.[450]

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[448] God incarnate is not limited to the particular details of Jesus event. God is incarnate in those who attempt to live as Jesus in context's to come. The shape of this life will be astir with the same event that Jesus life is, though the particular shape will not be identical

[449] For Yoder, the particularity of Christ reveals a cosmic reality. For Caputo, Jesus is a contextually relevant response to a call. It can be said that for Yoder Jesus is *the* response to the call, while for Caputo Jesus is *a* response to the call. For Yoder, the response of Christ is paradigmatic, which is counter to Caputo's project. That being said, it is important to state that Yoder is not establishing that humanity is to live in the particular form of Christ, bound to the events that occurrence contextually, but rather to live in the way of Christ, embodying that which is restless within Christ's life, in all contexts to come. Within Yoder's project, this restlessness can be identified with love.

[450] John Howard Yoder, *Doctrine of the Work of Christ*, 10.

In this work, Yoder is coherently addressing the details we have been working through: God's agape character is witnessed through Jesus who, in a fallen world context, is put to death because of the life he lived and his unwillingness to take the life of the other.[451] To be clear, the non-resistance discussed by Yoder here is not universal; it is linked specifically to violence and is most clearly understood as the choice to not kill the other in defense of one's self.[452] We also need to keep in mind that non-resistance itself is not the rule[453] but is an *eventive* response, an activity drawn from Jesus' commitment to love.[454] Yoder is not attempting to establish a new law, as much as already been stated, and while he seems to default to a minimum explanation of love as non-resistance,[455] we should interpret this as an instantiation of love though not the fullness of love. Thus, the non-resistance to violence lived by Jesus is an event restless with love and calling for love, but it does not demand a love of the same particular form.[456] As Glen

[451] Yoder further expands, "The whole way meant the cross. For since murder is the worst sin (I Jn. 3:11-12), as it takes away freedom most utterly, so the utmost in agape is the utmost in non-self-defense, to undergo murder, respecting the other's freedom to commit the worst sin (I Jn. 3:16) out of love for the sinner-murderer. Which is what Jesus did…The imagery of sacrifice is particularly relevant here. For the ultimate sacrifice, the sacrifice of self, is precisely the giving of oneself utterly to communion-obedience with God. Which is what Jesus did in letting God express His agape through His 'obedience unto death, the death of the cross.'" Yoder, *Doctrine of the Work of Christ*, 10.

[452] It is clear from Yoder's project itself that one is to actively resist various pressures and temptations toward coercing and violating the other. While Jesus is *non-resistant* to the violence of the other, he is resistant to the temptation to take the others life.

[453] Yoder does put a fine point on non-resistance as essential to agape. While listing presuppositions that condition his revised view of atonement, he states "The belief that nonresistance is part of the essential nature of "agape," of God's way of dealing with evil. This has been sufficiently dealt within pacifist literature and in word studies to need for further elaboration here." This is no doubt a logic that follows the emphasis on freedom that Yoder places upon humanity, "The Bible sees being human as being always in a context of choice…That we shall afterwards be able to analyze our decisions as having been 'caused' makes no difference; at the time of choice, when facing God's command obeying or disobeying, we know ourselves free." He further applies "freedom" to God's relationship to humanity in ways that have already been developed in chapter one (cf. Universal Salvation). Yoder, *Preface to Theology,* 308-09.

[454] To refer to non-resistance as an activity is counter intuitive as it is most immediately understood as the negation of the activity resistance. Yet, for Yoder this is precisely the case, as non-resistance, in this context, is the activity of love (the deed of love).

[455] This is at once the most extreme and most minimal expression of love: do not kill the other. As Yoder developed, love, at its very least, is a power that ensures the life of the other, even to the extent of costing the life of the self.

[456] It is clear that I am using Caputo to stretch Yoder, but I believe such is in fidelity to Yoder's project not in contrast to it. Non-resistance to violence is resonant with our understanding of love, perhaps even defining of it in some base or foundational sense, yet it is not comprehensive. Yoder is not trying to make love formulaic, he is

Harold Stasson states of Yoder's position, " …Yoder said that non-violence is not adequately understood as an absolute ethical rule; it is loyalty not to law but to Jesus."[457]

The love of Jesus is the "power" of God, and it functions simply by being enacted. This "power" exists when one, such as Jesus, lives for the other to the point of sacrificing oneself to them. Defined by a relationship of love even to those who would persecute him, the life of Jesus stands in contrast to the logic of this fallen world. Jesus is responding to the call of love, and his response takes form in the activity of non-resistance toward the other's act of violence. The call to love resonates from Jesus life, and his embrace of the oppressed and rebuke of the oppressor are activities that solicit a response. It is important to bear in mind that all responses to this call do not and will not take the same shape; Jesus' response was contextual, and any response to come is bound to its own context. Jesus' deeds of love were not intended to achieve a particular end, and they were not instrumental power. Rather, they were in and of themselves the ends that he desired. Feeding the poor, healing the sick, refusing the sword and forgiving those who carried out his execution were all activities that spoke of love and demanded a response.

The "power" of the cross is found in the unconditional claim of justice that sounds from the event (Caputo) and calls those who witness it to lay down their own lives for the sake of the other (Yoder). This "power" is not found in a metaphysical super-structure that guarantees success;[458] instead, it is present in the solicitation from the injustice of the man, Jesus, on the

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calling for the contextual enactment of love, as is observed in Jesus life. What is called for is not the precise way Jesus loved, but to love because Jesus loved. Such will take on many shapes, this is the *eventive* quality of love. For the sake of what Yoder is saying, we ought to understand it with ears for the impossible, following Caputo, in order that love is able to have an (absolute) future, defined by that which we have yet to glimpse (A love to come). Perhaps Dietrich Bonhoeffer stands as an event of such, a man who lived an impossible situation, sacrificing love for the sake of love, and throwing himself at the mercy of God.

[457] Glen Harold Stassen, *Nonviolent Public Ethic*, 256.

[458] While Yoder does understand this way of living to accord with a certain order of the cosmos, he also affirms, as repeatedly stated, that there are no handles. Said otherwise, a life lived for the sake of the other does not give one control over them, or over history, it is simply the *shape* of the life of Christ, and the way that kingdom *is*.

cross. A call sounds, from God knows where, begging for those who hear it to seek justice. The dynamics of justice and the law that were previously discussed are at play within this happening. Rome and the Jewish authorities represent the law and are understood to uphold and deliver justice, and as each of the Gospels attest, the crowds wanted Jesus punished to the full extent of the law.[459] As the account in each of the Gospels testifies, Jesus was an innocent man who lived according to an alternative order, but he was not the king the Jewish people had expected and hoped for, and they did not live according to the order of his (Jesus') kingdom.[460] Through this event, the criminal (Jesus), who suffered at the hands of the law,[461] is depicted as more just than the law. The law is deconstructed and revealed as restless with the call of justice. Jesus' life is poured out through his love of the other as he literally takes on their sins and[462] deconstructs the legitimate claims and underpinning logic of the Powers and Principalities. Here, Caputo and Yoder resonate with one another: Jesus unmasks the powers that be and renders their normative claims illegitimate through his broken body on a cross. As Caputo states, "the call, the cry, the plaint that rises up from the cross is a great divine 'no' to injustice, an infinite lamentation over unjust suffering and innocent victims."[463] Emanating from the broken body of Christ is a call to justice that is a call to love. This call is the love of God, but it only has tangible effect when it is incarnated and lived out.

The Powers and Principalities attempted to end Jesus' movement through coercion, and, had Jesus adhered to the same logic, this plan would have succeeded. However, Jesus operated

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To live as such is to usher in the Kingdom of God in the midst of the old order. This does not ensure that the old order will not crush one for doing so, clearly the life of Christ establishes such.

[459] See the account of Pilate and the crowd: Matthew 27:16-26, John 19:15, Luke 23:21, Mark 15: 7-15, Luke 23: 18-25, John 18: 38 - 19:16.

[460] The author of John speaks to such a sentiment, See John 18: 36-37.

[461] Let us conceive of law broadly, representative of not only the *letter* evoked to crucify Jesus, but the *authority* of Rome and the Jewish authorities who enforced the law.

[462] That which is carried out upon his body.

[463] Caputo, *Weakness of God,* 45.

according to an alternative logic. The life of Jesus ushers in a new order visible within the church. The church is a new creation and reality, and the patterns of life that had bound and determined humanity are powerless to the "power" of love incarnate within this community. While the Powers and Principalities operate by and espouse the ultimacy of coercive power, it is not non-coercive power that stands as the alternative, but love. Love does not attempt to compel the other into abiding by certain standards; it inspires the other by providing space for them. Coercive power desires to control and depict the order by which events unfold, whereas love is a posture open to the surprise of the event. The way of Jesus does not reach for the validation that comes from enforcing a change within the established order; rather, Jesus' way lives according to an alternative order. The existence of Jesus' life and the shape of the community of believers is the effect of love. For Yoder, the means are the ends, and there is no cause and effect because they are one and the same. Jesus does not operate according to love because it is a good strategy to achieve certain ends, Jesus loves because that is the end that he desired. This love separates Jesus from Yoder's reading of Gandhi and King. Jesus is not living toward any singular end; he is simply living love. To be sure, such a life has effect as love takes on the shape of a deed. However, the occurrence of such an event *is* the desired effect.[464] Where Gandhi and King are examples for Yoder, they are examples because their means led to the ends they desired. Alternatively, Jesus commits to love. The result of his commitment and the form it takes is simply the occurrence of love.

[464] This is not to condemn or criticize the ends that Gandhi and King pursued. To be sure, they desired equality and liberation, how can one criticize such desire? What I am attempting to argue is that the form of "power" evident in the life of Jesus, and thus revealing of God, is without emphasis upon ends. The emphasis is on love, and if something that looks like our understanding of liberty and equality descends from such, than such is according to the *eventive* quality of love. Though, it may occur that, true to the *eventive* quality of love, a form of "liberty" and "equality" that is alternative to the standards of the society may arrive. Being that love is not driven by ends, the shape that love takes will not be "measured" according to worldly standards. Here we have the possibility of the occurrence of something other than the established understanding of liberty and equality, rather than the validation of these notions. Which is to say, Jesus commits to love, which is not the achievement of standards established by the oppressor (common notions of equality and freedom) but to the arrival of something impossible.

God is that call that turns our attention toward others and begs that we love them. In Yoder's work, we see the church responding to this call by enacting *agape* love, which is the arrival of God. God arrives and exists within human affairs through the response to the call that sounds from the other. God is the deed done in the name of forgiveness/love/justice. God is the call that disrupts the status quo and ruptures firm horizons. Finally, God is the restlessness that compels one to live for justice, die for love and liberate through forgiveness. God is the call that draws humanity to reach toward the other and become open to the "to come."

God calls humanity to the act of love, and humanity's response to this love is hospitality. Metaphorically speaking, the call to love knocks at the door. This knock is unexpected and without capacity to enter aside from invitation.[465] This invitation is an act of faith: one does not know who or what knocks, only that, in spite of fear and anxiety, one loves.[466] Hospitality is the response to this knocking; the welcoming of the other into one's home by not simply allowing the other access but inviting the other to make themselves at home (to make the home their own). This is the impossible element by which hospitality turns: hospitality is contingent on one being able to invite, yet the act of invitation sacrifices that capacity (inviting one into your home and giving them that home).[467] Thus, love knocks on one's door as a call, and it is given shape when the other enters. Love is a call that is manifested in the act of love, and it is this action that gives

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[465] Every invitation is an act of faith, of being faithful to the call of God to love.

[466] This invitation is not a faith act when one knows who are what is knocking, when one can anticipate what will be expected of them. Faith is only faith when there is risk involved. Caputo discusses faith as such, "When is faith really faith? Not when it is looking more and more like we are right, but when the situation is beginning to look impossible, in the darkest night of the soul. The more credible things are, the less faith is needed, but the more incredible things seem, the more faith is required, the faith that is said to move mountains." Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?,* 45.

[467] Caputo states, "…for hospitality to occur, it is necessary for hospitality to go beyond itself. That requires that the host must, in a moment of madness, tear up the understanding between him and the guys, act with 'excess,' make an absolute gift of his property, which of course is impossible. But that is the only way the guest can go away feeling as if he was really made at home." Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell,* 111.

To further clarify, Caputo notes, "The limit case of hospitality would be the 'saints' who give away their hone and all their possessions to the poor, which would not be hospitality any longer but a saintly excess." Ibid., 111 n 7.

it tangible substance. Letting love in has no end aside from the occurrence of such an act. Thus, this activity of hospitality, this act of love, is a deed carried out toward its own occurrence.

The unconditional agape love found in Yoder's work is sharpened through Derrida's development of unconditional hospitality and the notion of "hosti-pality" implicit to such. As Caputo states, "'unconditional' hospitality can only be found in the unexpected 'visitation' by the other…a visitation by the *hostis*, the 'stranger,' who might be hostile. Hospitality…means to say 'come' to what we cannot see coming, to what may or may not…be welcome, to welcome the unwelcome, which is why Derrida coined the word 'hosti-pitality,' and Jesus said that it is easy to love our friends but loving our enemies can be dicey."[468] Unconditional hospitality does not prepare, if such is possible, for the neighbour but for the enemy: the other. This hospitality is characterized by a lack of foresight or predictability, the acceptance of powerlessness and a lack of control as it willingly strides into darkness and knows full well that what lies ahead may be one's own undoing. This is an impossible situation and an impossible call, yet, here in this unconditional hospitality is what Yoder's understanding of God turns upon. This is what Yoder glimpses in Jesus, a man who enters into the darkness knowing not what lies ahead, but still, he is willing to endure what awaits for the sake of the other. It is a portrait of radical openness to the other and to love that welcomes the unpredictable potential of love (where will love take me? what will it call from me? I know not). Caputo's reading of Jesus presents him as empty of sovereign power over history; unable to "predict or control" what is coming but open to the coming of the other.[469] This is not in contrast to Yoder's understanding of Jesus (indeed, God) as *agape* love, which has no rigid form or orientation and is not restricted to one particular group,

[468] Caputo, *Insistence of God,* 40.

[469] Here Caputo is not explicitly speaking of Jesus or power, and yet the general spirit of this section of text resonates with the way of Jesus and the contrast it provides to our common understanding of power, as previously developed.

but is impossibly open to all. Jesus does not choose whom he loves or how he loves. Contextually bound, he chooses simply to love and serve the other, and from his life, in his context, events are drawn that resound with this love. This is clearly evident in the cross: an act of love for those who put him to death.

There is a lack of specificity inherent to this reading of Jesus' *agape* love that seems to conflict with his contextual life of loving particular peoples. Jesus, like any human being, is situated in a particular time and place, but we must read the narrative of his life according to what is astir within it. This is not a story about loving Israel or Rome; it is a story about loving human beings, both the oppressed and the oppressor. The shape of this love—feeding the oppressed, healing the sick, communing with the outcast, refusing to attack the oppressor and going to the cross as a result of these actions—is not confined solely to those particular instances but is astir within them. These instances are called from Jesus' life due to his posture of hospitality in that particular context. Here, Jesus shows a failure to be certain—which appears as a weakness or deficiency for our culture that prides certainty— but as Caputo asserts, "…this failure to be certain is not a failure but a 'negative capability,' a power to sustain uncertainty that structures the insistence of hospitality."[470] Jesus is neither carrying out nor demanding a particular rule (absolute practices of love). He is living a life of *agape* love that desires the liberation of the other and is open to the form this may take. Yoder and Caputo affirm hospitality toward the other, the enemy, which may cause the destruction of one's self. Perhaps this is understood as one's death, or perhaps it is a deconstruction of one's self: the loss of particular beliefs or norms in fidelity to what gives reason to those beliefs and norms (the event that stirs

[470] Ibid., 40.

within). In hospitality and love, one can never be certain of who or what knocks at the door. One can only welcome the potential that awaits by throwing open the door and saying, "Come."

The enemy love of Jesus is an openness to the potential of love and a desire for the love "to come" by reaching for the other in a way that is not bound to a particular form. This enemy love unveils what we mean when we speak of unconditional love. Typically when we wield the concept of loving unconditionally, we have already subordinated it to particularities by confining it to specific forms, groups of people or lengths, which negate the notion that we are speaking of. When we speak of unconditional love, we tend to not speak of it in absolute terms as we have already delineated between those who will receive our love and those who will not. Within Yoder's project, there is evident in the way of Jesus a love that cuts through horizons and reaches for the other even when they are raising the sword toward him. This is a love that is not born of strategy and calculation but instead overtakes and disorders one's horizon. This is the event of love, and it is translated throughout human history. The call to take up one's cross is the call to love and welcome the other. In doing so, one then lives a life open to the shape that it may take.

The love of Jesus is a call to love those who are unlovable and exist beyond the lengths and expectations of our love. This is impossible. It defies all of our normative standards and conventions and seems to achieve nothing. Logically, instead of enemy love, Jesus should have sought to preserve his life, overcome the enemy and save his people. He should have allowed his followers to defend him[471] or called upon the soldiers of heaven to overcome the might of Rome.[472] Such is the logic of this world that Jesus' life ruptures. The logic of Jesus was attentive to the event alive in words like, "justice", "love" and "forgiveness". His life stands as an alternative logic— a different logos— that reached out in love toward the other with an

[471] John 18: 10-12; Matthew 26:51-56; Mark 14:47
[472] Matthew 26:53

impossible hospitality that cost him his life. This love was not a means to an end or a way to exert the sort of power that brings about a particular result. It was simply the enactment of love through the disordering and unpredictable event of love and the result of a call that sounds evermore. In Jesus is one who responded to the call of God, the "power" of God incarnate. This is love, and it is the call that draws humanity beyond its firm horizons into God knows what. The only preparation for such a call is hospitality, and the result of hospitality is the act of love. This is the "power" of God.

Love is What it Takes to Make Love Happen

God as agape love is the foundation Yoder uses to establish the church as distinct from broader society. This is clear in the church's distinction from Christendom and the Nation State or, in shorthand, the Powers and Principalities. For Yoder, the church's purpose is to bear witness to God, who is love, and this can only be done through love. Conversely, the state has many competing interests and *ends* that it needs to achieve, which all hinge upon the continued existence of itself. Accordingly, the state must remain stable and secure from threat, and it must maintain control. The state is understood through particular ideals, norms and practices, and its identity is fixed and defined. It has strict boarders, and while it allows the other to enter, they must conform to and obey the precepts of the state. All state precepts are means toward the end of security and the elimination of the anxiety that comes from not feeling in control. The state will defend itself through coercion, either internally or externally, in order to ensure its continued existence. The alternative is not non-coercion, such as the movements led by Gandhi and King; such means are still oriented toward ends. Though the attempt to control comes through an alternative means, it still remains congruent to that of the state. In either case, the church, as it

follows Jesus, is much more radical. By placing the emphasis on means alone, it denies the need to control, although this denial comes with the risk of losing itself, as Jesus did.

For Yoder, the way of God, as revealed by Jesus, is fundamentally a way that is founded upon risk. He states, "if God chooses to work in history, it means God is taking the risk of incarnation, of being in history. God is choosing to identify with the uncertainty and weakness of existence within history. *God is not afraid of history and risks losing Gods own self within it, as the other gods do not.*"[473] The act of operating within human history, such as the activities of Jesus' life, risks God losing God's self. This is because of the *agape* character of God: God in Jesus is swept up into human history and made subordinate to its events, illustrating the character of God. By not desiring to control human history—for such would negate the *agape* love that is God— God operates in human history through the life of Christ (as the call that Jesus responded to, and the call that resounds from his life) and bears witness to the character of the universe, which is *agape* love.

Within Yoder's project there is a new paradigm of power: the simple and profound event of love. Gingerich calls for a new reality of power, one by which Yoder and the Christian tradition can be understood as operating in love. Gingerich calls for a new wineskin, though he offers an alternative that is still in the form of the old: "power as the Non-violence-of-God." This sort of power is reactionary and exists within a predetermined paradigm. Non-violence is more accurately rendered as non-coercion, and in order to be power, both must be actively working toward some effect. This understanding of power is a different means toward the need for an end as it shares the exact form as coercive power. Within Yoder's project, love is an event that ruptures our understanding of power. Through love, God makes things happen, and through

[473] Yoder, *Theology of Mission,* 131.

events that resonate with love, history is moved. It is not that love is well suited to achieving the ends that God desires; rather, love *is* the ends that God desires. The effect that love has is its own existence. Love is a call to love and it is only made known through hospitality (an act of love).

Love is the "power" through which God moves history. We must now re-render Yoder's basic definition of power: "what it takes to make things happen."[474] This understanding is bound to the means and ends paradigm: "what it takes" is simply the means, and "make things happen" is the ends. Based on the development of this project, Yoder's basic definition is now considerably more paradoxical and is rendered as: love is what it takes to make love happen. Love is now both the means to achieving the ends, and the ends that are desired. Thus, God moves history through love, and the direction history is moving toward is love. God is the call to love—the solicitation for deeds toward the good of the other—and such deeds have no life (no material reality) until humanity responds to that call and enacts them. This is not a law that God is instituting, but a relationship of love that God and humanity are already in. God calls for love, and humanity responds in love. Such a response is how God is made *real* (of the order of being) and humanity made free. Whereas worldly power is toward controlling ends, be it through coercive or non-coercive means, love is not a "power" that controls but a "power" that liberates.

The logic of the Powers and Principalities is control through whatever means are deemed necessary. On the surface, such logic seems to lead to the freedom of those who take part in it, yet the reverse is actually the case: one is a slave to *ends*.[475] It is the ends that necessitate the implementation and form of the means that are carried out. Human existence is reduced to *means* lived toward particular ends and rendered in attempts to control the future. That which human

[474] Yoder, *Jesus and Power*, 138.

[475] Which is to say they are a slave to their anxiety, attempting to gain release from such through the security of control which eliminates risk. When one knows what they are trying to achieve (what ends they have in mind) they can carry out whatever means necessary or possible to achieve such.

beings put their hands to and how humanity orients itself within history is relative to the ends established by their context and always gives form to a desire for control. The paradoxical "power" of God is founded on the now and alive in the present event of love. Without ends, the means themselves take on the only value. Without ends, the means themselves are driven by the occurrence itself. Love is not bent toward a future reality; love is calling for an event now. Living love is God's liberating "power," it frees humanity from those ends that divide one from another and the compulsion to control the future, an activity inevitably resulting in the oppression of another. Love is the "power" to live, experience God now and be liberated from the logic of a power that is predicated on the compulsion to control. This is the "power" that Yoder sees in the life of Jesus and in the faithful community of the Believers' Church. This is the "power" of God.

Conclusion

By interpreting Yoder's project through Caputo, we can see how God is not a being who exerts a force upon the world but, rather, is the call to love. Though Yoder does not provide such a level of engagement with God, Caputo is helpful in this regard as he provides a means to consider God in a way that is alternative to a traditional understanding. Caputo's concepts of event, call, and hospitality provide us with notions that allow for an articulation of the way that "power" operates within Yoder's project. This call moves history when it is given shape as a deed, and it is this deed that has an effect upon the world. Through hospitality to this call, humanity gives shape to it; through the deed responding to this call (which is an attempt to be faithful to the call), the call comes to have a material reality. This is the event. A call is sounding, insisting and begging for its existence, which can only be realized in the response (the hospitality) of humanity. This is not the end of the call, for it is not contained in any particular event. The call continues to sound, as it is restless within this event. Thus, the "power" of God is what solicits love and insists from within events of love, inspiring further events. True to its eventive quality, love occurs in a surprising incarnation, toward no other end than the occurrence itself. Such an occurrence ruptures our horizon, for it is without cause and effect. Contrary to means and ends, it is simply event. To be sure, Yoder, contra Caputo, affirms a God independent from humanity.[476] Yet, parallel to Caputo, this God is understood and made known according to the order of the event. Thus, God *occurred* within the life of Jesus because of his response to the call to love, and God is *occurring* within the lives of those who hear and respond to the call to love.

[476] Perhaps such can be considered to be a being, though Yoder does not deal with this line of thought explicitly.

God moves history toward love and through love; the means and the ends are identical. The very event of love is the "power" of God and its "effectiveness." In Jesus we do not observe a man destined for the cross, instead, we observe a man who lived in a way that resulted in an "unjust"[477] crucifixion. His love compelled him to feed the hungry and heal the sick, to consort with the unclean and the outcast and to criticize those authorities perpetuating oppression. Such events were drawn from his life, they were not the result of a finely tuned plan but resulted from a life open to the other. Jesus lived a life of openness to the call, a life of hospitality. The events defining his life *arrived*, and they were not the result of an ordained law, program or plan. The paradigmatic expression of this love is Jesus' denial of the sword to defend himself. Such denial does not become a rule but expresses the impossible form love may take. In denying the sword, Jesus ensures his own crucifixion. His love is manifest through his denial of coercion and at the cost of his own life.

The "power" of God does not only stand in critique of the Powers' coercion but also the very paradigm of power that they represent. Yoder is rightly recognized as reading Jesus for his non-violence, but this is not a new rule or law, rather, it indicates a certain relationship to the world. Yoder's concern is the freedom of the other, and violence is understood as the violation of freedom, though it is not the only manifestation of such. Coercion is the underlying principle to violence, and the act of physical violence may be used as a means to coerce. However, other means could be utilized to coerce the other into accordance with a particular standard. At the root of Yoder's project is a denial of the desire to control the other and shape the world. Implicit to the paradigm of power represented by the Powers is a desire to control, and power is

[477] Crucifixion was only understood as "justice" interior to the context of Rome, the context of the oppressor. Thus, in one sense it was justice, and yet I do not to label it as such. Perhaps rather than "unjust" a better word would be "illegitimate." In either case, as is depicted in the Pilate account, the cross is an exception made for Jesus, he does not fall under the rule. He does not accord to the shape of a criminal warranting crucifixion, yet this is what the crowd desired.

instrumentalized as the means to reach particular ends. A negation of this kind of power (ex. non-violence) is the logical alternative, though it accords to the same rationale of means and ends. Said otherwise, non-violence (non-coercion), while being opposite to the act of coercion, is still bound to the ends for which the particular action is being used. Each of these concepts of power exist within a paradigm that is understood through means and ends. Thus, the means are judged by the act of power's effectiveness to achieve the desired end; the means will be determined as effective if they arrive at the desired ends according to an amount of time deemed permissible. Conversely, the power of God ruptures this paradigm: love does not desire particular ends aside from the instance of love itself. The only effect love has and the only end it can "hope" to achieve is its existence.

God does not direct history toward a particular end; God calls for humanity to love. In Jesus, Yoder identifies the revelation of God and God's "power" as *agape* love. Jesus does not attempt to control history and direct it toward particular ends, nor does he grasp at the various "handles" that could guide events toward a certain outcome. Rather, Jesus serves the neighbour and the enemy. These actions are not carried out because they are a non-coercive way to achieve the ends of Jesus's desire, or God's desire for that matter. They are carried out because Jesus is obedient to the way of the *agape* love of God, and such a way *is* what God desires. The events of Jesus' life call out to history to take up a similar way, to carry one's own cross and live a love that is directed toward both the neighbour and the enemy.

The cross results from Jesus' life of love. It is an event drawn from Jesus' life because of the hospitality toward the other that he lived out; Jesus' orientation to the world—his posture of hospitality to the call of love—provides the context for the *arrival* of the cross event. The "power" of God is the "power" of a call that solicits humanity toward enacting love. It is in the

response to this call that love exists. The events of Jesus' life are alive within this call, and the particular instances of love that are documented in the Gospels are restless with the call of love. This is not a call to duplicate these particular instances but to live oriented to the world with the same hospitality. Love will take on many forms—impossible forms—it is not the particulars that are of importance, but the occurrence of love itself. In Yoder's work, the "power" moving history is love, and the direction it moves history toward is love. Such a "power" does not emphasize effect, as it is not "effective." Yet, love undoubtedly has the effect of love. Love is both the call for love and the event of love, and, in either case, the effect is simply love's occurrence. Love is the "power" of God at work within Yoder's project.

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