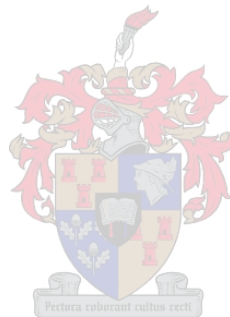


**CHRISTIAN FAITH AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: JOHN
HOWARD YODER'S SOCIAL ETHICS AS LENS FOR RE-
VISIONING THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL IDENTITY OF THE
SOUTH CENTRAL SYNOD (SCS) OF THE PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH OF NIGERIA (THE PCN)**

By

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Dissertation Presented for the Degree of Doctor of Theology at Stellenbosch University



Promoter: Professor Nico Koopman

December 2008

DECLARATION

By submitting this dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Date: December 2008

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The Lord is faithful!

ABSTRACT

The premise for this research is that Yoder's restorative vision for an ecclesial theology holds great potential for a more adequate involvement of the South Central Synod (SCS) of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (The PCN) with the public. Significant resources from Yoder's Christocentric vision for restoring ecclesial reflections and practices can assist the church to *re-vision*¹ its distorted ecclesiology. Contemporary challenges within the Nigerian socio-cultural context question the meaningfulness of the Enlightenment-based and Constantinian-Docetic-faced ecclesiology of the SCS to its host *religio-cultures*. This ecclesiology is in conflict with the Reformed tradition which the SCS upholds, and which does not have a timeless, a-historical ecclesiology. The study adopted a systematic-theological approach focusing on historical, Christological and ecclesiological perspectives.

With its theological lens, the historical perspective is used to retrace the dilemma of the SCS to some distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based projects in Nigeria. These perplexing bequests do not spare the growing mission and projects of Nigerian churches, particularly The PCN which, gave birth to the SCS. Truism, universalism, abstract and competitive ideologies of the Reformation era often characterize the Enlightenment-based violent ethics. Local resources and contexts have less significant respect in their witnesses. Often, their competing ideologies becloud the embodied proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ by the churches. In other words, the social ethics of the SCS compromises the figure of Christ in its theological witnesses. Thus, Yoder's reflection on Christology is suggested as a restorative vision.

Yoder's reflection on Christology is an ecumenical vision. It is grounded in the historical life and works which the biblical Jesus Christ demonstrated in concrete communities. Yoder's Christological vision is scripturally rooted in the catholicity of the pre-Constantinian church traditions. It is Barthian in its foundation and orientations; albeit from a nonviolent-resistant Diaspora perspective. It also reflects on historical Christology as a nonviolentnon-violent-resistant ministry for renewing society. Fundamentally, Yoder's vision also seeks the restoration of *shalom* in the community. Yoder's visionary project takes local resources and contexts seriously in its ethical witness. Above all, it expects believers to adopt a Christocentric witness

¹ The term *re-vision* is used here (and throughout the study) in the sense of re- envisioning. It is adopted to underscore the concept of a restored vision.

to the political (non-violent-resistant) ethics of Jesus as their life responsibility. Yoder's reflection on Christology envisions an ecclesial witness that is defined and sustained by the merits of the gracious Christ-event.

Yoder's vision for ecclesiology replays the Barthian rhythm: *ecclesiology is the Church's affirmation of the lordship of Jesus Christ over its polity and politics*. It envisions a Christocentric corporate and embodied witness of the Kingdom vision as an historical reality. Yoder's vision for the ecumenical ministry of the Church re-presents believers' corporate (Christocentric) Kingdom realization as a Christological mandate to the empirical Church in concrete contexts. His vision for ecclesiology re-interprets and appropriates a Christocentric ministry of the whole people of God as a more significant practice of 'the rule of Christ' within historical contexts. It is a Christological ecclesiology. For Yoder, ecclesiology is ethics.

Yoder's restorative vision for social ethics is tied to his reflection on Christology. It bespeaks the believers' embodiment of a Christocentric *jesulogical* ethics as body politics. His social reflection suggests a multidimensional, exploratory, experimental, often spontaneous and *ad hoc* practice of trans-community embodiment of the fulness of Christ as a Christocentric social Gospel within historical contexts. It is concerned with the burning issue of restoring and reconstituting human dignity. Yoder's restorative vision seeks a Christocentric approach to nation building, social transformation and development. His Christocentric vision relocates mission and development to historical Christology.

Consequently, the SCS can learn from Yoder's social vision that historical Christology is a ministry to church renewal; that Christological ecclesiology is an ethical proclamation of Christ's lordship above the polity and politics of the Church and; that *jesulogical* social ethics is the historic kerygma of the revolutionary Gospel of Jesus Christ among the nations. His restorative vision for renewal can present the SCS with a more substantive reflection on a *reforming church* in a *reforming society* that is in dire need of a *reforming economy*.

OPSOMMING

Die uitgangspunt van hierdie navorsingsprojek is dat Yoder se herstellende visie van 'n ekklesiale teologie groot potensiaal inhou vir 'n meer toereikende publieke betrokkenheid deur die Suid-Sentraal Sinode (SSS) van die Presbiteriaanse Kerk van Nigerië (PKN). Betekenisvolle bronne van Yoder se Christosentriese visie vir die herstel van ekklesiale nadenke en praktyke kan die kerk help om te besin oor haar verdraaide ekklesiologie. Hedendaagse uitdagings binne die sosiaal-kulturele konteks van Nigerië bevrage die betekenis van die Verligtinggebaseerde Konstantinisties-Dosetiese ekklesiologie van die SSS in haar *godsdiens*-kulturele konteks. Dié ekklesiologie is in konflik met die Gereformeerde tradisie soos onderhou deur die SSS – wat nie 'n tydlose, a-historiese ekklesiologie voorstaan nie. Hierdie studie gebruik 'n sistematies-teologiese benadering vanuit historiese, Christologiese en Ekklesiologiese perspektiewe.

Met sy teologiese lens het die historiese perspektief die dilemma van die SSS teruggespeur na sekere ontstellende nalatenskappe van Verligtinggebaseerde projekte in Nigerië. Die Nigeriese kerke en hul groeiende sending- en ander projekte is nie hierdie verwarrende erflatings gespaar nie. In besonder het dit 'n effek gehad op die PKN, wat geboorte geskenk het aan die SSS. Die Verligting-gevormde gewelddadige etiek word dikwels gekenmerk deur truïsme en universalisme, asook deur die abstrakte en kompeterende ideologieë van die Reformasie-tydperk. Die getuienis van plaaslike bronne en kontekste geniet minder respek. Die kompeterende ideologieë verduister dikwels die kerke se beliggaamde verkondiging van Christus se heerskappy. Die sosiale etiek van die SSS plaas dus die figuur van Christus in sy teologiese getuienis onder verdenking. Derhalwe word Yoder se refleksie op die Christologie as 'n herstellende, helende vooruitsig voorgestel.

Yoder se nadenke oor die Christologie is ekumenies van aard. Dit is gegrond op die historiese lewe en werk wat die Bybelse Jesus konkreet in gemeenskappe gedemonstreer het. Yoder se Christologiese visie is Bybelsgefundeer in die katolesiteit van die tradisies van die voor-Konstantynse kerk. In sy fondasie en oriëntering is dit Barthiaans, alhoewel vanuit die perspektief van nie-gewelddadig verset. Dit reflekteer ook op historiese Christologie as 'n lydelik-versetlike bediening vir die vernuwing van die gemeenskap. Fundamenteel wil Yoder se uitkyk

shalom in die samelewing herstel. Yoder se visioenêre projek beskou plaaslike bronne en kontekste, veral in hul etiese getuienis, as baie betekenisvol. Bowenal verwag dit van gelowiges om 'n Christosentriese getuienis as lewensverantwoordelikheid aan te neem met betrekking tot die politieke (nie-geweldadige) etiek van Jesus . Yoder se besinning oor die Christologie stel as vooruitsig 'n ekklesiale getuienis wat gedefinieer en onderhou word deur die verdienste van die genadige Christus-gebeurtenis.

Yoder se ekklesiologiese visie herhaal die Barthiaanse ritme: *eklesiologie is die Kerk se bevestiging van die heerskappy van Christus oor haar beleid en politiek*. Dit stel as vooruitsig 'n Christosentriese korporatiewe en beliggaamde getuienis van die Koninkryksvisie as 'n historiese realiteit. Sy visie van 'n ekumeniese bediening van die kerk verteenwoordig gelowiges se korporatiewe (Christosentriese) realisering van die Koninkryk as 'n Christologiese mandaat aan die empiriese kerk in konkrete kontekste. Sy visie vir ekklesiologie herinterpreteer; dit vereis 'n Christosentriese bediening van al God se mense as 'n meer betekenisvolle praktyk betreffende die 'heerskappy van Christus' binne historiese kontekste. Dit is 'n Christologiese ekklesiologie. Vir Yoder is ekklesiologie in wese etiek.

Yoder se herstellende visie vir sosiale etiek is verbind aan sy refleksie op Christologie. Dit hou verband met gelowiges se beliggaming van 'n Christologiese jesulogiese etiek as liggaamspolitiek. Sy sosiale refleksie suggereer 'n multi-dimensionele, ondersoekende, eksperimentele, dikwels spontane en ad hoc praktyk van 'n trans-gemeenskaplike beliggaming van die volheid van Christus, as 'n Christosentriese sosiale evangelie binne historiese kontekste. Dit is gemoeid met die belangrike saak ter tafel, naamlik die herstel en bevestiging van menswaardigheid. Yoder se herstellende visie streef na 'n Christosentriese benadering tot nasiebou, sosiale transformasie en ontwikkeling. Sy Christosentriese visie verbind sending en ontwikkeling aan 'n historiese Christologie.

Gevolglik kan die SSS by Yoder se sosiale visie leer dat historiese Christologie 'n bediening tot die kerk se hernuwing is, dat Christologiese ekklesiologie 'n etiese verkondiging van Christus se heerskappy is, verhewe bo die beleid en politiek van die kerk en dat die jesulogiese sosiale etiek die historiese kerugma van die revolusionêre evangelie van Jesus Christus onder die nasies is. Sy herstellende visie vir vernuwing kan aan die SSS die geleentheid bied vir 'n meer substantiewe refleksie op die *Gereformeerde Kerk in a reformerende samelewing* wat 'n *reformerende ekonomie* broodnodig het.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late parents, Chief Ndukwe Kalu Ndukwe, who died in December 2000 and Mrs Ubani Ndukwe, who died in November 1997. They lived, worked and died with the hope that I would one day attain this level of education. I also dedicate the work to my selfless and inspirational wife, Elder Mrs Grace Olo, and our daughters (Precious and Hope). They sacrificed much in order to make this dream a reality.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------|---|
| AIC | AFRICAN INITIATED (INDIGENOUS) CHURCHES |
| APGA | ALL PROGRESSIVES GRAND ALLIANCE |
| BFO | BOARD OF FAITH AND ORDER |
| CAN | CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA |
| CBO | COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS |
| CCC | CELESTIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST |
| CCN | CHRISTIAN COUNCIL OF NIGERIA |
| CRM | CHARISMATIC RENEWAL MOVEMENT |
| EFCC | ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRIME COMMISSION |
| EYN | EKKLESIYAR YAN’UWA A NIGERIA |
| FBO | FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS |
| FESTAC | FESTIVAL OF ARTS AND CULTURE |
| FGN | FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA |
| FMG | FEDERAL MILITARY GOVERNMENT |
| GA | GENERAL ASSEMBLY |
| GAEC | GENERAL ASSEMBLY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE |
| IMF | INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND |
| ING | INTERIM NATIONAL GOVERNMENT |
| JNR | JUNIOR |
| MDG | MILENIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL |
| MIN | MINUTES |
| MP-MF | MULTI-PARTNER MICRO FINANCE |
| NAPEP | NATIONAL PROGRAM FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY |
| NEEDS | NATIONAL ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY |
| NEPAD | NEW ECONOMIC PROGRAM FOR AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT |
| NGO | NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS |
| OIC | ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COUNTRIES |
| PDP | PEOPLES’ DEMOCRATIC PARTY |
| PFN | PENTECOSTAL FELLOWSHIP OF NIGERIA |
| PKP | PROMISE KEEPER PROGRAM |
| PROCMURA | PROJECT FOR CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONSHIP IN AFRICA |

| | |
|---------|---|
| RECON | REFORMED ECUMENICAL COUNCIL OF NIGERIA |
| SAP | STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAM |
| SCS | SOUTH CENTRAL SYNOD |
| SEC | SYNOD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE |
| TCU | TRINITY (UNION THEOLOGICAL) COLLEGE UMUAHIA |
| THE PCN | THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NIGERIA |
| TPUHC | THE PRESBYTERIAN URBAN HEALTH CENTRE |
| UN | UNITED NATIONS |
| WCC | WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES |
| WARC | WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES |

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A church which *is* not clear on this ...task of making *its* Christian instructions known in words which grapple with the problems of the day – a church which *is* not filled with the anxiety to discover this word, would a priori betake itself to a corner of the graveyard.

(Barth 1949: 24-25[Our italics])

A church which refuses to also define its role in socio-political and economic terms stands a chance of being irrelevant in Nigeria today.

(Udoh² 1988: 13)

To be is to belong, and to belong involves active participation in alleviating problems of our society: only a corpse may hear about an issue and proceed on its own journey without uttering a word on it.

(An Abiriba³ adage)

1 Background

This study is seeking guidelines that can strengthen the public involvement of the South Central Synod (SCS) of The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (The PCN). The brief background that is offered here indicates that the SCS is well positioned to play a significant role in reconstructing and reforming public life within contemporary societies in Nigeria and beyond.

Given its increasing numerical strength, strong financial base, and consistent human resource development and supply to The PCN, the SCS is ranked among the fastest growing synods in the church. It is blessed with visionary leadership and committed followership. These human agents labour for its slow but increasing membership, strong financial support, as well as consistent resource development and supply to the entire church. Most of its ecclesiastical leaders, in particular, strive to harness its abundant human and material resources by blending spirituality

² Enyi Ben Udoh is an ordained minister of The PCN and a lecturer at the department of Religion and Philosophy, University of Calabar, Nigeria.

³ Abiriba is a community in Nigeria. Footnote 17 below presents a concise history of the Abiriba people. It acts as a guide to understanding the pervasive influence of 'African Religiosity' on Christian faith and practice in the Nigerian society under study (cf. Turaki 2006a and b, 1999; Kalu 2005, 2004, 2001a, 2004b; Okure 2002, 1993, 1990; Oshun 2001, 1998; Okorochoa cf. Bediako 2005, 2004, 2003, 1997, 1996, 1992a, 1992b; Maluleke 2005; Oduoye 2003, 2001, 1998; Mbiti 2003, 1998, 1993a and b; 1975, 1969; Verstraelen 2003, etc).

with skill. For instance, right from its inauguration in 1996,⁴ the SCS directed all its parishes and presbyteries to establish schools in the cities in order to inculcate godly morals in youths as the hope for a healthy moral ecology for church and society. Since that time, it awards University scholarships for studies in Science and Humanities.

These reflections of humane practices arise from the church's persuasion that the vision for a reconciled community and the need for a higher moral law call for the joining of theology and social practices. The SCS is also graced with ever-growing industrial and commercial cities, which result from migration and development. Its climatic conditions favour, *inter alia*, mineral exploration, farming, tourism, fishing, craft and trade. The synod is located within the rain forest region of Nigerian and stretches across four oil-producing States of Nigeria (Abia, Imo, Rivers, and Bayelsa). Such admired creativity and reputed innovativeness of its ecclesiastical leadership has won the SCS the accolade of being a pace-setting synod. The SCS is even known for addressing some burning national issues through communiqués from its various annual conferences. Nation building, social transformation and development are fundamental to its vision and pursuit of (theologically envisioned) mission engagements. Hence, describing the SCS as one of the fastest growing Synods bespeaks a theology of grace.

However, various sociological factors, which arise from a critical evaluation of the church's life and mission, also seem to question the above-mentioned assumptions. They reveal that the impact of the church as a transformative agent in society is inadequate. The SCS tends to demonstrate ambivalent and ambiguous political ethics in its proclamation of Jesus Christ. The SCS does not appear to adopt the political mission ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ in its theological mission engagements. Its embodied life and presence rarely demonstrates the need for its members to pay a responsible attention to indigenous worldviews in their daily life pursuits. For example, this church sustains the perennial dichotomy between the sacred and the secular life within its geo-political environment. Such dichotomy projects an understanding of Christian life as living in two different worlds at the same time (cf. Udoh 1988: 263). This dichotomy is further heightened by its members' lifestyles, which reflect a growing ignorance of

⁴ The SCS is about twelve years old, as a Synod of The PCN, but this research also covers its (SCS) life and witness before the official inauguration in 1996. Today, some of the dilemmas of this church are older than the synod. This study retraces them to some distressing legacies of the 19th century vision and practices of the Enlightenment-based ethics, in Nigeria. This is why the next chapter, 'The Historical Context of the SCS', begins with a discourse on the political history of Nigeria, which is followed by another discourse on the birth, growth and historical developments of The PCN.

the Christian vocation and its critical engagement with society. The ethos of the SCS also appears to proclaim and sustain an unwholesome celebration of indigenous cultural patriotism. Thus, we read them as questionable (Christian) ethical reflection and practices.

The inadequate ethics, with regard to indigenous socio-cultural practices, combine to make the synod appear insensitive to increasing economic exploitation, the confusing political situation and the unbridled ecological degradation within the Nigerian society, as this study hopes to show. In the understanding of this research, these unethical practices of the SCS arise as a fall-out of some distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based⁵ visions and practices in contemporary Nigeria. Most of the Enlightenment-based visions tend to reduce the Gospel of Jesus Christ: they do not often show that the Gospel of Christ also seeks to transform people and their contexts without compromising its (the Gospel) historical source and practices. The reductionism of the Enlightenment-based ethical visions leads the SCS to embody a reductionist ethic. These issues make it more convincing that the Enlightenment-based ethics are confusing. The argument is, of course, not that the Enlightenment is the only cause of the inadequate social ethics of the SCS; it is only one of the primary causes of the church's inadequate social ethics.

Simultaneously, these confusing identities of the SCS seem to reduce Christianity to a mere abstract religion. The daily life of the majority of its membership hardly embodies the Gospel. Consequently, an over-adventurous quest for fame, wealth, hegemony, and religious bigotry characterize the socio-cultural life of this synod. This state of affairs tends to defame the transforming power of the Gospel, which The PCN proclaims. From its historical origin, the Gospel thrives as a lived, living and liveable reality; it is embodied by its devotees. Christianity

⁵ From the Nigerian experience, one can describe the Enlightenment-based ethics as visionary practices, which celebrate the philosophies of Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) among others, in its reflections and practices. Descartes posited the dictum, *I think, therefore I am*; in other words, what makes me a human being is my ability to think for myself; to doubt what people, institutions, traditions, authorities, documents tell me and to think for myself what I may believe or not. Similarly, Kant emphasized the coming of age of human beings, where it became necessary for human beings to think for themselves and not to trust external authorities and traditions any longer.

In the Nigerian context, therefore, the Enlightenment had no place for the culture, religion or religious affiliation, endowments/benefits, identity, etc of the host culture. It bequeaths Nigerians with some (often) *coercive and despondent or consumerist* legacies, which this study also assumes to be the root of Nigeria's present dilemmas. Some distressing bequests of the Enlightenment-based vision and practices, especially, their *separation of theory from practice, which often reduces theology to abstractions*, affect the missionary projects of the Church in negative ways; *they scarcely demonstrate theology as a liveable reality*. We shall reflect more on these issues in subsequent chapters.

is not reducible to a matter of the mind, or of simply convincing people with the claims of Christ by winning arguments. Its credibility also has to do with the way believers bear witness of Jesus Christ with their daily lives and engagements.

Interestingly, one can contrast these reductionist legacies of the SCS with some bequests of an embodied proclamation of the Gospel by South African churches during the struggle against apartheid. For instance, in spite of the negative legacies of apartheid in many (contemporary) South African communities, people from different parts of the globe esteem the social witness of the Gospel by figures such as the former Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu and Beyers Naudés, as meaningful examples of embodied Christianity in our age. Through their public witness of Jesus Christ, the world later saw a veritable miracle unfold before its very eyes in the new South African democracy. Humanity experienced God's incarnated intervention in history with the peaceful political transition that took place in the country. To be human, in biblical understanding, includes the freedom to choose; the freedom to choose, responsibly. Responsible appropriation of the human freedom of choice and conscience constitutes what it means to be created in the image of God. A true democratic vision works and hopes for a society in which the reign of God's *shalom* can become a reality.

Such pursuit of *shalom* could be what an optimistic Nigerian philosopher, Fabian I. Agudoso describes as political communication in democracy (Agudoso 2003). Political communication *inter alia*, seeks to disseminate information about a political organization to its audience. It adopts various means and approaches to impact on its subjects, listeners and/or admirers its cherished ideals or cultural identities and values. In a true democracy, political communication exists as a reliable instrument of peace and order in society. It cherishes such fundamental values as liberty, justice, dignity and tolerance. Political communication, as Agudoso claims, offers a more sustainable means of re-invigorating responsible governance in Africa.

Paradoxically, democracy seems to degenerate into a state in which it is used as an instrument of political confusion and unrest in some States in the synod. The notorious level and the evident rate of corruption, bribery and stealing; male domination of the female folks (or vice versa); increasing economic and ecological exploitation within socio-cultural milieu of the synod, are also alarming. As a fall-out, many observers wonder if one cannot re-interpret democracy as it is experienced within the geo-political vicinity of the SCS, to mean 'demo-crazy,' i.e., collective

madness. The actual practice is very different from the ideal of what true democracy represents. Within this Nigerian context, it seems that democratic values such as freedom of conscience; freedom of expression; freedom of association; and freedom of speech, illustrate what Professor Dirk Smit⁶ describes, in his ecclesiastical context, as ‘too many different people doing too many different things,’ (Smit 2004a: 139) in their own way. In short, democracy is almost at a crisis point within the socio-cultural environment of the SCS. The vices tend to lend credence to the views of some African philosophers and theologians such as the Nigerian Roman Catholic philosopher, Oguejiofor, the famous writer, Chinua Achebe and two Kenyan African women theologians Mikkell and Nthamburi⁷, that one of the most pervasive problems of democracy in Africa is corruption.

Significantly, the situations described above combine to indict the SCS for its inadequate involvement in and commitment to societal affairs. They also exist as evident signals that the Synod has to rediscover its identity as a ‘social ethic’, i.e., the sign, the instrument, and the embodied life for social reflections and practices within the Nigerian society. A Christianity, which fails to radiate the transforming ethics of Jesus Christ in a perverse and crooked world, but rather flows uncritically with the majority ethic, can be dismissed as ideological slavery in contemporary Nigeria. Hence, the salient and (often) disappointed response of the society to the SCS is best expressed in the words of prophet Jeremiah’s lamentation to God: ‘The harvest is past, the summer is ended and *we are* not saved’ (Jer. 8: 20).

Furthermore, most sociological manifestations arise from fundamental theological convictions. It is noteworthy that most Nigerians are incurably religious and culturally altruistic in their historical origins, orientations and practices. They embody their *religio-cultures* as indispensable religiosities.⁸ Thus, in this study, it is supposed that two major theological factors⁹ inhibit the SCS from fulfilling its public calling in Nigeria.

⁶ Professor Smit is an ordained minister of the Uniting Reformed Churches in Southern Africa (URCSA). He is a Systematic as well as an Ecumenical theologian of international repute.

⁷ See Oguejiofor (2003), Achebe (1983) and Mikkell and Nthamburi (1999)

⁸ *Religio-culture* represents the culture, which originates, thrives, and consummates in religion. It is adopted in this study to describe African cultures. Most Africans celebrate their *religio-cultures* as ‘religiosity’, i.e., religion as it is understood and practiced by a people. This study also hopes to demonstrate that Nigerians, as most other Africans, have knowledge of God, which antedates Christianity.

⁹ The first theological factor reflects a Constantinian theology, while the second reflects a Docetic theology.

The first theological factor seems to be the negative aspect of the pervasive influence of the (translated and transiting) legacies of the early missionaries' political ethics. This political philosophy insists on its truistic moral absolutes, which also proclaim sin as cultural otherness. From his South African experience, Doug Stuart describes it as cultural racism, in which the inferiority of the African *otherness* requires physical and moral domination. The missionaries 'labor among the convicts' using the Gospel to lay the axe to the root of 'pagan customs and criminal indulgences.' As a result, conviction of sin and guilt became synonymous with being an African. Such pseudo-political ethics also demeans indigenous peoples and cultures as the inferior *other* that 'needs magisterial control'. Consequently, most indigenous Africans became children in need of paternal care, as well as 'servants in need of human masters, before needing a Savior' (Stuart 2002: 72). From Stuart's narration of the missionaries' approach (mission ethics), this study reflects on the missionaries' theological (missionary) practices; mission ethics as conqueror; or heroic ethics. The missionaries' ethics celebrates unwholesome cultural transfer (or imperialism) as well as (violent) monarchical orientation of its adherents towards human lordship.

The inference from Stuart's narration can make it clearer that this conqueror or heroic ethics bequeaths the SCS with an ideological-political mission approach. When embodied, its social witness tends to compromise the prophetic voice of the church, i.e., the voice that also commends the good, while condemning the evil practices in the society in its theological mission engagements. Such Christian ethics rather paves the way for a cultural or Constantinian face of Christianity. Within it, the Gospel is often compromised in the effort of the church to proclaim the universal lordship of Jesus Christ. Constantinianism rarely emphasizes a theology that is functional in the public lives of its devotees. As a political ideology, its unhealthy association of Christianity with the 'power of human throne' often confuses the lordship of Jesus Christ with human lordship. Many a time, Constantinianism even becomes vulnerable to the temptation of substituting its emphasis on the kingdom of God with the church. The Constantinian church scarcely points its adherents to Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. In addition, it presents church membership as a matter of belonging, even without involvement. Constantinian political ideology permits an unbridled exchange of divine patronage in which one can choose God as a new patron, but deny the rule of Christ. From its perspective, people can also make decisions on religious matters and religion but refuse commitment to religious decisions. Constantinianism often tends to coerce (rather than coax or persuade) the membership. In Constantinianism, the

church also imitates the imperial model of authority that the governing authority (the State) often exhibits, without meaningful self-criticism. Constantinianism often adopts Christianity to achieve its political goals. It represents a political ideology more than conversion, or in Alistair Kee's (1982)¹⁰ words, it is 'the triumph of ideology'. Constantinianism often breeds, enthrones, and legitimates violence in the society.

With the background on the violence of Constantinianism, this study reasons that that Allan Verhey¹¹ may have argued based on similar reflections:

Constantine and Constantinians have plenty to repent of....They may not be tyrants. They may not "lord it over" those who are subject to them. They may not pursue policies that only serve the interest of the rich and the powerful. Jesus and the theocratic tradition neither divinized nor demonized political authority in the context of a common life....

(Verhey 2001: 468)

For Verhey, Constantinians need to repent from coercing the membership and from substituting the lordship of Jesus Christ with human leaders; neither Constantine nor any (Christian) political authority is the Messiah. Due to such Constantinian influence on the mission ethics of the SCS, the church and its theological mission engagements are often over-shadowed by the agenda of its surrounding societies. With the Constantinian influence, the SCS sustains its bequest of the unhealthy church-world relationship in its missionary projects, as we shall show in the next chapter.

The second theological reason results from the missionaries' attempt to proffer lasting solution to the enduring problem of Christ and Culture (Niebuhr 1951). We understand the solution that is proffered in the theology of some missionary movement in Nigeria as a reduction of the Christian faith to a vertical or Docetic Christianity. This mission ethics separates the sacred life from the secular and calls on Christians to be involved only in the sacred and vertical affairs of the Christian life. Many Docetic 'approaches concede unique authority to Jesus, but do so by divorcing him from our humanity' (Yoder 1994d: 99). Docetic ethical reflections and practices do not see Christians as human beings who have much association with human societies. One

¹⁰ Alistair Kee was a Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Glasgow when he wrote this book. He is also the author of the book *From Bad Faith to Good News: Reflections on Good Friday & Easter* (1991); and many other books. Kee moved from the University of Glasgow to Edinburgh University in 1989.

¹¹ Allan Verhey was a Calvinist Professor of Religion and the *Blekkink* Chair of Religion at Hope College, Holland, Michigan. He is now at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA.

can also describe it as an ‘other-worldly’ or a full eschatological (i.e., ahistorical) realization of the kingdom of God. More crucial for this study is the understanding that Docetism may not welcome a contemporary Christianity of African origin that interacts with local *religio-cultural* resources with the aim of refining them and integrating them into its theologies. More often than not, Docetism dismisses human participation in the partial realization of the kingdom of God on earth as unchristian.

As this study hopes to show, these mission ethics bequeath the SCS with acculturating theologies that constitute its present dilemmas. They often grace the church with what a Ghanaian-born Feminist theologian, Mercy Amba Oduyoye describes as a mission theology that was crafted to make Euro-American Christians out of African pagans (Oduyoye 1998: 361); these theologies function less in public lives. Their Constantinian and Docetic faces present the SCS with crisis-ridden ecclesiological identities. Most of the crises are retraceable to the competing political ideologies of the Enlightenment ethics in Nigeria. Hence, they provide us a platform to agree with some theologians of African descent such as Turaki (2006a; 2006b; 1999).¹² In Turaki’s view, an average western theology of the 19th and 20th centuries does not address the theological questions in nuanced ways. They scarcely give meaningful attention to issues arising from Christian engagements with indigenous *religio-cultures* in Africa as these pseudo-theologies only seek to impose their postulates on their host cultures.

From the foregoing, we hold that the crisis in the ecclesiological identity of the SCS arises from its unwholesome cultural patriotism as well as its unhealthy rejection of indigenous cultures. It does not reflect the mission ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ. This is a theological problem, which also reduces its adherents to the status of unhealthy consumers. Such devotees hardly contribute meaningful transformational developmental ideas to their communities. They often accept and adapt to these theologies without significant criticisms. At best, they recycle these unwholesome bequests with few modifications. These issues further strengthen our conviction that the SCS as a ‘Reformed church’ does not fulfil its public role in adequate ways. Such inadequate involvement of the church with the public may only be remedied theologically. The

¹² Yusuf Turaki is an ordained minister of the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) and a former Professor of theology and social ethics at the Jos Evangelical Seminary (JETS) in Nigeria. He was also a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Yale Divinity School in the USA, where he currently lectures.

SCS tends to compromise the centrality of the figure of Jesus Christ in its social witness, and this informs our motivation for embarking on this investigation.

In our view, the call for an adequate social participation on the part of the SCS is traceable to the Bible. Our Lord Jesus Christ emphasized its incumbency on the Church in the Sermon on the Mount when he charged his followers in these words: ‘You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but it is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world...In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven’ (Matt 5: 13, 14 and 16). It seems to us that the views of John Howard Yoder, a 20th century Mennonite (or rather, ecumenical) theologian, resonates with such a central statement from Scriptures.

This study argues that Yoder’s social ethics, which is based on his Christology and ecclesiology, can provide a necessary lens and framework for reflecting on the ecclesial identity and social ethics of the SCS. For several decades, Yoder wrote on the public involvement of the Church in the United States of America.¹³ The third chapter of this study discusses his intellectual biography more fully. However, it suffices to state here that Yoder’s wealth of resources on such themes as Christology, ecclesiology and social ethics could provide unlimited incentives for the SCS in its theological quest to re-define its public role. Yoder articulated his project on the social practices of the Church¹⁴ as he envisioned them from the political ethics of the biblical Jesus.

¹³ In his lifetime, Yoder (1927-1997) published about seventeen books and hundreds of articles and wrote many unpublished essays (Nation 2006: 27). Several of his works have also been published posthumously. Some of his publications include; *The Christian Witness to the State: Discipleship as Political Responsibility* (1964, 1997; cf. 2003b); *The Original Revolution* (1971); *Nevertheless: The Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism* (1971, 1992); *The Politics of Jesus* (1972; 1994). Some others are: *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (1984); *He Came Preaching Peace* (1985); *The Fullness of Christ* (1987); *Body Politics: Five Characteristics of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (1992, 2001); *The Royal Priesthood Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (1994); *When War is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-War Thinking* (1996); *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (1997); *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (2002). Yoder’s adherents are still collating and publishing some of his works as post-humus books. See also the bibliography below for a list of his works that were available to us.

¹⁴ This study associates with Yoder among other theologians, that the Church also represents a community of Christ-believers. It bespeaks of a body/entity that transcends Christianity and Christian denominations. It is therefore identified with a capital letter *C* in this project. While a small letter *c* denotes church (a church) as Christian denomination in this investigation.

In one of his important works entitled *The Christian Witness to the State*, for instance, Yoder emphasizes character consistency and witness as the criteria for the recognition, reverence and acceptance of the Church by the society. Writing from his western (and widely travelled) experience, Yoder also reasons that; ‘Only if she herself is demonstrably and ethically working on a given problem does the church have the right to speak to others. A racially segregated church has nothing to say to the state about integration....’ (Yoder 1997a: 21; cf. 1964: 21). He argues that the embodied testimony of Christ’s lordship over the State provides the believers’ community with the normative ethics for social engagements at all times and in all contexts. In other words, we can learn (in Nigeria) from his perspective that a church that loses its comparable impulse, which radiates to the larger society as a truer, more properly ordered community (than the society around it) has ceased to fulfil its deepest calling. The Church exists as the one community that is given the knowledge of God’s will for the world. It exists as the bearer of history. Hence, the church that ceases to reflect and sustain such a claim has arguably lost its reason for existence (cf. Braaten & Jensen 1997: viii).

Such postulations might fascinate Udoh (1988: 13), who insists that a church, which refuses to define its role in socio-political and economic terms, stands a chance of being irrelevant in Nigeria today. The state of affairs, which exists as distressing aspects of the British political ideology in contemporary Nigeria (as we show in the next chapter), yearns for a more responsible approach to nation building, social transformation and development. Churches in Nigeria today cannot afford to shy away from this need. Udoh’s view tends to re-echo the late President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania’s argument that:

Unless the church, its members and its organizations, express God’s love for humankind by involvement and leadership in *constructive* protest against the present condition of human beings, then it will become identified with injustice and persecution. If this happens, it will die – and humbly speaking, deserve to die because it will then serve no purpose to post-colonial humankind

(Nyerere 1987: 119[Our italics])

These assertions would also make Karl Barth’s rhetoric to the Church more meaningful to the SCS.

A church which is not clear on this point of having a duty to this nation in need, and not merely the task of giving Christian instruction in direct form, but which has the task of making this Christian instruction known in words which grapple with the problems of the day – a church which is not filled with the anxiety to discover this word, would *a priori* betake itself to a corner of the graveyard

(Barth 1949: 24-25 [Our paraphrasing])

The Church is the body of Christ, whose primary task is to proclaim Christ's lordship over the world and to proclaim his headship of the Church as grace (cf. Yoder 1997a: 12).

As a way forward, it is hoped that Yoder's ecclesial (or ecumenical) theology, specifically his Christology, ecclesiology and ethics would provide guidelines for a restorative discourse on the public role of the SCS. Yoder holds the conviction that the political ethics of Jesus Christ provides the Christian paradigm for a more meaningful political action for all time and in all places. Yoder re-presents Christian discipleship as an indispensable practice, which expects an open, respectful, and doxological awareness on the part of believers in Jesus Christ, of this (particular) historical identity. Yoder's covenant theology reflects on the history of God's self-disclosure (theology) as a continuing conversation of concrete present and past events. Yoder's historical, Christological, and ecclesiological perspectives on the Church are inevitable in the ongoing ecumenical quest for a responsible ethics in the Nigerian society. The historic Cross is central to his theology and his vision for an incarnated Christology seeks to demonstrate and altogether demystify theology. In addition, Yoder's Christological vision also highlights our vision of African hospitable and modifiable pre-Enlightenment *religio*-culture as an indispensable approach towards contextuality, and as the beginning process for a responsible ecumenical theology in our world. This study also reasons that a contemporary African (Christian) theology, which welcomes a self-critical pluralism, can offer the world a more significant beginning process in its quest for responsible ecumenical theology in a pluralistic world. Such a responsible pluralism also offers listening ears to the views of others in its interactive engagements.

Yoder's ecclesiology is the result and goal of his Christology. It defines ecclesiology as the expression and affirmation of the Church's faithful witness to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Yoder's social ethics highlights the Bible as paradigmatic for the people of God as they participate in the realization of a holistic salvation of society. Yet, it does not neglect the crucial roles of history, experience, and reason in the process. It renders unity in diversity plausible when the Church is regarded as a renewed human community that is inaugurated by the Christ-event.

Again, Yoder's relation of ecclesiology to ethics can provide the SCS with the framework to re-conceive, reconstruct and re-orient its theology to give priority to contextuality. In the process, Yoder's ecclesial vision would not reduce the theological mission engagements of the Church to mere contextual issues. Yoder esteems unity in diversity above unity in uniformity, hence, his predilection for a plurality of theology that would not compromise the historic particularity of Christian identity. In his visionary approach, religion and culture are inseparable; therefore, the Church, as a restorative (also as an alternative) society, may not be isolated from society.

In summary, Yoder's Christology is grounded in the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ. His ecclesiology is the goal and result of his Christology. Yoder's social ethics is tied to his Christology; his believing community is also a 'restorative' rather than a mere alternative society. His multifaceted social ethics reflects a Diaspora fulfilment of the Barthian ecclesial perspective. The Barthian vision insists on a public ministry of the Church that is rooted in the merits of the Christ-event. These issues, in our opinion, make Yoder's ethical (ecclesial) reflection and practices most ideal for *re-visioning* the 'distorted ecclesiological identity' (Onwunta & Hendriks 2006) of the SCS. They (the above-mentioned issues) are christologically determined. This study also supports the efforts of scholars such as the Dutch Calvinist and former Professor of Philosophy at Calvin's College, Richard Mouw¹⁵ to describe Yoder's multidimensional, occasional ethical reflections and practices as 'the Yoderian project'. However, these preliminary remarks about the so-called Yoderian project do not provide an exhaustive account of Yoder's Christology, ecclesiology and ethics. His work will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters of this dissertation. The purpose of these introductory paragraphs is to argue that Yoder's work have the potential for assisting the SCS in its search to re-define the public role of the church in Nigeria and elsewhere.

2 Research Questions

From the issues raised in the previous section, the research question for this study can be formulated in a variety of ways: How can the SCS understand its problem of inadequate social involvement better? How can its self-understanding and theological mission enterprise contribute more meaningfully to the ongoing quest for a sustainable and more responsible approach to nation-building, social transformation and development in Nigeria? More concretely, what light

¹⁵ Mouw has been lecturing at the Fuller Theological Seminary in the last two decades.

would the theology of Yoder (as expressed in his ecclesial ethics) shed on the church's discourse on the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics? In other words, what plausible and possible (practical) lessons can the church, in particular, the SCS, draw from the Yoderian project, on the relationship between church and public life, or on the relationship between ethical ecclesial identity and ethical practice? These questions will be addressed in the course of our investigation.

The study is entitled *Christian Faith and Social Transformation: John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics as Lens for Re-visioning the Ecclesiological Identity of the South Central Synod (SCS) of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (The PCN)*. This study engages Yoder's portrayal of the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics as a paradigm for *re-visioning* (re-envisioning) the public responsibility of the SCS. Such revaluation of the ecclesiological identity of the SCS might pave ways for the church to fulfil its public responsibility more adequately. Yoder's vision for a plausible and feasible ecclesiology seeks to restore the image of the biblical Jesus Christ and make it central in the life and in the theological mission engagements of the Church.

The theology of a Mennonite scholar is investigated and the potential of his work for the social ethics of the SCS is explored. The quest of the study is that this work can assist the SCS to rediscover and embody the wealthy Reformed social ethics within its historical contexts. Yoder stands as a good candidate to investigate since his work is deeply influenced by two Reformed scholars, namely John Calvin and Karl Barth.

In agreement with Yoder, this research therefore envisions a plausible and feasible ecclesiology that can restore the image of the biblical Jesus Christ and make it central in the life and in the theological mission engagements of the church. The ecclesiological identity of the SCS reflects a pendulum, which swings to two opposing extremes of unwholesome inclusivism and unhealthy exclusivism, i.e., Constantinian-like and Docetic-faced Christian theologies. The two extremes exist as two diligent midwives who deliver and nurture a crisis (split) of Christian identity in the Synod. Thus, we reason that the Yoderian restorative approach would strive to maintain a sustainable and more responsible balance between the two extremes. Its Christological ecclesiology will strive to demonstrate that the Bible is indispensable for Christians as they participate in the realization of a holistic salvation of contemporary society. Yoder's theological project will not neglect the crucial complementary roles, which history, experience and reason

play in the communication of the biblical witness as a lived, living and liveable reality. It will respect the saying that, a Christian theology betrays its faithfulness to the Gospel when as a pathway to expediency and social relevance it adapts to popular postulations without meaningful self-criticisms.

Consequently, this study also argues that Yoder's theology is of great importance to the SCS in reflecting on its public responsibility in ways that are more adequate in Nigeria (and beyond). In addition, it is hoped that Yoder's visionary ecclesial practices can pave the way for the SCS to engage in continuing conversations with the challenges of indigenous religiosities. It would seek to interact and reform them with a view to integrate some useful local *religio-cultural* resources into its theologies. Yoder also retrieves the Christocentric visionary practices of early catholicity (i.e. of the first three centuries) for his 'Diaspora' demonstration of the Barthian Christology. In other words, Yoder's return to the Christocentric visionary practices of early catholicity can assist the SCS to restore and translate the holistic witness of Jesus Christ within the church's Nigerian context and beyond, in more adequate ways. Reconciliation is central to Yoder's (ecumenical) Christology, which also pleads for active and responsible participation of 'all' God's people in the restoration of *shalom*. It also stresses that every believer in Jesus Christ is graciously favoured with, at least, one charismatic gift that can contribute to the church's pursuit of God's mission (*missio Dei*). The empirical church does not have its own mission but the *missio Dei*. This project also envisions the restoration of *shalom* as a true pursuit of the glory of God in society.

The Yoderian vision is a Diaspora project. Yet its Diaspora Christological vision will not exonerate the SCS from the inevitable responsibility of ensuring ecumenical prophetic public witness as an aspect of its revolutionary subordination to the State. It is Barthian; and according to the vision, reconciliation is the essence of justification, hence, Christology becomes the source and result of its ecclesial visionary practices. Furthermore, its ecumenical vision also suggests that Yoder's Diaspora Christological ecclesiology can project contemporary 'African Christianity' (Bediako 2004a, 2004b) as a more sustainable and responsible approach towards ecumenism in the 'pluralistic' 21st century world. It shares space with others and makes use of local socio-cultural resources by transforming them beyond their traditional conceptions, meanings, and practices. This embodied way of living out Christian catholicity in pluralistic societies can also provide the SCS with a restorative and stronger platform to practise a more

substantive Rule of Christ in Nigeria. The Yoderian project reflects African communal spirituality that is rooted in ‘covenanted’ or ‘extended’ family system (cf. Carter 2001). More importantly, the Yoderian social ethic can re-echo African ethics of hospitality, vulnerability and interdependence. It is a multifaceted social ethics, whose Christocentric religiosity often adopts the ‘*copulative and*’¹⁶ (rather than the ‘*either/or*’) approach to theology. Yoder’s Christocentric vision embodies generous hospitality as its inherent spirituality; it is a nonviolent-resistant-pacifist political ethics.

Given these positions, the study further asks if Yoder’s preference of the ‘*copulative and*’ in his theological projects may not offer valuable solutions to the pervasive subject-object dichotomy of the Enlightenment in the SCS. Would Yoder’s life and intellectual activities/ practices not spur the SCS to engage in active Christocentric public ministry as well as repentance from stereotyping the culturally different other? More concretely, the study enquires whether Yoder’s social ethics does not offer a lens for the SCS to re-vision its ecclesiological identity in order to transform its bequests of the Enlightenment-based ethics to Christocentric mission ethics. Will such a Christocentric ethics not offer Nigerians a necessary and feasible approach towards the ongoing quest for a sustainable and more responsible approach to community (nation) building, social transformation and development? The Yoderian non-methodological approach does not compromise its faithfulness to the Gospel in the process.

3 Methodology

This research adopts an inclusive systematic-theological approach in order to fit most of its theological postulations into an encompassing and valid framework of biblical truth. Such postulations will also extend beyond mere discourses or arguments. In addition, they will strive to demonstrate that being truthful to oneself and to what is true to one’s conversation partner is part of the task of systematic theology. The *other* is not an opponent *per se*; she/he is a conversation-partner in the Christian’s varied attempts to understand the act of faith. The research associates with the view that the quest of Christian theology to understand the act of faith itself is a consistent whole, which can be modelled after the biblical Jesus Christ. Everything Yoder tells us is systematized in Jesus Christ (cf. Yoder 1994d: 141). Such a quest

¹⁶ The ‘*copulative and*’ theology bespeaks of an inclusive theology. It is our conception but is accredited to Yoder based on inferences from his works.

further seeks to bring the various truths apprehended by faith and repentance into some kind of coherence in Him.

Consequently, this systematic-theological approach tilts towards 'ecumenical and Reformed' reflections, specifically, from a Nigerian Presbyterian perspective. As earlier pointed out, the SCS is a synod in a Reformed church in Nigeria, The PCN, while the student researcher is an ordained minister of The PCN. To authenticate some of its contributions with concrete human experiences, the project also draw resources from the experiences of Olo Ndukwe (the student researcher) who is a native of Abiriba¹⁷. Olo was also a businessman in the Francophone

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In earlier times, Abiriba was the Birmingham of Nigeria that was also praised for her technical ability; the people mined, smelt and forged iron (Mokhtar 2003: 334). They share a lot with the "Israelite artisans of Iron Age II" (McNutt 1999: 168-169, 196-198) but differ from them in not being marginal in society. Non-indigenes describe them as possessing hands of supernatural invincibility because of their craftsmanship as well as their daring and enterprising spirit in the times of war. As Joshua Akuma, an ordained minister of The PCN and a native of Abiriba observed, this spirituality has metamorphosed into trade and commerce. Its resultant vigor, ingenuity and industry ranks Abiriba among the first in Nigeria in terms of self-help communal infrastructural development and enterprise. Abiriba people's craftsmanship, daring and enterprising spirit in commerce and industry as well as wealth are comparable to those of the people of Nnewi community in Anambra State (Nnewi, by the way, is a famous community in terms of commerce and industry in Nigeria). The *Abiribas* (a term that will henceforth be used to identify the people of Abiriba origin in this study) are self-reliant and self-supporting, but not consumed by individualism (Akuma 2001: 5). Ogbu Kalu (1996: 74-79) also acknowledges this fact in his description of the Abiribas and both Akuma and Kalu agree with Ejindu's (2005) masterpiece on the Abiribas: "Abiriba has achieved tremendous success in business and industry, but has not been very active in politics beyond *outside her community until recently*. They take pride in their culture and traditions...but were open to innovations and receptive to foreigners" [Our italics]. By the way, Ogbu U. Kalu is a Ruling elder in the Nsukka Parish Kirk Session of The PCN and a Professor of Church History at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He is an African Church Historian of international repute whose home community is about an hour's drive from Abiriba. Abiriba people are hospitable and apt at new discoveries, but they do not compromise their *religio-culture*. They are noted for their hospitality, which is also evident in the scope of their magnanimity in recruiting apprentices for commerce and industry 'without charges' – known as *iku nwanta uzu* (i.e. picking up a youth for training in sojourn). This altruistic philosophy extends beyond biological and ethnic boundaries. For them (as for most other African communities), the concept and practice of *ubuntu* (as *belonging*, not as the Black African ideology that excludes other South Africans) is expressed in *madu no ndu maka ibe ya*, that is, *one exists because of and for the other*. The concept is non-negotiable because to be is to belong. Human development is their watchword; hence, the number of persons one assists to develop and celebrate humanity adjudges a person's popularity and affluence. Olo's study, sponsorship and sustenance in Stellenbosch are a testimony to this magnanimity.

Ogbu Kalu (1996: 75) points out that their ethics restrains the individual from super-imposing himself on the community. Surprisingly, there seems to be an oversight of the above-mentioned altruistic identity and spirituality of the Abiribas in Kalu's description. The Abiribas are not only a *competitive achievement-oriented* or *materialistic* people as portrayed, but are also *human developers and living symbol of hospitality* (and even more). Their slow reception of Christianity is based more on theological than cultural or ideological reasons. They are religious and emphasize religiosity. Abiriba people are migrants and adventurers, who are also found trading in many countries but are involved in education and civil service only recently. Abiriba is one of the dominant business communities in the state and its migrant communities are some of the harbingers of Presbyterianism in the synod. Positionally, Abiriba is one of the urban communities in Abia State but it is not located within the synod area. . Among the Abiribas, there is a maxim, which bids people to be concerned with societal problems: *Only a corpse hears about an issue and proceeds on its journey to the great beyond without uttering a word about it*. The saying pleads for active and critical altruistic participation in finding lasting solutions to social problems. A carefree attitude on the part of a community member towards this religiosity results in the summary dismissal of

Republique du Benin and in his own country before becoming a full-time ordained minister of The PCN in 1995.

The research draws from his experience in the synod. It reveals apparent economic exploitation, ecological degradation, marginalization and oppression of the poor and the less privileged in the area. Olo's experience can also shed more light on some confusing political situations as well as the distressing effects of bribery and corruption within the Synod area. Exploitation, oppression and marginalization abound, hence, the prophetic cry for the rise of those who will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents, rends the air in the synod area. The present conditions in the synod heighten our suspicion that the endemic crisis of identity in the SCS ensues from a misconception of the *raison d'être* (reason for being) and of the calling of the church, by a majority of its membership. Such a (suspected) misconception of the identity and being of the church ushers in ambiguity and ambivalence in Christian identity and social ethics, as can be seen more clearly in the next chapter of this study. However, this researcher is also convinced that God still hears the cries of the oppressed and afflicted, and can take sovereign initiatives to deliver them (as the Exodus Tradition shows us), hence the search for a necessary exit from this crisis-ridden identity of the SCS.

Further, the study focuses more on contemporary realities affecting the theological mission enterprise of this Presbyterian Synod in Nigeria. Thus, it also strives to reflect Yoder's position on systematic theology by being more inductive.¹⁸ The study also seeks to understand the problem better and, where necessary, articulate and suggest possible solutions. It further draws some useful resources from various genres in order to carry the reader along and enable her/him

the person as irrelevant to society. In Abiriba, even ancestors belong. Ancestors do not just die and cease to live; they only proceed on a journey without abdicating their responsibilities to society. To be is to belong, and to belong is to be active and be critically involved in societal affairs. Hence, the people's ethical reflection may not be separated from their ethical practice. (This brief history can assist us in understanding the background influence of culture on Christianity, which our mission theology neglects, and the resultant Christian identity crisis in the Nigerian society of this study.

¹⁸ We conceive this adjective *inductive*, its noun *induction*, as well as its verb *to induct* from the Nigerian Presbyterian (Reformed) background where ministers (old or newly ordained) are inducted into charges after renewing their ordination vows and consenting to it (P&P G-06.0202-5). The *P&P* or *Practice and Procedure* is an official guiding document of The PCN. In The PCN, induction demonstrates to all that the inducted minister is formally introduced and empowered by the Presbytery (Bishop) to oversee a particular Parish and to preside over its Kirk Session on behalf of the Presbytery. The induction is an esteemed official introduction and empowerment to stewardship.

to interact with, and make sense out of the work. The research recognizes ‘the reader-after-the-text’ (cf. Punt 2004; Yoder 1997b: 82; 1997c; 1996b; 1994c) approach to Christian scholarship.

Consequently, the study respects the sociology of knowledge as a useful reformulation, which can also provide its readers with meaningful resources for the Christian moral life. This project will, among other things, struggle to uphold its theological lens and consciousness in the pursuit of an interdisciplinary approach towards ‘interculturality’.¹⁹ It can be described in the words of Johann Mouton (2001: 175-180) as a ‘non-empirical study’.

The literature study will examine Yoder’s works and some responses to his project. The study will also serve as a critique to the Yoderian multidimensional, occasional and spontaneous but logically consistent project. In addition, other appropriate theological works and relevant synodical decisions of the SCS on social responsibility will be examined. This project also appropriates material from other disciplines that deal with society and social themes. The investigation seeks the renewal of the ecclesiological identity of the SCS with a view to nuance the public ministry of the church to Nigerians. This study focuses on historical, Christological and ecclesiological perspectives in the light of the ongoing ecumenical quest for more responsible ethical reflections and practices for a contemporary pluralistic Nigerian society.

The historical perspective insists that knowledge of the past is vital. Without it, it becomes more difficult for us to know who we were and who we are and to pursue who we ought to be. Contemporary history makes it clear that those who cannot remember the past are bound to repeat even its worst. Tutu (1999) and Bediako²⁰ (1992b) reiterate that the prediction or predilection of one generation can become a tradition of the next. With this background, the research begins its task, historically, by tracing and highlighting the genesis of the dilemmas of the SCS. In the process, the study also expresses and re-appraises the efforts of the SCS towards nation building, social transformation and development in Nigeria. Such an exercise will pave the way for us to investigate the intelligibility of the suspicion that there is a misconception on the identity and being of the church (amongst many) in the SCS To accomplish this task, this

¹⁹ The term is used to refer to the interface of cultures in this study. We offer more discussions on this term in the fourth chapter.

²⁰ Professor Kwame Bediako was a Ghanaian-born Reformed theologian of international repute and an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church in Ghana. He was the director of the Akrofi-Christaller Center in Ghana until his demise in June 2008.

study concurs with Yoder (1997c) that historiography serves as a ministry to renewal. The research explores the life of Yoder whose social ethics it upholds as possible and plausible for restoration in the SCS. This approach can assist us to determine the usefulness of the Yoderian Christology within the context of the SCS.

The Christological perspective of this research presents a historical Christian conviction espoused by some renowned theologians such as Karl Barth. It claims that Christology is the authentic test for the validity and usefulness of any theological position or contribution. Almost every Christian theological conviction stresses that the unique personality of Jesus Christ offers the one secure and fulfilling anchor for the soul of theology. Christology provides the goal and standard for the ethical projects of individuals and humankind. Thus, the research approaches Yoder's Christology from its locus in early catholicity. Yoder's Christology is a restorative project, which also seeks to realize the Barthian vision from a Diaspora perspective. The study reflects on this issue in detail in the third chapter of this research.

Yoder's Christological vision further seeks to validate its claim that what Jesus Christ has done for humanity through his life of self emptying, death, resurrection and ascension inspires Christians to refrain from self-centeredness; it pleads for a substitutory lifestyle of his believers. The merits of this (historical) Christ-event also calls on his disciples to embody and re-enact such a lifestyle through a unique community of faith as sacrament, sign, and instrument of the heavenly city within, and for the sake of the earthly city. The Yoderian Christological vision makes it incumbent for such communities to exist and serve with 'distinctive' ecumenical (ecclesial) convictions. They embody (or en flesh) ecclesial convictions whose intent is biblically rooted in the concept of the *missio Dei*, which was paradigmatic in Jesus Christ. We hope that an historical Christological approach can shed more light on the afore-mentioned theological problem, which manifests in the indistinct ecclesiological identity of the SCS and, consequently, affects its social ethics.

The ecclesiological perspective entails that such ecumenical theology portrays the Church as a distinctive community among other communities in the world. The Church exists alongside others for the right ordering of the society. Thus, the study reflects on the Church as a theological and sociological entity, 'which sees itself through the eyes of the world as disreputable and shabby, susceptible to all human frailties; and through its own eyes, a mystery,

the incorruptible Body of Christ' (Bosch 1991: 389). The research further seeks to establish the validity of its claim that such a unique community of faith is grounded in Scriptures. It is also characterized by necessary historical Christological convictions, which seek a continuing Christocentric realization of the kingdom of God within history. This might pave the way for us to demonstrate that such a community also thrives on a distinctive ecclesiology in which the others 'are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation, with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone' (Eph 2:19 [Our paraphrase]).

The shape of such a unique ecclesiology needs to be Evangelical, Catholic, and Reforming. We can also describe it in the words of Van Engen (1996: 183)²¹, as 'the Evangelist paradigm'; it is faith-particularistic, culturally pluralistic and ecclesialogically inclusivistic as a foretaste of the Kingdom. A substantive social ethics is our goal. As hinted earlier, this study suspects that the contemporary theological mission ethics, which the SCS embodies, is responsible for the church's inadequate public role within its host *religio-cultures*. It often re-echoes the sound of imperialism to the ears of many *religio-centric* and culturally altruistic Nigerians. These perplexing issues are inspirational to the research goal of this thesis.

4 Research Goal

The research goal of this study is to re-present Yoder's portrayal of the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics as a model for re-envisioning the public responsibility of the SCS. In its visionary approach, the Yoderian project fastens believers' social ethics to (historical) Christology in its constant affirmation that ecclesiology is ethics. This study reasons that such a visionary practice can provide a more significant theological framework, which can assist the SCS to think afresh on themes like Christology, ecclesiology and ethics in more substantive ways. The church's mission and ethics needs to be faithful to the Gospel without drifting into irrelevance, or withdrawal from meaningful social witness in Nigeria and beyond. The life and ministry of Jesus Christ, as God's self-disclosure to creation, constitutes the paradigm for the

²¹ Charles Edward van Engen is Arthur F. Glasser Professor of Biblical Theology of Mission at the Fuller Theological Seminary's School of Mission. He was born and raised in Mexico. The son of missionaries, he worked for twelve years as a missionary in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. Van Engen served as a consultant to pastors of Presbyterian churches in southern Mexico. He also served the National Presbytery Church of Mexico in theological education, evangelism, youth ministries and refugee relief from 1973-1985. He bagged his Ph. D in Missiology from the Free University of Amsterdam in 1981 where he studied under Prof Johannes Verkuyl.

Church's mission. This research seeks to re-present Yoder's Christocentric ecclesial vision as a plausible and feasible restorative project for the SCS. It envisions an historical Christocentric ecclesial reflection, which can assist the SCS to engage the apparent threat of irrelevance to its calling, being and witness, in conversations that are more responsible. Yoder's Christological ecclesial vision underscores the Church as the shape of a faithful Christian social ethics, whose very existence serves as a sign of hope in the world.

In conclusion, we hope that the study will provide a theological framework for the SCS to think afresh on themes like Christology, ecclesiology and social ethics. This can bring to light the nuances in the ministry and in the contributions of the SCS to contemporary discourses on the public witness of the Church. The research focuses on the mission ethics (missionary practices) of the biblical Jesus Christ to plead for a sustainable and more responsible 'practice-based' ethical reflection in the SCS. Most importantly, it is our hope that this project will contribute to the modest efforts of the Faculty of Theology in providing material for researchers who are engaged in the ongoing quest for a responsible approach to the question of the relationship between the Church and society. The material can be useful to researchers not only here in Stellenbosch University but in the nascent democratic South Africa, the rest of the continent of Africa and the entire world. To be is to belong, and to belong is to be critically and actively involved in societal affairs.

5 Chapter Division

Chapter Two offers a brief analysis of the historical context of the SCS. It begins with the political history of Nigeria and the history of The PCN, especially of the SCS. In the major part of this chapter, attention is given to the public theological discourse and practice in the SCS. In discussing the public theological efforts of the SCS, some important synodical decisions and declarations on its public role, are investigated. The inadequacy of these decisions and their inadequate implementation are also highlighted.

Chapter Three discusses the Christology of Yoder as well as his intellectual biography, which will help readers to understand the most important influences on Yoder, his context and the most important themes in his theological labour. The second part of the chapter, which investigates his

Christology focuses on the central features of his Christology and their implications for his ecclesiology and social ethics.

Chapter Four describes Yoder's ecclesiology as both the goal and the result of his Christology. It explores Yoder's 'Free Church' ecclesiology, which highlights ecumenism as geographical wholeness and Christ as the crucial figure for evaluating the faithfulness and unfaithfulness of the Christian family. Besides portraying the Christocentric nature of his ecclesiology, the chapter also discusses the ethical dimensions of Yoder's ecclesiology.

Chapter Five clarifies the implication of Yoder's biblical realism in his demonstration of the relationship between ethical theory and practice. Yoder envisions a renewed and distinctive ecclesial practice, which he analyzes as a foretaste of the kingdom of God and as incumbent on the Church. The chapter also sustains its efforts to trace some threads of Calvin's ethical thoughts and social practices in Yoder's ecclesial practices after outlining the contours of Yoder's social ethics. Yoder's ethical vision relocates mission and development to historical Christology.

Chapter Six reflects on lessons the SCS can learn from Yoder against the background of the inadequacies in its theology. Inadequacies in the public practices of the SCS as they are affected by contemporary issues are also investigated. The chapter also highlights the hopes and goals, which the SCS can realize from a judicious appropriation of its resources using certain aspects of the Yoderian restorative project.²² It concludes with some projections for future academic scholarship.

²² The study also holds that Yoder's Christocentric vision for social ethics can complement and substantiate the efforts of the SCS to contribute more significantly to nation building, social transformation and development. The vision can inspire the SCS, among other churches, to challenge the Nigerian masses to appreciate also the positive aspects of the FGN and her programs (such as the NAPEP, NEEDS, FESTAC and EFCC) as they criticize the negative visions and practices. In other words, this study shows that Yoder's vision for ecclesial reflection and practices also suggests a Christocentric vision for the *African palaver* from a western perspective.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOUTH CENTRAL SYNOD IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Reformed theology...is a faith and tradition that must be continuously liberated from its own failures and idolatries...as it *also* follows Calvin in confessing God's caring and compassionate justice in a world of injustice and oppression, and the calling of his church to serve this God.

Dirk J Smit (2005c: 367[Our italics])

This problem points to the very centre of Christian callings.... that is, to glorify God in Jesus Christ rather than in competing ideologies. Therefore, we hold that....the negative impact of some aspects of mission theology and the inadequate public involvement of the SCS, all plead for a fresh discussion on the public role of the SCS. And an analysis of Yoder's Christology will help in this regard – the problem of faith in the SCS is fundamentally theological and its solution must also be *re-visioned* and sought after, theologically.

(Ndukwe 2008)

1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we hinted that ambiguity and ambivalence in Christian identity and social ethics threatens the SCS with irrelevance. This phenomenon expresses itself in the church's inadequate engagements with its host socio-cultural religiosities. It exists as a perennial problem that is older than the synod. Such inadequate or *pseudo*-ethics translates and transits into visible (unhealthy) political struggles, bribery and corruption, economic exploitation, unbridled ecological degradation, and marginalization of the poor and the less privileged within the synod area. These vices also bequeath the SCS with competing ideological theologies that are visibly antithetical and foreign to the *religio-cultural* environments of the church. Above all, these ideological theologies reduce the mission of the SCS to abstract, universalistic and imperial cultural translations and transitions, which show little or no respect for local *religio-cultures*. They reflect more of the negative legacies of the translated and transiting influences of the Enlightenment mission theology within this Nigerian context. Hence, they can even be described as one of the dilemmas of the SCS, as this chapter hopes to show.

This chapter describes the contextual situation in the synod area. It articulates a concise history and the (transformational) developments of The PCN, which gave birth to the synod and provides an overview of the SCS (i.e., its creation as a synod, its growth and expansion, and the

socio-cultural life). It also appraises the efforts of the synod as an agent of transformation. In the concluding section, the ways and means in which the SCS fulfils its public responsibility are discussed. However, the chapter seeks to ensure more clarity in its background by opening the discourse with a brief discussion of the political history of Nigeria where the church is set.

2 The Political History of Nigeria

This section retraces the political history of the geographical expression called Nigeria from the 19th century Enlightenment period. It also draws resources from indigenous experiences of Nigerians on the fallout of the 1884/5 Berlin Conference of Western nations²³ to validate the claim that the present day Nigeria is a product of the Enlightenment-based ethics.

According to Iwaloye and Ibeanu (1997), the present day Nigeria is located in the West Coast of Africa between longitudes 3.5 degrees East and 14 degrees East and, latitudes 4 degrees North and 13 degrees North (cf. Okafor 1997: 41). Nigeria is the most populous nation in the African continent with a population of about 140 million people living within a landmass of approximately one million sq kms. She is bordered in the south by the Gulf of Guinea – an arm of the Atlantic ocean; the Republique du Benin in the west; Niger in the northwest and north; Chad in the northeast; and Cameroon in the east. This location favours Nigeria with a climatic condition, which boosts agriculture (its primal economic resource), tourism and mineral explorations. Presently, and sadly however, her growing oil industry attracts many people to the urban areas, to the detriment of this sector. The problems in the (oil) industry also contribute a lot to the much publicized and over-publicized spate of corruption, religious and ethnic violence in the country. Many prominent (national and international) figures in Nigeria are stakeholders in the industry since the discovery of oil, and the commencement its exploration in the 1940s. Consequently, one can even dare to say that commerce was a central motivation in the advent of Europeans and their scramble for dominance of Africans in Nigeria.

²³ Adogame (2004: 186) describes the Berlin Conference as a European imperial controversial forum in which Africa was partitioned into artificial geographical domains for European influence, exploitation and expropriation.

This ‘scramble for the soul of Africa by European countries’²⁴ began and it influenced and the geographical entity, which Britain amalgamated and christened Nigeria in 1914. The translations of western civilization (for domination) led to unhealthy (competitive) struggles among some European nations. Each state laboured hard to colonize its host culture, even outsmarting others to ensure a monopoly of some African markets. They came from the background of *political economies*²⁵, which were instituted and defined by the Enlightenment-based political ethics. Consequently, each nation state, established fortified enclaves in their areas of dominion. The expatriates also stored their goods, which, until the economic change in Europe (after the abolition of slave trade in 1807), included slaves. They operated as merchants and colonialists (Dike 1956²⁶; Okonta & Douglas 2001: 7-8; Falola 2004: 1-22).

In an attempt to reorganize and restore sanity into such unhealthy struggles, the Berlin Conference parcelled out indigenous African states among these European nation states. In the process, it ceded the geographical area (now known as Nigeria) to Britain.²⁷ Thus, Britain sought to translate her notion of a nation state as well as other reflections of the 19th century (western) civilization within this geographical expression. In the quest to consolidate her sovereignty,²⁸ Britain organized the indigenous heterogeneous states into what she also described as Northern and Southern protectorates, and the colony Lagos by 1900 (Isichei 1983:5, 362; 368; Okonta & Douglas 2001: 10; Falola 2004: 4-6)). This reorganization paved the way for the colonial office in London under Lord Lewis Harcourt and the British colonial administration under Fredrick

²⁴ These translations of western civilization, which began (in some African states) with the arrival of the Portuguese (around 1481) sought to influence, colonize and impose European political ideologies on Africans. European trade efforts in Africa (and the New World) were closely connected with the foreign economic policies of individual states from inception. Originally, commerce was more foundational to this relationship, which later bound African states to Europe. Politics gained a more central position in the relationship from the 1840s.

²⁵ A western theologian, John Milbank also reflects on political economy as a child of the humanist tradition, which arose from a shift within theology. It de-ethicizes the economic domain. Being a product of the Enlightenment, its pursuit of social relations has negligible respect for traditional morality of its host culture. It is a political ideology, whose ethics seeks to limit the self-interest of others and to its own truistic interests. Political economy hardly calls for an altruistic vision for the self-interested actions of its proponents. It looks up to its own visions, for meaningful long-term results of a given economy. As Milbank states, “the theme of possessive individualism does remain central for political economy” (Milbank 2006: 31).

²⁶ He points out that the Portuguese monopoly of the West African market since 1481 was broken in the 16th and 17th centuries. In Dike’s words, ‘[T]hey could not withstand the naval might of England, Holland and France. Henceforth West Africa from Cape Verde to the Bight of Biafra (or Gulf of Guinea) became the scene of European enterprise and rivalry. In the scramble for African slaves, even small nations such as Denmark, Sweden, and Brandenburg fought for a share of the spoils’ (Dike 1956: 2). Dike also stresses that the economic change that was taking place in Europe provided a platform for unity to these estranged bedfellows (Dike 1956: 14).

²⁷ That is, foreign lands, governed by the British Colonial Administration in London as extensions of British provinces. In West Africa, they include Gold Coast (now Ghana) and Nigeria, among others.

²⁸ The French were also lurking in the South.

Lugard (or Lord Lugard)²⁹ to amalgamate them into one nation in 1914. Onwunta (2006) re-echoes Okafor (1997:1) to note that, that year, the Nigerian nation was created. Before 1914, there was no entity known as Nigeria. Thus, Nigeria became an amalgam of many ethnic groups (Onwunta 2006: 15). This vision of nation state, which Britain bequeathed to Nigerians, also shows negligible respect towards the religiosities of the people's *religio-cultures*.³⁰ Consequently, many Africans believe that this *Nigerian Project*, the *British Real Estate Property*, or *the amalgamation* was a political mistake, a colossal political fraud.

The geographical expression called Nigeria is composed of about 350 ethnic groups, each with its own distinctive language and *religio-cultural* values. These heterogeneous (multi-tribal)³¹ and *religio-centric* states have diverse, complex and eclectic political structures. Nigeria has several major ethnic groups, namely the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the Southwest and the Igbo in the Southeast. Among the minority groups, the most prominent include the Tiv, the Edo, the Efik, the Ibibio and the Ijaw (cf. Okafor 2003: 580; 1997:1). Unfortunately, Britain pursued her amalgamation vision without meaningful recognition of these socio-cultural disparities. She also created artificial ethnic boundaries in the process. Thus, most artificial boundaries, which the amalgamation vision imposes on indigenous communities, contribute much to the *religio-political* upheavals in some parts of the country. Many Nigerians do not only reject these artificial landmarks, which often relocate and banish some indigenous peoples into *religio-cultures* that show inadequate respect to their primary religiosities, they also draw from their local experiences to question the meaningfulness of this *imposed* vision of a nation state to Nigerians and its continued sustenance.

Consequently, Ogbu Kalu (2004b), Falola (2004), Omoruyi (2002), and Isichei (1983), among other Nigerians, reflect on the amalgamation as a political manipulation. They reason with Okonta and Douglas (2001) that the interests of British trade were fundamental in this political ethical approach. The dictates of commerce coupled with the financial difficulties of administering the various ethnic groups as separate entities inspired the colonial administrators

²⁹ Captain Lugard was a veteran of the East African British colonial campaign. He arrived in what is now known as Nigeria in 1894 to assist in extending the British Empire on the Niger coast. Achebe (1983: 68) describes him as the eminent builder of British Empire in Africa.

³⁰ Milbank (2006: 103, 108) points out that the prime concern of western politics often centres on the mediation of the unlimited sovereignty of the State. In most western views, mediating sociology only serve its model of social genesis without really resolving the ensuing effects of its actions and structures.

³¹ Tracing the origin of these multi-tribal ethnic groups is beyond the scope of this study. Some of these origins as well as other historical facts are controversial.

to treat the country as a single unit. Unfortunately, Britain favoured the North in the process. Ogbu Kalu also recaptures this preference with a sympathetic bias. According to him:

The British colonial officers were intrigued by the sophistication of the emirate structure of the Sokoto Caliphate....the British were fascinated by the architecture, durbans and horses, the speed of the cavalry, and tone of the skin of the Fulani and concluded that this was a non-African people with a culture worthy of protection and preservation. A protectionist policy by “Christian” Britain ensured that Islam benefited most from the colonial presence.

(Ogbu Kalu 2004b: 245)

Britain tended to recognize the Islamic religion and its practices without according similar respect to African *religio-cultural* practices and its adherents. This colonial approach seems to affirm the view of many observers of the Nigerian political scenario that Britain adopted a lopsided political ideology whose political economy ensured that ‘the North enjoyed a degree of autonomy and was not “contaminated” by the southern politicians upon whom the colonialists generally looked down as upstarts and political agitators’ (Okonta & Douglas 2001: 15-16). The colonial government treated the southerners with a visible degree of suspicion.

In his contention of the *British Real Estate*, Omoruyi re-traced the origin of the name Nigeria to Britain in his published open letter to President Olusegun Obasanjo. Omoruyi’s letter, which was written in July 2002, is entitled, *The Origin of Nigeria: God of Justice not Associated with Unjust Political Order – Appeal to President Obasanjo not to Rewrite Nigerian History*. Omoruyi rejected President Obasanjo’s description of the amalgamation and the continuing co-existence of Nigerians as ‘an act of God’ (Obasanjo 2000). He rather described it as a mischaracterization of what Britain did in Nigeria. The amalgamation vision bequeaths Nigerians with a legacy of unjust political order. Omoruyi also expressed agreement with other Nigerians that the name Nigeria has no meaning in indigenous (Nigerian) languages.

Omoruyi attributed the origin of the name Nigeria to Flora Shaw (who later became Lord Lugard’s wife), whose essay on Nigeria was published in the *Times of London* on January 8, 1897. In Omoruyi’s words, Shaw was making a case for the “agglomeration of pagan and Mahomedan States” that was functioning under the official title, “Royal Niger Company Territories.” According to him:

She thought the term, “Royal Niger Company Territories” was too strong to be used as a name of a Real Estate Property under the Trading Company in that part of Africa. She was right. That has nothing to do with the people in that part of Africa. What was important in Flora Shaw’s article was that she was in search of a new name and she coined “Nigeria”.... She then put forward this argument...

The name Nigeria applying to no other part of Africa may without offence to any neighbors be accepted as co-existent with the territories over which the Royal Niger Company has extended British influence, and may serve to differentiate them from the colonies of Lagos and the Niger Protectorate on the coast and from the French territories of the Upper Niger.

(Omoruyi 2002: 2)

Omoruyi notes that by the adoption of the name, Britain betrothed the oil-rich South in a patriarchal contract marriage to the North. Until date, an average northern Nigerian, especially a Muslim, sees himself as a ruler and dictator to other Nigerians. As pointed out earlier, Britain privileged the North over other regions in the governance of Nigeria (cf. Omoruyi 2002: 25).³²

One can also share the views of Omoruyi (2002) and of Okonta and Douglas (2001). Their perspectives can explain the hostility of an average Nigerian northern (Muslim) toward people of other ethnic groups. This understanding can also shed more light on the reasons many Muslims are hostile to people of other religious faiths, especially, Christians in Nigeria. Most Nigerian Muslims understand the Christian faith as the fundamental hindrance towards the realization of their own Nigeria project, that is, Islamizing Nigeria.³³ An average Nigerian Muslim will scarcely submit to a non-Islamic authority.³⁴

However, Omoruyi denies the birth and continuing co-existence of Nigerians as an act of God (but sees as an act of Britain). He also dismisses President Obasanjo's position as ahistorical. Nevertheless, some Nigerians believe that the name means a land of the Black people and that

³² Omoruyi's remark agrees with the views of Okonta and Douglas, i.e., that Britain regarded people and regions that were outside the jurisdiction of the Royal Niger Company as foreigners (Douglas & Okonta 2001: 13).

³³ One wonders whether this can explain Sanneh's (2004: 151) findings from his interview with the Waziri Junaidu, a section of the ruling house of Sokoto. This group said that they would not surrender the North's Islamic legacy to secular influences emanating from Lagos in the South. In their reasoning, Islam must not be gambled with in the cause of national sovereignty. As Sanneh further observes from his interview with another prominent Islamic radical in Nigeria, '...Muslims and non-Muslims, including Christians, cannot be equal under one government...A sovereign secular constitution and a sovereign nation state represent a double assault on revealed law and the chosen...They are unholy combination, and must be opposed by Islam's unitary mandate' (2004: 156-157). Despite divergent Muslim views on this issue, the fact remains that most average Nigerian Muslims cannot accept the authority of non-Muslims. In any case, Sanneh is a Gambian-born Muslim who converted to Christianity. He is a Professor of Missions and World Christianity.

³⁴ According to Omoruyi, these were the facts; 'that Nigeria was to apply to the "agglomeration of pagan and Mahomedan States" meaning the North as we know it today; that the term, Nigeria was to serve to differentiate the areas of the Royal Niger Company from other areas. This means that Nigeria was not to apply to Lagos colonies and other Protectorates in the south, meaning the current southern states; that the term Nigeria was to apply to the Royal Niger Company Territories....Sir Fredrick Lugard was hired by the Royal Niger Company to bring together under his administration the "Pagan and Mahomedan States". That the name later assumed by the collection of territories amalgamated in 1914 was actually incorporation (sic) of the two system of administration in the south (Lagos Colony and Protectorate) into an existing entity put together under the Royal Niger Company called Nigeria. That the use of a name that was already assumed by the British territories in the north for all the territories amounted to a (sic) colossal fraud' (Omoruyi 2002:2).

Lord Lugard was the real founder. Historically, the name Nigeria means (as in most other countries of the globe) different things to different Nigerians, based on their experiences. Most Nigerians embrace the challenges of a continuing communal co-existence, albeit, not without influential and intermittent dissenting voices.

In fact, Omoruyi's observations can resonate in the hearts of many Nigerians in many ways. For instance, it can inspire Nigerians to revisit the issue of the disparity in the political structure of the nation.³⁵ On the other hand, Omoruyi's contention that the life and continuing co-existence of Nigerians is not an act of God calls for a number of questions.³⁶ If the name, Nigeria, makes no common intelligible and feasible meaning to all Nigerians and its citizens continue to grapple and celebrate (with one another) the challenges of their co-existence, will it be wrong to express agreement with Chief Obasanjo that Nigeria is more of an act of God than a British political ideology? What about the cases of former United Sovereign States of Russia (USSR), Ethiopia, Senegambia, etc that split into two or more independent countries? Should Nigerians not rejoice with Chief Obasanjo that God is the Sustainer of the nation's threatened unity? Does such an argument not portray human disrespect for the Reformed understanding of the sovereignty of God? More concretely, can we not describe Omoruyi's secular submission as one of the legacies, which many Nigerian sages (intellectuals) are also endowed with, courtesy of the Enlightenment ideologies in Nigeria? Historically, most Nigerians are *religiocentric* and their interpretations of historical events often begin with God rather than science (or logic).

³⁵ At least, some recent calls for a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) by the marginalized ethnic groups are an example. It can offer them many opportunities to ease out repressed emotions. They will also seek redress of the unjust political order in Nigeria. Furthermore, the (now violent) agitation for resource control by oil-producing state governments in the South can also nuance Omoruyi's position. These oil-producing states reason that the pseudo-political order denies them of legitimate entitlements, which accrue to them from the oil industry.

³⁶ Pastor Matthew Ashimolowo of the Kingsway International Christian Church, London seems to share our perspective. Although he did not focus his views on Omoruyi's position, in our opinion, his reasoning also addresses Omoruyi's argument. Ashimolowo adduced the survival of Nigeria to the Providence of God. He reasoned that most Nigerian governments show little or no concern for the populace: 'There is insecurity in the land. Nigeria is not creating an enabling environment for people to grow and flourish. It is not creating it. In fact, in my opinion, it is even getting worse. There is systemic breakdown in Nigeria....the people in power, *even if they break their ankles; they fly out of the country for treatment.* So we don't *even* have hospitals *to cater for the people.* The only reason *for our survival* is the providence of God' (Ashimolowo 2007: 19 [Our italics]).

Ashimolowo's church is a fast growing Pentecostal Church in Nigeria and the United Kingdom. Although the issues he pointed out are realities on ground, Ashimolowo in our opinion, sounds pessimistic on this point. Despite their apparent flaws, most administrations of the FGN strive to ameliorate the hardship in Nigeria but their efforts are often below the expectations of most average Nigerians.

Consequently, one can also express some agreement with the views of Kalu, Falola, Omoruyi, and Isichei. In their view, Britain institutionalized a lopsided political structure in Nigeria; in pursuit of the process of the amalgamation, she privileged the North over other regions. For instance, Britain's constitutions for Nigeria, enacted by Richards (1947) and Macpherson (1952), established an equal and unwieldy federation in which the North became twice the size of the East and the West (Okonta & Douglas 2001: 16-17). Britain also seems to esteem the Islamic culture of person-over-person mediatory governance above the Christian face-to-face alternative, in Nigeria. Significantly, these apparent structural political disparities remain a threat to the entire polity and politics of as a nation.³⁷

One is thus compelled to wonder if a Christian Britain should not have laid a better foundation for an inclusive *religio-culturally* rich Nigerian politics. As Milbank (2006: 218) observes, without the recognition of the (host) socio-cultural allegiance, foreign traditions and practices may reflect nothing but violence and unjustifiable risks. This lopsided vision and political structure breeds violence. Thus, one can as well express agreement with Falola (2004: 5-8) that Britain also achieved the Nigerian Project through violence more than through the pacification of the peoples. At least, the British subjugation of indigenous peoples through the gunboat and other military weapons is a historical example in Nigeria experience. Britain sought to transform and consolidate her vision of a nation state and impose them on these heterogeneous states without meaningful concern for the socio-cultural realities of her host *religio-cultures*.

In reality, one is also worried that many succeeding (indigenous) Nigerian governments hardly concern themselves with the drastic effects of these acculturating legacies. For instance, the structural (political) disparity in the nation persists. Demographic reports are politicized in Nigeria, particularly, between Christians and Muslims. Sustenance of such distressing bequests ought not to be, even if Islamic northerners have had the upper hand in the governance of Nigeria. Most Nigerian indigenous *religio-cultures* are rooted in communal spiritualities and

³⁷ Given this states of affairs, one can also agree with Sanneh (2004: 151) that the British partisan orientation of Muslims and Christians on modern state governance remains a heater in Nigeria. Her policy oriented and allowed the Muslim objection to secular rule to be modified in way that religion and politics remain inseparable. This was an orientation and privilege, which she was unwilling to extend to her Christian subjects. Furthermore, Sanneh's view also has other implications as one recalls that while Islamic stools were accorded a sacred status, British colonial administrators deposed King Kosoko of Lagos, King Dappa Pepple of Bonny, and King Jaja of Opobo in 1851, 1854 and 1887, respectively. None of these monarchs is a northerner.

identities. Within their local cosmologies, *to be is to belong and to belong involves active participation in social affairs; only a corpse can proceed on its journey without showing meaningful concern for the resolution of issues which can metamorphose into social disharmonies*. This study challenges Nigerians and their lovers to engage in the continuing social transformation and development of some distressing legacies of the amalgamation project.

Politically, Nigeria gained independence from Britain on 1 October 1960; it was made up of three regions, namely Eastern, Western, and Northern regions. On 17 August 1963, she created a fourth region called Midwest, from the former Western region. Nigeria also became a Republic in 1963. Yet her self-governance is not bereft of political, religious, and ethnic manipulation and violence, which are traceable to external influences. For instance, Nigeria's first civilian rule was cut short by a military coup in January 1966, which plunged the country into 28 years of military dictatorship. A civil war was fought (1967 –1970); there were several coups and counter coups and new states were created (1966-1998). This chain of crises is rooted in some negative legacies of the British political ideology in Nigeria³⁸ (cf. Okonta & Douglas 2001).

At present, Nigeria is in her fifth republic (1963-1966; 1978-1982; 1998-2002; 2002-2007; and 2007 until date). The country consists of 36 states and a Federal Capital territory at Abuja. Lagos was the capital of Nigeria (since the amalgamation in 1914) until 12 December 1991 when the military dictator and Head of State, Gen Ibrahim Babangida relocated the capital to Abuja. Chief Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo was the country's democratically elected President from 29 May 1999 to 29 May 2007, when the incumbent, Alhaji Musa Yar' Adua assumed office. The late military dictator, Gen Sani Abacha, seized power after the resignation of Chief Earnest

³⁸ For instance, one can describe the British instituted Nigerian Project as the catalyst to these events. Attempts by the government led by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe (the first civilian President of Nigeria) and Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Belewa (the Prime Minister) to correct the lopsided federation, which Britain left behind gave rise to the events that culminated in the first military coup on 15 January 1966. Other factors such as corruption, intolerance and abuse of office on the part of some Nigerian politicians could have also played a role in the crisis. A counter-coup on July 29, led to the massacre of the Igbos and other easterners in the northern cities of Nigeria. It necessitated a new constitutional amendment to save the country from civil war and subsequent disintegration. A meeting was held to this effect at Aburi in Ghana. It was attended by the Head of State, Colonel Yakubu Gowon (a northerner) and Colonel Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the governor of Eastern Nigeria (an easterner). In the words of Okonta and Douglas (2001: 18), "[A] new constitutional arrangement making for a loose confederation was worked out...But Gowon reneged on this agreement after realizing that the Aburi Accord effectively gave the Easterners regional political autonomy. On May 27, 1967, he announced that the country would henceforth be divided into twelve states. Ojukwu saw this as an attempt to bury the Aburi Accord, and he responded three days later by proclaiming the former Eastern Region as the sovereign Republic of Biafra. The federal government declared war on Biafra on July 6, a bloody carnage that did not stop until Nigerian troops forcibly brought the East back into the country in 1970. An estimated two million people, the bulk of them Biafran children, lost their lives in this conflagration".

Shonekan, the head of the Interim National Government (ING).³⁹ Abacha died in Abuja on 8 June 1998 in mysterious circumstances and he was succeeded by Gen Abdusalami Abubakar who handed over the leadership of Nigeria to Chief Obasanjo.

Chief Obasanjo's administration divided the country into six geo-political zones of North Central, Northeast, Northwest, South-South, Southeast and Southwest for easier political administration. However, the states in which the SCS is situated were created by military governments. They are located within the South-South and South-East geo-political zones of the Federation. These States are also influenced by the coercive and consumerist bequest of the Enlightenment-based ethics in Nigeria. The most distressing legacies of the Enlightenment ethics constitute problems to the polity and politics of Nigeria. For instance, the recent unconstitutional and aborted third-term plan of President Obasanjo⁴⁰ can speak for itself. Chief Obasanjo sought to veto in a constitutional amendment, which would pave the way for him to contest for the presidency of the nation for the third time. Politically, contemporary Nigeria is yet to transit from the legacies of a militarized society.

With regard to religion, African Traditional Religion, Islam, Christianity, and other religions thrive in Nigeria and these religions often engage in an unhealthy struggle for prominence. The often sporadic and politically motivated religious riots especially, between Islamic and Christian in northern Nigeria serve as an evidence of this unhealthy rivalries (cf. Ogbu Kalu 2004b). African Traditional Religion is the primary religiosity (or embodied religion) of the *religio-cultural* states, which constitute contemporary Nigeria but Islam and Christianity are more predominant. Each of these two religions has a common membership of about 42% of the

³⁹ The ING was set up by the FGN to manage the affairs of the nation when national and international call and pressure on the government of Gen Bagangida to give democracy a chance in Nigeria compelled the dictator to step aside on 27 August 1993. It was set up to administer the affairs of the nation until a general election could be held in 1998. This dream was almost aborted. The tyrant, Gen Abacha led a military coup, which wrestled power from the ING and took over the governance of the nation on 17 November 1993. Abacha's administration existed as the most harassed (from within and outside the country) government in Nigeria's post-independence history. It showed itself as an inhuman government, which committed too many blunders, which included the continued repression, trial, conviction and (often) execution of military officers, which it accused of plotting to overthrow the regime. Other atrocities of that government include the killing of Ken Saro Wiwa and his fellow eight Ogoni activists in September 1995; the abrogation of liberalization policies in 1994; and the refusal to negotiate with Western creditors in settling national debts. Abacha was not only corrupt; he made looting of the national treasury, a family affair. Millions of (US) dollars were traced to bank accounts belonging to him and his family after his death.

⁴⁰ Obasanjo wanted to continue as president for a third term when his second four-year term expired on 29 May 2007 but Nigerians rejected his plans and scuttled all efforts to make it a reality.

population while the other religions share the remaining 16%.⁴¹ Originally, atheism was unthinkable among the peoples of this geographical entity, which amalgamated and christened Nigeria in 1914 by Britain.

Islam came in as a conquering missionary religion through the caravan route between the seventh and eleventh centuries. Ogbu Kalu points out that the religion was part of a trans-Saharan movement that developed in contemporary Nigeria. After (Islam) ‘captured the Maghrib in the seventh century....thus by the ninth century, northern Nigeria was woven into the tapestry.’ (Kalu 2004b: 244-245). However, Islam was firmly established in what is now northern Nigeria between the 13th and the 15th centuries. It came through the Arab and Berber race of North Africa and it was well received in the North as well as in some communities in Yoruba land in the west. Today, Islam is also making some inroad into other parts of contemporary Nigeria.

On the other hand, Christianity arrived through Portuguese sailors and missionaries between the 15th and 16th centuries. Its successful growth and expansion came with the arrival of the Protestant missionaries in the 19th century through the South.⁴² In the area where the SCS is located, an average of eight out of every ten persons on the street is a Christian, at least by profession. Christianity has also begun to take root in many northern communities to the point of becoming a threat to the Islamic fundamentalists. This phenomenon constitutes a catalyst to the

⁴¹ These figures are questionable. The issue of the number of religious adherents and population are highly controversial issues in Nigeria since they are greatly politicized. However, the fact remains that Islam and Christianity are the dominant religions and their population ratio has been highly politicized because each group claims dominance.

⁴² The first effective contact of the Christian faith with Nigeria dates back to 23 September 1842 when the Wesleyan Methodist missionaries led by Thomas Birch Freeman arrived in the Badagry Creek before they finally settled at Abeokuta. A former Portuguese Roman Catholic mission was aborted earlier in the 15th century. A few weeks after the arrival of the Methodist Missionaries, a missionary team of the Church Missionary Society led by a lay missionary, Henry Townsend also arrived in Badagry. They operated from Badagry and Lagos but only visited Abeokuta. Both mission teams came in response to an appeal from Sierra Leonean traders who believed that Abeokuta offered much promises in terms of accepting the Christian message, commerce and civilization. It had developed into a cosmopolitan environment with the influx of refugees from Oyo, Ife and Ijebu who boosted the population. The ‘Saros’, i.e., the liberated African slaves from Sierra Leone also contributed to this development (Cole 2004: 387).

Next in this order of missionary advent were the Presbyterian missionaries who arrived in 1846 (through the Bight of Biafra) and settled in Calabar. They came under the auspices of the Church of Scotland Mission Board. The Baptists arrived in 1850. The Roman Catholics returned before the 1890s to Lagos while the Sudan Interior Mission and the Sudan United Mission arrived in 1901 and 1904 respectively, to work together as inter-denominational evangelical missionary societies within the Middle-belt area of Nigeria. These mission churches laboured to establish what they believed to be Christian standards in political and social lives of Nigerians. They laid the foundations for the sustenance of mission schools, hospitals as well as arts and culture centres. The indigenes, in turn, provided them adequate room for their missions.

bulk of religion and religio-politically motivated uprisings especially, in northern Nigeria. In spite of her acclaimed *secular status*⁴³, religion remains an embodied practice (or religiosity), for most Nigerians⁴⁴ and although their orientation is patriarchal, many Nigerians are ethically altruistic and incurably religious, as many other Africans.

Thus, prior to the arrival of European colonialists, merchants and missionaries, there was, at least, religious tolerance in most of the ethnic groups that constitute contemporary Nigeria. With the arrival of these colonialists, things began to fall apart within many communities of the heterogeneous states, which Britain amalgamated into one nation in 1914. Of a truth, these early harbingers of (western) civilization also brought social transformation and development into their host cultures. Most of their social establishments and engagements, however, reinforced notions of difference. They insist that nothing short of total transformation would suffice for the salvation of the heathen. Many early Europeans also saw most of the indigenes especially, the southerners, as an irreligious people with worthless cultures. The expatriates, as this study also shows later, came to teach their hosts about God and to educate them on European cultures.

Consequently, these harbingers of the 19th century western civilization often operated from unhealthy ethical perspectives. Much of such ethics existed as ideological hegemony or conquerors' approach. The colonialists also sought to conquer indigenous socio-ethical vision and practices and to subjugate them under their (self-acclaimed) superior ethics. Thus, one can learn from Kalu (1996:77) and Udoh (1988:41) who affirm the views of Achebe (1958: 124) and Idowu (1965:1-13) that the expatriates were also clever in establishing their religious (*pseudo-ideological*) hegemony in Nigeria. They came, swept over the people and made them to see their native culture as bad. With the co-operation of local cohorts, their activities marked the beginning of religious intolerance in Nigeria. The conquerors' *pseudo-ideological* and political approach to social transformation and development heats up and continues to heat up the national polity and politics of contemporary Nigeria as hinted above. Given these observations,

⁴³ Section 10 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FGN) states that, 'The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion' (Constitution 1999: 29).

⁴⁴ Nigerians embody and demonstrate their *religio-cultures* as communal religiosities of their local cosmologies. These religiosities and their *religio-cultural* resources essentially constitute the historical identity of Nigerians and their socio-cultural contexts. The organizational forms and ecclesial practices of these human (embodied) quests for, and appreciation (as well as appropriation) of the grace of God, play crucial roles in (re)creating effective institutions and practices for social transformation and development.

Aye's position that, the Enlightenment altered Nigerian cultures and philosophies in remarkable ways from the pre-mid-19th century, sounds interesting (cf. Aye 1987: 26-30).⁴⁵

Based on the brief narrative, may we not argue that the Enlightenment had been translated into in Nigeria and undergone a transition even before 1914? If finding causes of events in human affairs can be seen (more) as a matter of re-definition and re-description as Milbank (2006: 123) tells us, may we not concur with the view that the origin of Nigeria's present dilemma, that is, corruption, which also affects the Church, is traceable to the Enlightenment and its translations? Would a survey of the establishment, growth and activities of The PCN not lend more credence to our claims?

We have presented a concise historical-political development of Nigeria in this section. Perhaps an investigation into the life and witness of The PCN in the next section can assist us to reflect on and respond to the above questions in more nuanced ways. Both the birth and some historical developments within this Nigerian church reflect the Enlightenment-based ethical vision and practices in the theological missionary enterprises of the church. The SCS is only one of the several synods in The PCN.

3 The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (The PCN)

This section will survey the birth and historical developments of The PCN. It will reflect on the legacies of her missionaries and the need for re-visioning and the reformation of the church. The last segment of the section introduces the aborted co-operation of The PCN with the Mennonite Church in Nigeria. We seek to trace the dilemmas of the SCS to some negative effects of the Enlightenment-based ethics in Nigeria.

True to its name, The PCN is found in many parts of the Federation. It has, at least, one worship centre in each of the capital cities of the 36 States of Nigeria, as well as in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.) The history of The PCN can be summed up in the words of Aye (1987: 168). He regards it as 'a tale of romance, because from the start it remains an exciting story of adventures; a tale of love because there is no greater love than that a man offers his life for his

⁴⁵ E.UAye is an ordained Ruling Elder of The PCN and a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Calabar, Nigeria.

friend; a tale of a man seeking his Maker, and a tale of the Gospel of Jesus Christ'. Aye wrote from a socio-philosophical perspective but unlike Aye, this study holds that a more reconstructive approach from theological perspective could be most helpful for its vision.

Bediako may have expressed a generalized African view when he claims that African Christianity cannot be treated as a colonial leftover or a western colonial hangover. Many indigenous rejections of imported and imposed forms of Christian life indicate that Africans take Christianity very serious. They are able to connect their faith in Christ to address some challenges, which the African context presents to the Christian faith (cf. Bediako 2004a: 36-38). As we can learn from the Anglican Bishop of Owerri Diocese (Nigeria), Rt Rev Cyril Okorochoa, in African religiosity, nothing is impossible for religion.

In fairness, the origin and particularity of the theological history of The PCN is scarcely retraceable to the abovementioned historical fact, which Bediako expressed. One can hardly succeed in tracing it back to North African early Christianity of the Graeco-Roman world, which became a new home for Christianity when it 'first abandoned its Palestine roots' (Kalu 2005a: 25). Such a person may not also succeed in retracing it back to Ethiopian Christianity that has become 'a history in the making' (Bediako 2004a). The PCN owes its theological vision, spirituality, and responses to the European Christianity of the 19th century. The PCN's distressing bequests of the *Enlightenment*-based vision and practices came to Nigeria through contact with the first European merchants, colonialists, and colonizing missionaries, etc. In order to clarify this point, we shall examine the historical developments of The PCN in the next paragraph.

3.1 Historical Development of the PCN

This segment surveys the historical development of The PCN. It is hoped that such an exercise can assist us to envision a more significant way towards a sustainable and more responsible Presbyterianism in Nigeria.

Three authors (from The PCN), Aye (1987: 15-19), Udoh (1988: 25-75) and Kalu (1996: 1-5) among others, agree that it was indigenous efforts that led to the eventual birth of the church in

1846. The two prominent kings of the Old Calabar⁴⁶, King Eyo Honesty II of Creek Town and King Eyamba V, invited missionaries of the Church of Scotland Mission to come with Christianity and the white man's power (i.e. education): these kings were worried over the survival of their post-slave-trade subjects. Until its abolition, the slave trade was for them, a source of popularity, power and wealth. With the signing of the treaty for the abolition of the slave trade (in 1841), these Kings needed respite from the pressures of the economic vacuum, which confronted their kingdoms. According to Aye:

The signing of this treaty *created* ...an economic problem that agitated the minds of African rulers all along the coast where the slave trade has been part and parcel of the economic life for centuries.... To fill the economic vacuum created by the abolition....the two rulers....were faced with this problem and they should act promptly if their subjects were to survive.

(Aye 1987: 16 [Our italics])

Kalu affirms Aye's view thus:

King Eyo Honesty II of Creek Town and King Eyamba V of Duke Town stood shoulders above others...There is little doubt that the changing contours of the slave trade and the burgeoning of trans-Atlantic trade created tremendous strain on the socio-political structures. In adjustment, the white man's power, education and therefore his religion would need to be pressed into service. Adjustment to legitimate trade would require resourcefulness.

(Kalu 1996: 1-2)

Aye and Kalu's reflections can help us to understand that the kings and other Nigerians were already interacting with these harbingers of western civilization before the 1840s when Christianity arrived and survived in Nigeria. The locals interacted with the early European merchants and explorers before the Protestant missionaries arrived on the scene, through the South. The above-mentioned views also point to the fact that the kings' motivation arose from

⁴⁶ Calabar is Obio Efik - the Efik town. The Efiks are part of a linguistic group that includes the Anang, Oron, Enyong and Ibibio of Nigeria. Johnston (1998: 11-17) describes them as fishermen engaged in import-export trade of goods and slaves who continued to buy slaves even after the trade was abolished, to the point where the slave population far outnumbered the free. However, Efik slavery was a different institution from that known in the West. Enterprising slaves could work their way to becoming slave traders. This practice afforded them the opportunity to purchase their way into the lower ranks of society. Although it remained inhuman, it at least afforded slaves opportunities to work out their salvation and to be integrated into society as citizens. Lovejoy and Falola (2003: 5) explain this point; 'A domestic slave had value to her or his owner because slaves were an investment; moreover over time, the relationship might well evolve so that so that personal attachment might become almost as strong as that based on kinship' (cf. Ashimolowo 2007). Nigerians, as most other Africans, are humane. They are demeaned when titled *animists, savages, inhuman*, etc by persons who were gladdened with what Mbiti (1993a: 418) describes as 'the prejudices that often lay beneath the surface in the attitude of many so-called foreign experts' on Africa. Interestingly, animism as a title for Africans and their religion was 'a description taken from a European who was not particularly religious himself and who probably never met any of those whose religion he gave the term' (Bediako 1994: 244-245; cf. 2004b; Achebe 1983: 55-56). Present day Calabar has the third largest and busiest seaport in Nigeria, as well as an airport. It is one of the most beautiful, peaceful and culturally rich urban cities in Nigeria. Calabar is a tourist centre of international repute.

concern for the well-being of their subjects, as well as the urge to maintain sovereignty over their kingdoms. The kings invited the missionaries, primarily, for the material gains, which they expected from religion. This is an influence of the Enlightenment-based political ideology in Nigeria. The kings also hoped to use religion to achieve their own political goals.

The missionary team arrived in Calabar on 10th April 1846 to begin their theological mission. Members of the team included Rev Hope Masterton Waddel, Samuel Edgerly and his wife, Andrew Chrisolm and Edward Miller. It was a mission, which eventually would cost the church many lives, as she sought to communicate the Gospel. With the co-operation of the indigenes, the missionaries built schools, hospitals, clinics and health-care centres, along with colonies for leprosy and tuberculosis. At that initial stage, the missionaries expressed a philosophy, which seemed to demonstrate a practice-based relationship with their hosts. Such a philosophy allowed them to co-operate and recognize the humanity in their hosts. They also introduced extensive and mechanized agriculture as well as recreation and recreational facilities into some Nigerian communities. Above all other things, The PCN mission pioneered the quest, which ended human sacrifice and the killing of twins. It sought to substantiate the Christian respect for the dignity of human life within some Nigerian communities.

Unfortunately, the afore-mentioned political ideology of the kings also introduced a foundational error into its theological mission. Its institutionalized missional approach tends to glorify, even deify, the Gospel bearers. For instance, the founding missionaries of The PCN and their representatives went about their business as special human beings, who bring (a domesticated) God to an irreligious people. As a response, the receivers of the Gospel viewed and revered the missionaries as superior personalities who brought God; and a glorified (western) civilization to a people (supposedly) without culture. This *pseudo*-missionary approach introduced and sustained unwholesome dichotomy between the Gospel bearers and the recipients. Its concept of church leadership and membership reduced God seekers to the status of patrons and subjects of the evangelizers. Thus, instead of the Good News reaching the people in a proper sense, Nigerians rather patronized the Gospel. Often, they literally had to leave their own culture and identity behind. This is an Enlightenment-based ethics. Its mission theology scarcely clarifies the status of the Gospel bearer as a moral agent whose ethical life is also a witness to the Good News. In other words, the Gospel bearer rarely embodies the Gospel it proclaims. This study reads such an approach as an apparent detour from the Gospel of Jesus Christ – it constitutes a

foundational error. The detour also ushered in *pseudo*-ethics that gave birth to Constantinian and Docetic-faced *Christianities*⁴⁷ in The PCN. The Constantinian ethics, as the study remarked in the previous chapter, leads The PCN into unrestricted and unhealthy appropriation of culture while the Docetic approach bequeaths the church with the continuing and unwholesome dismissal of *religio*-cultural resources as (intrinsically) evil.

For example, Ogbu Kalu (1996) traced what we read as the Constantinian phase of this detour to the court-alliance strategy. In this strategy, the missionaries adopted an unhealthy ethics to suit the Efiks who were adjusting to the new economic realities. Often, the kings' courts became the mouthpiece of the church. The missionaries saw the alliance strategy as an avenue to raise some local people as mediatory mission agents for the church. Wittingly (or perhaps, unintentionally), these Gospel-bearers wedded the church into an unwholesome relationship with the kings' courts in the process. Consequently, The PCN mission grew as an appendage to the Efik re-adjustment strategy in which primal religion and trade became intricately and unwholesomely interwoven with Christianity. According to Ogbu Kalu (1996: 5, 6), the initial goal of the mission was to Christianize the Efik community. Sadly, it backfired against the church as it metamorphosed into a Constantinian strategy, which eventually constitutes one of the 'blurred',⁴⁸ ecclesiological identities of contemporary Presbyterianism in Nigeria.

Furthermore, Udoh (1988:10, 41) identifies what resembles the Docetic approach of this theologically deficient mission ethics in The PCN. He describes it as a wholesale importation of *received* Genevan theology and polity. The original Genevan theological polity arose from the experiences of the exiled and refugee reformers. In contrast, the conquerors Christian ethics of the missionaries dehumanizes the Gospel as the bearers of western civilization transplanted it

⁴⁷ As observed in the previous chapter, Constantinianism also exists as 'unwholesome cultural celebration' while Docetism also reflects 'unhealthy rejection of culture' in Christian proclamation of the Gospel. This study understands both concepts as two extreme perspectives on the question of the relationship between Christ and culture in Christian theological mission enterprise.

⁴⁸ Onwunta and Hendriks (2006) describe it as the distorted ecclesiological identity of The PCN. It metamorphosed from racism during the missionary era into ethnocentrism in this post-missionary age. Ethnocentrism affects the ecclesiological identity and witness of The PCN in very significant ways. Onwunta and Hendriks (2006: 235) re-echo Udoh (1988: 272) in noting that 'we seldom call it by its name in our meetings except to justify a decision or a certain course of action which is itself ethnic in nature.'

From his South African perspective, Dirkie Smit describes such a blurred ecclesiological identity of the church as a 'false ecclesiological identity of the past'. It interjects ecumenical commitment to meaningful unity; social concern and witness and exchanges it for a different kind of spirituality and structure (cf. Smit 2004b). Above all, such distressing ecclesiological identity seems to celebrate 'the view that to be Reformed is to be apart' from other churches (Akper 2006a). We hope to discuss these issues from the fourth chapter of this work.

into the Nigerian soil. It suggests a mental Christianity, i.e., a Christianity, which thrives (mainly) on abstract philosophies. The missionaries' ethics showed little or no respect for the emotions, experiences and contexts of its receptors. Docetic missionary ethics concerns itself with the divine Jesus and his eschatological perspectives on the kingdom of God. It also reflects a theology, which draws its *force motrice*⁴⁹ from John Knox's over-exaggerated view of Genevan Calvinism. In the Knoxist perspective, Geneva had become the perfect school of Christ on earth since the days of the Apostles (Leith 1984: viii). This Docetic vision insists that nothing short of a sudden and total transformation is meaningful for the salvation of the godless or savage natives.⁵⁰

Udoh also sees such a Docetic vision as the unfolding and application of the kernel of Scottish theology in a different context (cf. Udoh 1988: 10, 41). In The PCN experience, the Docetic or conquerors' approach sees nothing good, useful or godly in its host *religio*-cultures. It tends to make European Christians out of African pagans. Docetism preaches a Gospel that is often divorced from the historical experiences of Jesus and his followers.

These Scottish bequests are also evident in the church's continuing celebration of its pledge to 'remain faithful to its origins' more than the need to affirm the lordship of Jesus Christ above its polity and politics (P&P G-04.0303).⁵¹ Often, the sustained-struggles of the church to embody the affirmation of Christ's lordship over its pledge to be faithful to its origins, especially to the Scottish legacy, result in the said 'distorted ecclesiological identity (the DNA) of the PCN' (Onwunta & Hendriks 2006: 235). As we learn from Ross (2003: 395), the Scottish Church 'is a

⁴⁹ This is a French expression, which is translated as motivation or driving force in this study.

⁵⁰ Kee (1991: xi) recaptures the pervasive influence of Docetism in modern Christianity in these words: 'It has been constantly present in the history of the church. It has infiltrated orthodox belief, and it represents the majority view among Christians in the modern world....Docetism....is alive and well whenever it is thought that Jesus had to be born in some way different from human beings, to protect him from being human.... Through this false theology....Christians are distracted from the events themselves, from the mystery, which is revealed in them. In this way, the life and death of Jesus are abstracted from our history and become events in higher history quite different from ours'.

⁵¹ We are hesitant to quote The PCN Constitution in this dissertation. According to an official report of The General Assembly of The PCN, 'The GAEC discovered that there are various versions of the Church's Constitution that were being distributed. It agreed to set up a Committee to harmonize them and produce a version that would reflect the changes intended' (The PCN 2006a: 119-120). We suspect that the many different versions may have arisen from the possible failure of some founding missionaries of the (then) Synod of the church, which metamorphosed into the General Assembly to keep proper records. Our position is based on a letter written on 2 April 1958, by Rev E H Johnson, a Canadian missionary in Nigeria, to his employers. He states that, 'Unfortunately, our Synod records are very poor and incomplete until as late as 1944, for reasons with which I won't trouble you' (Johnson 1958). Rev Dr Uma A Onwunta retrieved the said letter from the archives of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

national church, deeply conscious of its responsibility to the Scottish community'. As observed earlier, this religious (ideological) hegemony reinforces and elaborates on notions of difference in The PCN. Its imperial philosophy insists that nothing short of total transformation would suffice for the salvation of the heathen. Thus, it turns its converts into a people who see and summarily dismiss their own native *religio*-cultures as fetish, paganistic, demonic, and evil. Today, this ethics is a problem in The PCN.

All the same, Presbyterianism grew and expanded beyond the Efiks and Ibibios to Unwana in the Northeastern part of Igbo-land.⁵² The PCN could not penetrate the Southeast (where the Abiribas as well as many other pioneers of Presbyterianism in the synod area would originate) until the British military expedition of 1901-2 to Arochukwu (Aye 1987: 100-103; Johnston 1988: 32-71; Ogbu Kalu 1996: 50-95; Okafor 1997: 18). Only when the church had been firmly established at Abiriba did the Presbyterian religious tentacles spread from there to Aba and Umuahia (Aye 1987: 133). Based on this understanding, one can describe the Abiriba community as the birthplace of the SCS, that is, the place from where the Enlightenment influenced Gospel, which our ancestors met in 1846, would filter westwards to form what would be officially christened the *South Central Synod* (SCS) in 1996. Presently, The PCN is composed of nine regional synods. However, the aborted co-operation between The PCN and the Mennonites (which we shall discuss later) took place while the church existed as a synod.

Given these observations, this study holds that the above-mentioned theologically deficient mission ethics and their negative legacies do not reflect a Christ-centred evangelization in Nigeria. Rather, they suggest an ideological hegemony and cultural transfer. Thus, the contemporary PCN must not translate and transmit them without meaningful critique. The Enlightenment ethics need continuing re-visioning and reformation in contemporary Nigerian communities especially, within the milieu of The PCN. African Christianity is a history in the

⁵² The PCN was first constituted as the Presbytery of Biafra on 1 September 1858. This elevation in status enabled the church to ordain the Rev Essien Essien Ukpabio as its first indigenous minister on 9 April 1872. After (about) five and a half decades, the young Presbytery was later reconstituted as the Synod of Biafra on 4 May 1927 and subsequently, as The Presbyterian Church of Biafra, on 19 October 1945. That name was changed to the Synod of The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria in June 1952. By 16 June 1960, its Mission Church Integration program was completed. Consequently, the synod adopted the name, The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (The PCN) in order to reflect its national character. On 27 August 1987, The PCN was inaugurated and constituted as a General Assembly.

making.⁵³ Perhaps a fuller survey of the influence of the Enlightenment-based ethics in the life and witness of the church (in the next segment) can assist us to substantiate these affirmations.

3.2 Influences of Missionaries and the Need for Re-visioning and Reformation

This segment seeks to demonstrate that the theology behind the social establishments and engagements of The PCN yearns for re-visioning and reformation.

As we noted in the previous sub-section, the theological mission ethics of the founding missionaries hardly reflects the correct theological thoughts of John Calvin. As Dirkie Smit shows, in his thoughts, Calvin read and interpreted Scripture ‘with a view to the city, with a view to the public life, to the questions and issues, the challenges and crises of society’ (Smit 2005c). These thoughts arose from varied human experiences within a concrete society, basically, within the Genevan Church. To substantiate this claim, Smit appealed to Heiko Oberman’s interpretation of Calvin’s understanding of the phrase *sola scriptura civitate interpretata* (Scripture alone, interpreted in view of the city) from a similar perspective:

According to Oberman, this referred particularly to the suffering and hardships of strangers, of refugees and exiles. There is no way...of understanding Calvin’s thought and theology, including his views on God’s gracious election, God’s providential care and God’s covenantal faithfulness, as well as Calvin’s work as a social reformer, including his involvement in education and welfare, without taking into account the historical context of the diaspora, the material and spiritual conditions of the Genevan congregation at the time.

(Smit 2005c: 367).

In Calvin’s theological thought, personal life is not more dear to the theologian than the holy bond to which is annexed the welfare of the society (cf. Wallace 1988: 29). Calvin also tailored his interpretation of *sola scriptura* towards the social life of the Christian particularly, as it affects the life of the Genevan congregation of his time. As Smit (2003b) remarks, in the Reformed vision, the context provides the occasion, albeit, not the content of interpretation. The Reformed vision takes the historical context and realities on the ground serious. However, he also notes that Reformed ethics needs continuing transformational critique in contemporary contexts (cf. Smit 2003b: 147).

⁵³ African Christianity challenges the universal Church to embody its social ethics as way forward to a sustainable and more responsible ecumenism in contemporary worlds (cf. Bediako 2005, 2004a, 2004b, 2003; Nussbaum 2005: 149-150; Ogbu Kalu 2005b; Verstraelen 2003, etc).

Smit's view is a paradox to the *received* Calvinism, which the founding missionaries of The PCN transposed to Calabar. Their received Calvinism was very different from Calvin's vision and interpretation of the *sola scriptura* as *sola scriptura civiate interpretata*. The missionaries indoctrinated their devotees in the Calabar mission⁵⁴ with a *pseudo-political* philosophy that is alien to Calvin's view of *sola scriptura civiate interpretata*. Udoh (1988) recaptures this *pseudo-political* philosophy behind the missionaries' theological mission ethics of the Scottish Church⁵⁵ identity (as Nigerians experienced it in the Calabar Mission) in these words:

Scripture possessed the ultimate and infallible authority. Genevan influence and Knox's temperament gave the Scottish Church a definite identity, later transmitted to Calabar by the missionaries. We meet them in Calabar not only with the English Bible but also with other documents⁵⁶, all of which were used for religious education and as a guide for social reforms in Nigeria.

(Udoh 1998: 27).

With great zeal and commitment, the missionaries pursued the Calabar mission as a continuing vision of *received* Calvinism, as the Scottish Church affirmed it at home. In contrast, the continuity that is more appreciable is that the same Gospel witness evokes the same community-forming response without (unhealthy) institutional restrictions. The incarnation is a metaphysical mystery, which calls for celebration and contemplation in diverse cultures, without dislocating its source and practices from the historical Christ-event. The restoration of wholeness constitutes the basic task of the Christian community. The church's affirmation of the lordship of Jesus Christ also bespeaks of believers' social concern for the welfare of the neighbour.

Udoh (1988) also laments this imposition of a different form of understanding of Jesus Christ by the founding missionaries of The PCN thus:

⁵⁴ The Calabar mission refers to the Scottish sponsored mission to Nigeria, which began in Calabar (in 1846) and metamorphosed into (The) PCN.

⁵⁵ Kenneth R. Ross has also expressed the view that the Church of Scotland '...is a national church, conscious of its responsibility to the Scottish community' (Ross 2003).

⁵⁶ The bulk of these documents consisted of Scottish church documents, which were meant for the Scottish Presbyterians. The missionaries transposed and imposed them on Nigerians without meaningful modifications to suit the new context (cf. Udoh 1988: 26). Until date, the Practice and Procedure (an official policy document) of The PCN (P&P Sections G-01.0601, G-01.0603) stresses the church's loyalty to these Scottish documents: 'The Apostles' Creed, The Nicene Creed, The Westminster Confession of Faith, The Larger Westminster Catechism, The Shorter Westminster Catechism.' All these make up The PCN Confessions. It is stated that, 'In matters where sufficient guidelines may not be obtained from this Practice and Procedure of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria...the Practice and Procedure of the Church of Scotland...shall be considered the prime source for further enlightenment....'. The inappropriate dependence upon the Scottish church order is obvious.

Christ entered the scene as a forceful, impatient and unfriendly tyrant. He was presented as invalidating the history of a people in order to impose his rule on them. In the *characteristic Mission House*⁵⁷ and, as a concrete institutional strategy, which this mission adopted, we meet Christ removing his followers from the community, their families and their heritage – a *secessionist*.

(Udoh 1988: 39, 64 [Our emphasis])

As we have noted, Udoh's observation tends to give more meaning to Ross's⁵⁸ view that the Church of Scotland '...is a national church, conscious of its responsibility to the Scottish community' (Ross 2003: 395). This *pseudo-ethic* was also a truistic religious philosophy. It thrives on individualism, which stands as a paradox to the communal spirituality of its host's altruistic *religio*-cultures.

The missionaries' ethics also upheld a formal spread of colonial empires. This ethical vision was an essential component of many Christian missionaries' philosophies in the 19th century especially, in the Calabar mission. Such philosophies bequeath their devotees with the status of unhealthy consumers. With this mission ethics, the missionaries brainwashed Nigerian Presbyterians to reflect on most self-help developmental projects of the church as a deviation from the bequeathed norms. For instance, *The Revised Church Hymnary*, which the Scottish Church faded out many decades ago, remains the official hymnary of (The) PCN Even though the foreign missionaries left about two or three decades ago. Yet, it is unthinkable for the majority of those in leadership as well as the members of The PCN to see the need for the church to articulate and produce a new hymnary, which can take more cognizance of the local contexts and experiences of God seekers in Nigeria.⁵⁹ This truistic (missionary) ethics rarely pays

⁵⁷ The phrase Mission House represents the isolated abode of the missionaries. Withdrawn from the society, they surrounded themselves with mini-houses where their converts (better referred to as convicts because they believed the missionaries' teachings that indigenous culture and practices were a-religious and intrinsically evil) came to live. It was within this mission house (which also existed as an empire within another empire) that the indoctrination into the separatist theological ethics often took place. The new (or conquerors') empire metamorphosed into a church, which 'functions to provide sanctuary for social misfits and converts....to treat the institution as an educational and administrative center'. The Mission House further served as a city of refuge, which as Udoh further points out, also 'implies some element of protection, which presupposes power – unending physical power backed up by force of arms' (Udoh 1988: 59).

⁵⁸ Kenneth R. Ross was a former Professor of Theology at the University of Malawi. He wrote this article while serving as the General Secretary of the Church of Scotland Mission Board of World Mission.

⁵⁹ It appears that the emphasis of The PCN on the consciousness of its historical origins in the Practice and Procedure is often misread to mean rigidity to received Calvinism. According to Section G-04.0303, 'The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria is aware of its origins in the Reformation, especially for the enlightening ministries of John Calvin in Switzerland and John Knox in Scotland... The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria gives glory to God and expresses its everlasting gratitude to the Church of Scotland... In the light of this historical context, the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria remains faithful to its origins, yet equally faithful to the leading of God through His Holy Spirit in adapting itself to contemporary situations.' In many quarters of The PCN,

significant attention to the emotions or temperaments as parts of the historical experiences and contexts of its host *religio*-cultures. It scarcely reflects on the vision for the (partial) realization of the kingdom of God as a feasible mandate to an empirical church. Sadly, contemporary Nigerian Presbyterianism adopted the missionaries' ethics without significant modifications.

The PCN mission ethics often constitutes an affront to the historical realization of the 'Kingdom vision' in Nigeria. The kingdom of God is also a political language; it reflects a whole new order in social realities. Its concern for a unique set of relationships involves healing of wounds, among other mighty works. The kingdom of God is also a movement, which often draws people from their regular occupation to come to Jesus Christ and participate in the *missio Dei*. Such believers in Jesus Christ also serve God by serving the larger community through the community of faith. In contrast, the imperialistic mission ethics, as Udoh also opines, focuses 'more on individualistic and personal interpretation of the Christian faith. *This ethics* conceived it more beneficial to save individual soul than the corporate and physical body.... The pioneers' aim to institute an entirely new society in Nigeria was cast in personal terms' (Udoh 1988: 40 [Our italics]). This is a theological problem, which is also traceable to the 'theological-academic' deficiency of the founding staff of The PCN. It can substantiate the thesis of this sub-section, i.e., that the theology behind the social establishments and engagements of The PCN yearns for re-visioning and reformation.

From his Efik experience, Aye (1996) also seems to share this view particularly, as it affects the theological-academic deficiency of some founding missionaries. He reminisces that it was with much courage and spiritual fervor that the early missionaries arrived at the mangrove swamp of the Cross River through Fernando Po. Aye further acknowledges the Scottish preference for trained personnel in mission enterprises. In the process, Aye detects a foundational error in their theology of mission/ministry as he notes that the Nigerian mission was not manned by properly trained personnel. The founding missionaries were godly people, but they clearly lacked the skill for the cross-cultural communication of the Gospel. This approach was very much uncharacteristic of later Scottish enterprises⁶⁰ (Aye 1996: 5, 6, 9). For instance, only Rev Hope

emphasis on faithfulness to the received tradition tends to compromise the church's concern for a biblically sound Christological faith.

⁶⁰ As we shall see later in this segment of the study, Andrew Walls states that the Scottish mission was noted for the emphasis on the academic excellence of its personnel.

Waddell was an ordained minister among the pioneer (founding) missionaries. Samuel Edgerly was a catechist; Andrew Chilsom was his assistant; Edward Miller was a carpenter; while G.B. Waddell was Rev Hope's houseboy. For reasons, which lie beyond the scope of this study, all members of this group participated in Bible interpretation and communication. From this example, one can understand why, in its 162nd year of witness in Nigeria, The PCN has less than twenty (20) ordained ministers who hold doctoral degrees in theology. The scarcity of trained theologians affects contemporary mission engagement of The PCN. Humanly speaking, it takes guidance and an informed leadership to communicate an effective Gospel more meaningfully, particularly, in cross-cultural contexts.

Furthermore, Aye also recalls that, often, the missionaries selectively chose and preached from Bible texts that would prick the people's conscience and thought. Such texts were concerned with the relation of masters and servants (1 Tim. 6: 1-2); the promise of the future of the Gospel (Deut. 18: 18-19); death and judgment (Heb. 9: 27); false gods (Ex. 20: 3-6); murder (Ex. 20: 13). This approach would have been relevant and appropriate to the state of things in the Efik society of that time. However, often, it clearly lacked the necessary (trained) theological touch. Unfortunately, this approach, coupled with the insensitivity of the missionaries to the endemic local politics, hardened a strong notion of difference (cf. Aye 1996: 9). The conquerors' ethics introduced, reinforced and sustained an unhealthy social interchange between the adherents of the Christian faith and the non-Christian peoples in this Nigerian context. As we noted in the previous sub-section, a majority of the Christian adherents came to the conquering Christ for the material benefits, which they believed religion could offer. Others also came to embrace Christianity as 'convicts'; the missionaries brainwashed them to denounce indigenous culture and practices as sinful. The missionaries' ethics transposes and imposes the Enlightenment-based western civilization with acculturating visions. Their approach dehumanized and demonized indigenous religiosities and *religio*-cultural reflections and portrayed them as being synonymous with the understanding of guilt and sin. Such an understanding is evident in this study. The missionaries' Docetic approach also presented the culturally otherness of their host *religio*-cultures as intrinsically sinful.

Consequently, we reiterate that their approach often constituted an affront to the Kingdom vision. True Kingdom proclamation seeks to transform its host cultures without demonizing them as intrinsically evil. A more appreciable approach towards the communication of the

Gospel of the Kingdom would rather strive to inspire and direct believers to the historical source and practices of the Christian faith; i.e., the biblical Jesus Christ and his early community of believers. This study has emphasized these issues in the previous sections. It is true that a mixed abode often arises when the preached Word is received. However, such a case for a mixed (human) habitation does not provide meaningful answer to some distressing questions, which these *pseudo*-ethical practices raise for many contemporary Nigerians, i.e.: must Christ and his Christianity thrive as authors and sustainers of divisiveness and arrogance or secessionists in order to make a more significant impact in Nigeria? Should not the church and its ministry shine as lights for those who live in darkness within its surrounding environments to see and enjoy the benefits of its illuminating presence?

As fall-out of this *pseudo*-ethic, The PCN mission, as Kalu notes, also thrives as an appendage to the Efik re-adjustment strategy. This mission scarcely emphasizes Christ-centered distinctiveness in its pursuit of the church-world relationship. For instance, the Efik primal religion and trade became woven intricately and unwholesomely into Christianity. This deficiency indicates a significant foundational crack in the theological mission and ministry of The PCN. As earlier noted, contemporary Presbyterianism has not yet disentangled itself from the adverse manifestations of Constantinian ethics in its mission engagements.

Such Constantinian reflections can explain why the mission approach meant little to the natives, hence, the church's (unjust) recourse to British gunboats and machine guns to subdue their hosts. The Arochukwu expedition, which we mentioned in the previous subsection, is a clear example. The missionaries only succeeded in planting the church after the indigenes were subdued through the barrels of the British guns. Thus, such resorts to violence create theological problems for the contemporary church. It often portrays missionaries as imperialists and the Christian mission as a militarized religion.

Nevertheless, the social involvements of The PCN missionaries were also useful in a sense. For instance, relocating converts or convicts to mission quarters helped to save the lives of those God seekers whom the natives regarded as traitors. Again, the missionaries' attempt to sanitize the culture could also help to restore the waning vision for the dignity of human life back to their host cultures, as we hope to show in the later part of this section. Their efforts climaxed in the 'promulgation of Ekpo law forbidding human sacrifices on the 15th of February 1950' around

Calabar (cf. Aye 1987: 61).⁶¹ However, the approach also seems to project itself as a questionable reform. It reveals the apparent projection of the missionaries' ideological desire to weaken and subdue indigenous societies in the process (Ajayi 1965: 64-66). Re-echoing Udoh (1988: 4), Onwunta (2006: 28) notes that The PCN was born at a time when Scottish nationalism was at its peak.

Consequently, these issues raise more questions for us.: Should not a responsible Christian theology demonstrate the goal of Christian calling as active participation in re-webbing God's *shalom* (rather than what the distressing legacies of the Enlightenment offers) in society? Can we not assume that such a *pseudo*-ethics also transposes and reinforces its theologically deficient (ethical) practices in the theological mission for ministry in The PCN? More concretely, can we not retrace its accompanying legacies in Nigerian educational projects and programs, especially its individualism and self-centeredness, to the Enlightenment ethics?

The legacies of the educational involvements of The PCN still present challenges to contemporary Christianity in Nigeria. Many of its schools produced eminent Nigerians as Christian nationalists in politics, medicine and medical enterprise, education, and business, etc. (cf. Omenka 2003). This prominence is not accidental, vis-à-vis the Scottish background of The PCN. Andrew F. Walls reminds us that the Scots invested a high proportion of their effort in education in a way that distinguished them among the missions: 'For the Scottish missionaries, at least for a substantial and determinative part of their existence, education was mission' (Walls 2002: 262). Just as the Reformation brought a vision of education to Scotland, so did the Mission Board of the Church of Scotland place a premium on education wherever they worked. The provision of education remains an important expression of mission for the Mission Board (Ross 2003: 397-398). Thus, it remains a puzzle that the founding missionaries of The PCN hardly embodied this view. In spite of this puzzle, contemporary Nigerians can hardly discuss such enormous contributions of The PCN to nation building, social transformation and development without attributing its success to the work of the early missionaries. For instance, the first

⁶¹ The Ekpe (or Ekpo, as the Europeans called it) was a powerful secret society, which served many socio-economic purposes including enforcing the payment of debts; levying fines; impounding property and imposing trade boycotts on individuals who violated the code. Although its membership was open to all, its upper class was confined to the wealthy merchants (cf. Onwunta 2006: 17). Thus, when the law, which prohibited human sacrifice was promulgated through the lobbying strategy of the missionaries in their court alliance relationship with the king's palace, the Ekpo society helped to enforce it (the Ekpo Law).

democratically elected President of Nigeria, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe was a product of Hope Waddell College, Calabar, an institution founded by these early missionaries.

However, the answer to the question on whether contemporary Nigerian education reflects African communal spirituality remains a contestable issue. The foundation of contemporary visions for formal education in Nigeria remains rooted in the Enlightenment-based project. Consequently, its transmission does not seriously consider indigenous worldview and style of learning. For instance, in most Nigerian cultures, oral speech and on-the-ground training are foundational educational ethics. The African communal philosophy, i.e., *to be is to belong, and to belong involves active and responsible participation*, is embodied. Community, relationship, hospitality, participation, and other ethos constitute a non-negotiable communal *religio-cultural* spirituality. In contrast, the mission-led educational ethics imposes and transmits as pure and normative, the ‘memorize-and-reproduce’ approach to learning (Udoh 1988: 32).

As a result, formal education in Nigeria does not often equip its beneficiaries with adequate skills and consciousness, which are necessary for meaningful and sustainable social transformation. It bequeaths most Nigerians with skills and spiritualities for individualistic and discriminatory social actions. Nigerian education also thrives as an ideology that seeks ‘to turn the area into a British Colony or Scottish village’ (Udoh 1988: 261; cf. Omoruyi 2002).⁶²

For instance, the word *illiteracy* often suggests ‘failure (or inability) to speak or write in polished (imperial) English’ in contemporary Nigeria. Usually, the word *literacy* suggests more of individualistic ability to communicate in ‘sound imperial’ English. In short, education is more of an *individualistic struggle for self-centred subsistence* in Nigeria. This ought not to be. In South Africa, for example, one cannot describe those who only speak or write Afrikaans, Xhosa or Zulu as illiterates. The local languages also accord its speakers the privilege to sit among the sages, in the South African context. Given this understanding, one can reason that many products of the Nigerian educational system reflect the consumer-oriented political ideology of the Enlightenment-based ethics. A consumerist philosophy also thrives more on negative competitiveness and incorrigible individualism. Again, this should not be. Sanneh (1983: 127) points out that Christian education ought to underscore as its goal, sustainable and responsible

⁶² One often asks why the colonial masters, i.e., the British and the founding missionaries of The PCN, i.e., the Scots, who are among the so-called Christian nations of the world could not do otherwise.

(theological) transformational development of society. Theologically and otherwise, education also provides a significant way for human beings to assist their communities to take place among the nations. It exists as the gateway to a new and secure future. Such a Christian approach to transformational development embodies communal spirituality as its indispensable ethos. Nigerians have *religio*-cultures, which are embodied and celebrated as communal religiosities.

Given all these revelations, one becomes burdened with the following type of questions: Can we not agree with the submissions of Ogbu Kalu (1996: 77) and Aye (1987: 85-86) that the missionaries also ensured that their native agents could not get much education?⁶³ Should a Christian vision of education not also ensure a theological transformational-development? Would such an approach to development not re-present humankind as Christ's subordinate believers who can take Nigeria beyond its distressing legacies of the British political ideology? More pointedly, should the *status quo* lead us to denounce the humane identity of some of The PCN missionaries and their positive legacies in Nigeria?

The answer is an emphatic "No!" Posterity cannot forget the humane public involvements of people such as the female Irish missionary from the Church of Scotland mission, the late Mary Mitchell Slessor, in Nigeria. She took the bull by the horns in order to adopt and cater for the ostracized mothers of twins and their children in some Nigerian communities. Twins and their mothers were regarded as an omen to society. As a result, Slessor's missionary activities led to the eventual survival, acceptance and re-integration of twins and their mothers into many (Eastern) Nigeria societies. Again, the missionaries' humane public involvement also bequeaths

⁶³ Kalu drew his reason from the reticence of the missionaries to appropriate judiciously, the opportunities, which the quest for education created in, for instance, Abiriba community in the 1920s. He also reflects specifically, on the missionaries' uneasiness with the presence of Dr Akanu Ibiam, whose 'education was at no cost to the church.' According to Kalu, 'the missionaries found him inexplicable and felt uncomfortable with an educated Igbo because they had ensured that their native agents could not get much education.' Kalu's view also corroborates the view of a Canadian Presbyterian missionary in Nigeria from 1959-1963, Rev Geoffrey Johnston. Johnston revisits the sad experiences of Dr Ibiam in the hands of the Scottish missionaries when the latter returned from his academic pilgrimage in England and sought to serve his fatherland as a Missionary medical doctor. The Scottish missionaries treated Dr Ibiam with suspicion and contempt because 'in a country where talented people headed for the comforts and income of the city, a doctor who was prepared to work in a country was more than a little strange....But the interview indicates the underlying uneasiness of the missionaries before an educated Nigerian' (Johnston 1998: 206).

Aye states this point more strongly; 'The missionaries of all religious denominations seemed to have agreed on one point, viz, to try not to encourage the African to be academic....in order "to check that pride of dress and caste that unhappily sometimes obtains with the African". Rev G.F. Buhler stressed on their fear of native pastors and evangelists of contracting habits of life, which "would render necessary a larger stipend than the native church would as a rule be able to provide...." The native pastor, "while still at his job in the school and church, to be kept under observation...."'

The PCN with its contemporary celebration of the dignity of the female gender. The PCN is the first mainline church in Nigeria to see the ordination of women as one of the great issues of Christian justice to women (Ogbu Kalu 1996: 242). These contributions notwithstanding, the study laments that further involvement of the church in women's transformational-development and empowerment programs is still very different from the ideal in contemporary Nigeria. Most of the laudable decisions of the church in this regard, end up in the minutes of the various courts and committees of The PCN. However, it is not simple for one to dismiss the church as unconcerned with contemporary issues in Nigerian societies, as this study will further show.

On the other hand, in some cases, The PCN strives to discern some issues and concerns that matter to society in general. The church emphasizes its conviction that the Gospel cannot be good news if its witnesses are irrelevant to social concerns. The content of the national communiqué issued after its GEAC⁶⁴ Meeting on 3 – 4 March 2006 and, which was published in The Nigerian Vanguard of 9 March 2006 can further authenticate this view on the social witness of The PCN. Extracts from the communiqué show that The PCN condemned the crisis in the Niger Delta area⁶⁵; it called on the president of the country to shun the Third Term Agenda⁶⁶ and advised the Federal Government on its Downsizing Policy⁶⁷. The extract also stresses that the church spoke on the Bird Flu⁶⁸ invasion and the recent Bank Consolidation⁶⁹ exercise in the

⁶⁴ GAEC simply stands for the General Assembly Executive Committee. It is an executive committee, which meets to take decisions on behalf of the church when the General Assembly (GA) is not meeting. The GA of the PCN meets bi-annually.

⁶⁵ The PCN condemned the recent kidnapping of expatriate oil workers in the Niger Delta region by militant groups. It stressed that the church laments the increasing wave of kidnapping of oil workers and attacks on oil facilities and urges pressure groups in the area to seek dialogue rather than violence in settling issues. It maintained the belief of The PCN that years of neglect, mass poverty, deprivation and environmental degradation suffered by the people of Niger Delta are responsible for the crisis in the region. The GAEC, therefore, urged the Government to address these issues effectively to restore peace in the area.

⁶⁶ The church restated its call on President Olusegun Obasanjo to shun any moves to persuade him to run for a third term in office against the provisions of the 1999 Constitution which he swore to uphold. It condemned the recent public hearings of the Joint Constitution Review Committee of the National Assembly, which, considering its timing, is likely to be viewed as a hidden agenda for the third term game plan. The GAEC advised that, desirable as it may be, Constitution amendment should not be embarked upon at that time until the 2007 elections were over.

⁶⁷ The PCN noted with concern, plans by the Federal Government to lay off half of its 100,000 workforce in a national downsizing program that was meant to keep pace with the government's gradual withdrawal from its involvement in the running of the economy through privatization. It acknowledged the downsizing program as part of the laudable economic reform package of the administration but observed that the issue should be well handled in order not to worsen the ugly unemployment situation in the country. The GAEC advised the government to allow enough time for the economic reforms to achieve the desired results in the economy to enable those to be laid off to engage in profitable self-employed ventures.

⁶⁸ The PCN commends the Federal Government for the prompt action it took on the outbreak of the dreaded avian influenza virus, Bird Flu in Nigeria. It however calls on the government not to stop at the depopulation of

country (The PCN 2006a). As we noted in the introductory chapter, adequate social involvement of the church is central to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Furthermore, the willingness of The PCN missionaries to pioneer excellence and transformational-development is also evident in the area of sports. For instance, The PCN missionaries were the first in Nigeria to introduce the game of soccer and cricket in 1902 and 1903, respectively. This pioneering venture became a success through the efforts and commitment of the missionaries at Hope Waddell Institute Calabar (Aye 1987: 113, 170). Today, FIFA ranks Nigeria among the twenty best (male) soccer playing countries in the world. Nigeria's female soccer team (the Super Falcons) has been the reigning African Champion for several years, courtesy of the mission theology of the founding missionaries of The PCN. However, we note with sadness that contemporary Nigerian Presbyterianism is losing this legacy. The vision and enthusiasm for sports in The PCN seem to have died with the exit of the missionaries. For example, the two theological seminaries of The PCN own neither a functional soccer pitch nor any other sporting facility. Sports are hardly emphasized in contemporary theological training of The PCN.

In summary, The PCN ministry seems to be an interesting and important illustration of such an altruistic 'attitude which was also in Christ Jesus who being in every nature God, made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, humbled himself even unto death on the cross' (Phil 2: 6-8 [Our paraphrase]). One can argue that this altruistic spirituality also inspired The PCN to fraternize with the Mennonite Church in Nigeria. The PCN played a major role in the establishment of this independent church in Nigeria. The next sub-section will briefly investigate this story.

3.3 The PCN's Co-operation with the Mennonite Church in Nigeria

This section introduces the meaningful but aborted co-operation of The PCN with the Mennonite Church in Nigeria. It seeks to throw more light on the adverse effects of the church's inherited

affected poultry farms as means of containing the flu, but to embark on the massive importation of H5N1 vaccine for an aggressive vaccination campaign of birds for an effective control of the virus.'

⁶⁹ The extract submitted that 'The PCN commends the recent and very successful Bank Consolidation exercise in the country. It can restore confidence in the banking sub-sector and help to strengthen the nation's economy.'

theological mission ethics. This may pave the way, and shed more light on our understanding of the distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based ethics in the SCS.

As mentioned above, The PCN fraternized with the Mennonite Church in Nigeria. Udoh (1988) argues that The PCN, 'with considerable openness and support, led the way into Ibibioland, in the establishment of what is today known as the Mennonite church in Nigeria'. From his perspective, God used The PCN as the human agent to bring the Mennonite Church into eastern Nigeria. This Reformed church accommodated and practically co-operated with the Mennonite Church during its teething stage in Nigeria. As Udoh notes elsewhere, '....Mr. Graber, Secretary of the Mennonite Board of Missions had approached the southern Presbyterian Committee on the possibility of working with the spiritual churches in Nigeria. In 1963, [the] Synod agreed to show its (Synod) concern for these young independent churches....whether it was possible to enter into some kind of unofficial relationship with them' (Udoh 1996: 40).

Evidently, Udoh's account of the relationship seems to reflect the prejudice, which the aforementioned *pseudo*-theologies also bequeathed on many contemporary Nigerian Presbyterians, as opposed to the so-called independent churches. For instance, it seems to present the Mennonites as mere receivers of grace in this relationship. Udoh's abridged narration completely missed out the Mennonites earlier contribution to the relationship; and this is crucial for this study. The Canadian Missionary to The PCN, Rev Geoffrey Johnston reasons that, providentially, the missing link in the church's co-operation with the Mennonites would save the church from losing Abiriba to the Roman Catholics (Johnston 1998: 205-209).

After much frustration in the hands of the Scottish Missionaries, Dr Akanu Ibiam⁷⁰ obtained permission to run a clinic for the church at Abiriba. Ibiam ran this clinic from 1936-1941 when he answered the call to serve his nation at a higher level.⁷¹ With his exit in 1945, the hospital,

⁷⁰ Ibiam's experiences with the expatriate missionaries have been noted in the previous segment.

⁷¹ History shows that this Missionary doctor chose to serve in Abiriba from 1936-1945 (rather than in Uburu or his native community Unwana where the medical facility was closed in 1906). Abiriba was under the auspices of the Church of Scotland Mission (of course, oral history at Abiriba has it that Dr Ibiam had some maternal kindred there – the Ekwugbalories). In 1946, he went to serve the nation as the fourth member of the Eastern Nigeria in the legislative Council at Lagos. He became a member of the Eastern House of Assembly in 1951, the year he was also knighted (Knight of the British Empire) by His Majesty, King George VI. According to Kalu, the knighthood was conferred upon him in recognition of his meritorious and selfless service to his country in the Mission and medical fields (Agwu Kalu 1986: 18). However, Ibiam renounced his knighthood in a nonviolent protest against British conspiracy in the Nigeria-Biafran War in August 1967 (Agwu Kalu 1986: 39-41). It is important to note that Dr. Ibiam's 'years of service at Abiriba went beyond the medical fieldto apply

which served as the only functional medical facility to a large population, closed down for many years. The incidence tended to sound an ominous bell. As earlier pointed out, the indigenous philosophy shows that Nigerians often adhere to a religion if it provides material gain. With this philosophy, it becomes evident that Presbyterianism would have lost Abiriba but for the coming of the Mennonite missionaries who were ready to help.⁷² Johnston recaptures that state of affairs in a more nuanced way:.

When the lease on Abiriba hospital ran out, the mission did not renew it, but handed over the unused building to the town. In 1960, negotiation to reopen the hospital built up within Abiriba, even if this meant inviting the Catholics, an invitation which would have seriously divided the community. Some hard talking Presbyterians kept the question open until the Mennonites agreed to supply the staff. The hospital reopened in 1961 as a joint venture of the government, the Abiriba Improvement Union, and the church.⁷³ In 1963, the hospital began a Grade II midwifery course....which would enable a woman to handle a routine care and deliveries and to report abnormalities. On the eve of the Civil War, the hospital was anticipating receiving permission to offer the more sophisticated Grade I course.

(Johnston 1998: 209)

The Mennonites arrived in Abiriba in October 1960 through the help of Dr Ibiam and Chief Echeme Emole the ‘the first lawyer in the modern period of Abiriba’s history’ (Ogbu Kalu 1996: 77). To substantiate our claim on the resourcefulness of the Mennonites and their usefulness to The PCN, we also appeal to the following extracts from the minutes of the church for the period, 1961-1962. Minute 1085 notes that The PCN did not only tolerate the Mennonites, it allowed them to assist in providing staff as well as training for local workers of the Akahaba Abiriba Joint Hospital. Despite the anti-chaplaincy stance of their church tradition (cf. Yoder 1971b), these Mennonites also provided what one can also describe as chaplain services for the hospital.⁷⁴ The Minute further records that, ‘A hospital chapel was planned, but its activities

Christian socio-political influence in matters of the community’ (Ogbu Kalu 1996: 78). His influence gave the Presbyterian Church a prominent position at Abiriba and such surrounding communities as Ohafia, Igerre, Nkporo, Abam, etc. The Akahaba Joint Hospital provided the only medical facility for this rural populace at that time. Thus, the Roman Catholics were poised to capitalize on Dr. Ibiam’s relocation to take over the community. To God’s glory, the Mission Board of the Mennonite Church of America offered to help the Presbyterians overcome the threat, with a promise to provide the necessary staff (cf. Otisi 2008).

⁷² The first indigenous Administrative Secretary of the hospital, Chief E.K.Otisi records that, ‘A team of medical personnel from the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities arrived at Abiriba about the end of the third quarter of 1960 and was well received by the Abiriba Community. The very fact that the team came from a Missionary Organization gave the Abiriba people a great sense of relief. The members of the Mennonite team were quick to establish good relationship with the traditionally hospitable people of Abiriba’ (Otisi 2008).

⁷³ The Abiriba Communal Improvement Union (ACIU) adopted the hospital project of the Akahaba Age Grade; hence, the hospital came to bear the name *Akahaba Joint Hospital*. Of course, Chief Echeme Emole, a Presbyterian, was also an influential leader of the Akahaba Age Grade.

⁷⁴ Chief Otisi, as an eyewitness, recalls that the Mennonite missionaries regularly attended and participated in morning church services at the Abiriba Urban Presbyterian Church. The Missionaries also introduced evening church services at the outpatient section of the hospital. The evening service, which was started by the missionaries, was described as chaplain services in the synod minutes. According to Chief Otisi, ‘Under this

would be confined to the hospital and there was no intention of running a rival church in Abiriba'. Min 1177 also extolled their works at Abiriba. The 'Synod expressed satisfaction at the excellent spirit of co-operation shown by the Mennonite missionaries in the work carried on in relationship with the Presbyterian Church'.

Sadly, the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War interrupted this laudable co-operation. The Mennonites left in 1967 when the Biafrans declared a sovereign State and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) declared war on them (cf. Thelin 2001: 17; cf. Otisi 2008; Udoh 1988). To God's glory, this researcher was born in that hospital on the 8th of February 1963, with the help of one of the midwives, Elder (Mrs) Oyediya Eleanya Onuma. Mrs Onuma's professional training became a reality through the co-operation of The PCN with the Mennonites (we shall return to this discussion in the last chapter of this study). More significantly, many of those who founded the churches, which metamorphosed into what is known as the SCS were (migrant) traders from Abiriba and Igberre communities.

This act, as an aspect of the social involvement of The PCN, further suggests its understanding of human integrity as inherent in the *imago Dei*. The PCN stresses that a just and sustainable equality is essential to human life and being; humanity bears the image of God. However, we note with heavy heart that, often, contemporary Nigerian Presbyterianism hardly respects such a theology, at least, in practice. For instance, it demonizes and ridicules Mennonite reflections and practices. Members are often encouraged to look down on other church traditions, which differ with the receptions of *Calvinism* and *Knoxism*. Presbyterians usually dismiss them as fanatics especially, the Mennonites (as well as other strands of Anabaptism) in Nigeria. Their ethics are also regarded by some leaders as devilish and paganistic, and as idolatrous theological reflections and practices (cf. Fubara-Manuel 2004). This study also challenges The PCN in general and the SCS in particular to seek nuanced ways to initiate discussions for re-establishing this laudable co-operation. It is hardly mentioned in the meetings or reflections of The PCN of today. The research also hopes that such a renewed co-operation will respect each partner church as a colleague in God's mission. The study looks up to Yoder's Diaspora fulfilment of the Barthian ecclesial vision as a possible and plausible restorative approach.

arrangement, the missionaries attended morning service at The PCN, Abiriba Urban and held the evening church services in the hospital compound, which were also attended by members of the PCN....and able patients in the hospital' (Otisi 2008 [Our italics]).

Given the ongoing discussion, what can we learn, with particular reference to the public ministry of The PCN? As this study shows, The PCN has always tried to go public in its missionary life and activities. At least, its varied involvement in social engagements can speak for the church. However, the foundation error, which we discussed in the current and previous segments of this chapter, constitutes its bane. Its Constantinian and Docetic manifestations restrict the church from engaging in a social witness that is more meaningful. Consequently, this study conceives such a hitch as a negative impact of some distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based theological visions, on the church's ethical reflections and practices. This theological mission and its ethics reflect 'a demeaned presence' rather than the absence of truly Reformed theology. In other words, the ethics of The PCN demonstrates too little Calvinism (cf. Smit 2004a: 1). Such a foundational (theological) error culminates in Presbyterianism with a reduced functional theology in the public lives of Nigerians. In addition, The PCN and other Reformed churches in Nigeria also exhibit a deficiency in a biblically informed theological consciousness and education. In Smit's opinion, as a paradox, Reformed theology is a rich tradition with enormous potential. It needs continuing liberation from traditional failures and idolatries, which can assist it to generate and sustain a more meaningful social witness in contemporary societies (cf. Smit 2005c: 367).

Thus, we consider Smit's view in asking the following questions: Is there nothing more in being reformed that can challenge the ways in which The PCN does mission? In other words, must the church continue to celebrate its theology in received *pseudo*-Calvinism since its received tradition does not share space with local contexts in contemporary Nigeria?⁷⁵ Will such issues not encourage us to engage in a radical review of the tenets of the received faith and teachings particularly, as they affect the church's polity and political ethics in its pursuit of the *missio Dei*? From the discussion in this chapter, can we assume that the influences of the foundational

⁷⁵ We appreciate the animosity of the Kenyan-born African theologian, John S. Mbiti among others, towards what he describes as racially impregnated (or biased) anthropology (cf. Mbiti 2003: 619) or an extensive criticism of what the West has done, said, or failed to do, however justifiable that may be (cf. Mbiti 1993a: 419). Christianity in Nigeria cannot be considered in isolation from the West. The study resonates with, and argues for the concern of African evangelization to underscore what the South African theologian, Ernst Conradie, refers to as 'Christianity with an African face' (2004: 255). One of the contributions that Nigerian Christians with any social agenda and of every social and ethnic origin can bring to the political, social, and economic life is to create an awareness of the need for contrition on their own part. After all, theology also highlights God's history of God's self-revelation as an ongoing conversation between the past and the present, which is influenced by contexts. The Christian mission needs to be contextual with a global view that is meaningful and feasible in the pluralistic Nigerian society.

(distressing) legacies of the Enlightenment-based ethics on the ecclesiological identity of The PCN have become traditions in the SCS? Furthermore, would such traditions not affirm the saying that a prediction/predilection of one generation can become the tradition of the next, if the SCS sustains it? We hope that an analysis of the life and witness of the SCS in the next section will assist us to reflect more critically on these and many other questions.

This section has surveyed the historical developments in The PCN. In order to respond to the questions that are raised from the discussion in ways, which are more meaningful, we shall explore the life and witness of the SCS. This can assist us to retrace the church's contemporary dilemmas over the negative impacts of the Enlightenment-based ethical vision and practices on the SCS; as hope to show in the next section.

4 The South Central Synod (SCS)

This section describes the establishment and historical developments of the SCS. It engages the task through an analysis of the SCS: the creation and inauguration; the growth and expansion; and the socio-cultural life in the synod. We seek to substantiate the claim that the theology of the SCS needs reconstruction, re-visioning and reformation particularly, as it affects the church's ecclesiological identity in Nigeria.

4.1 Creation and Inauguration

We shall offer a brief narration of the creation and inauguration of the SCS here that will lead to a discussion of the growth and expansion of the church in the next segment.

Calvin (1975) claims that God's intention for the human race is that generations will multiply and sustain it with legitimate seed. Humanity is graciously made in God's image. It is also privileged to steward God's creation in a responsible way. God ordained such a pure and lawful method of increase from the beginning and interestingly, such a pure and lawful method resonates with many African worldviews. In spite of the pervasive influence of the Enlightenment-based ethics on indigenous *religio*-cultures, many contemporary Africans celebrate procreativity as an honor and an indispensable pursuit of God's glory.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ An increasing number of Africans also mirror Calvin's view on responsible living (self) by practicing birth control in their communities.

Thus, the creation and inauguration of the SCS reflects a commitment of The PCN to the above-mentioned view of Calvin on pro-creativity. The Synod of the East ⁷⁷ recommended the creation of the SCS to the 10th GA of The PCN, which met at Calabar in August 1996. The assembly approved it, and later inaugurated the SCS as a full fledged synod of The PCN on Sunday 24^h November 1996 at St. Andrew's PCN First Aba Parish, Aba, Abia State Nigeria. Since then, the growth and expansion of the SCS has been encouraging. This success is tainted by the said theological deficiency of The PCN. To substantiate our claim that the theologically deficient foundation of The PCN constitutes a dilemma to contemporary SCS, we turn to Idowu's (1965) plea for the Indigenous African Church.⁷⁸

In his book, *Towards an Indigenous Church*, Idowu called for a more meaningful understanding of true Christianity as a religious dimension of culture. In listening to the Church, humanity in a concrete society ought to hear God in Jesus Christ addressing them in their native situation and particular circumstances. Idowu is of the view that the Church should proclaim the divine message to reflect rhythms, which are worthy of the Gospel. Idowu also argues that the local church should be allowed to hear the voice of Jesus Christ and interpret His will for itself. In other words, he holds that the Church should also embody some necessary reflections of its local context. The church's existence and essence is to solicit allegiance to Jesus Christ, its only Lord, in all contexts. Such a practice can assist local churches to afford indigenous peoples the opportunity to worship God in their contexts. Its expression and worship will reflect, *inter alia*, what is compatible with indigenous spiritual temperament and intelligible idioms. Idowu also expects an indigenous church to express the Christian faith in local languages, idioms, symbols, etc., among other things (cf. Idowu 1965: 11). Idowu craves for the indigenization of Christian theological practice in Africa. The cosmic Christ is also the Lord of indigenous cultures.

In his reflection, Bediako (2004a: 37-38) appeals to Mbiti, in order to criticize the notion of indigenization of Christianity and theology in Africa. Bediako argues that indigenization tends to reduce indigenous attempts to contextual realities often to serve as ends in mission. It is hardly emphatic that local efforts, contribution and participation have necessary, feasible and plausible ethics for ecumenical conversations. To speak of indigenizing Christianity often creates the

⁷⁷ This is the synod, which conceived, incubated and which gave birth to the SCS.

⁷⁸ Idowu is not a Presbyterian. However, we hope that his work can illuminate our claim that the paradox in the intent of establishing the SCS is a hangover from the distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based theologies in The PCN.

impression that indigenization is a mission-accomplished, which has to be transposed to a local area. Bediako criticizes such a concept of indigenization. It constitutes one of the Enlightenment-based assumptions of many missionaries and theologians in Africa. Bediako argues that local churches are also called to confess and embody wholeness and fulness. They are constitutive of the global society, which is also privileged to communicate and commend their unique contributions to the universal church. Local churches have some contributions to offer to global Christianity. Given such a position, this study reasons that responsible evangelization should not lose sight of the crucial roles of context in the process. Mission should be done in conversation and in continuity with other parts of the world. Prof Nico Koopman⁷⁹, a South African Reformed and ecumenical theologian, describes such visionary practices as confessing and embodying the catholicity of the Church in the context of *glocality*.⁸⁰ Local churches confess and embody their proclamation of *the* universal lordship of Jesus Christ in ethics, which *inter alia*, gives significant attention to contextual realities within its host cultures.

In contrast, the birth of the SCS did not arise from such a desire. The church was born out of the burning desire to bring the leadership of the church nearer to the people. Thus, the SCS, like many other synods of The PCN, adopted a parochial missionary approach. It often concentrated its vision for membership and evangelism on the indigenes of *Old Bende*⁸¹ and *Efik* and *Ibibio*. In other words, the pioneer vision of the SCS did not so much include the indigenes of its host environment in the missionary agenda of the church. This is a foundational theological-mission error. Its missionary projects also concentrated on the challenge for expansion and the need to make the impact of The PCN felt in the traditionally Presbyterian areas.⁸² This practice also

⁷⁹ Professor Koopman is an ordained minister of the URCSA. He is the Head of Department of Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology in the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University. Prof. Koopman is also the Director of Beyers Naudes Centre for Public Theology, Stellenbosch University. On the international level, he is the Chair for Global Consultation on Public Theology.

⁸⁰ *Glocality* depicts local manifestation that is conscious of global developments and, in turn, exercises global influence.

⁸¹ The Bende Division was in the Eastern region of Nigeria before the various regions were split into states. It 'comprised of the Southern Igbo of Umuahia and its environs and Northeast Igbo of Umunneato, Ohafia and Abam' (Erundu 2005). It is in Abia State and the people still share a lot culturally. The Northern Igbo Bende Division has now been split into Local Government Areas (LGA), which include Arochukwu, Ohafia, Bende, Umuahia South and Umuahia North. Abiriba, the researcher's native home is in the Northern Igbo Old Bende Division. It may receive official recognition as a Local Government Area before long.

⁸² The phrase describes geographical areas originally allotted the Presbyterians in the aborted Nigeria Church Union. The union was a movement, which first began in the South-East of Nigeria, as a quest for the unity of action – to avoid competition (Ogbu Kalu 1978: 4 - 5). In an official report retrieved from the archives of the Board of Missions of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, Bernard (a Canadian missionary to Nigeria) reminisced that the moving spirits behind the Union were the Church of Scotland missionaries and the Nigerian Presbyterians. The Rev Dr Dean of the Church of Scotland first proposed actual union in 1919. In 1928, the first

questions the status which the Practice and Procedure (P&P) of The PCN accords the synod. The P&P describes the SCS as a confessing church. On the other hand, confession also bespeaks embodiment, as Nico Koopman observes. In the Christian understanding, it is about a practice-based proclamation of the Gospel. According to Koopman (2006a: 10), '[T]o confess and embody is more than merely determining challenges of ...today. It is more than discerning implications and imperatives of this confession to contemporary churches. It is to confess in word and in deed, to embody in ethos, in structures and in practices, in every sphere of life wholeness and fulness – albeit in imperfect, preliminary and penultimate form'.

Given this understanding, we respond with the following questions: Can we not reason that the said desires, which led to the creation of the SCS, represent a foundational missional error in the intent for establishing the church? Do they not affirm the woes of an unhealthy tradition? Can such an error account for the parochial evangelization of The PCN, which was centred on *Old Bende* and *Efik and Ibibio* and had little or no concern for the indigenes of the synod until its (SCS) official inauguration in 1996? If the church exists as a living and dynamic entity (or body), should its ministry not touch the heart and the mind in order to bring a positive change in the environment? Further, how far has this synod sustained the vision of its vocation? In other words, has it improved on this foundational error?

conference of Senior African Agents urged the missions to take necessary steps to bring about a united Church. As a result, a union committee began to meet from 1933 in order to accomplish the vision (Bernard 1954:1).

This perspective on the Presbyterians' initiative of the church union project at Calabar (around 1902) can help us to understand The PCN ecumenical spirit, which is elusive in the SCS. Agwu Kalu (1978: 1-30) also acknowledges the Presbyterian initiative but he points out that the four initial partners (i.e., the Presbyterians, Primitive Methodists, Niger Delta Pastorate and Qua Iboe Mission) had had a conference in Calabar in 1911 under the name, Evangelical Union of Southern Nigeria. The Calabar Conference drew its catalyst from the agenda of the 1910 Edinburgh Conference whose ecumenical consultations in the West would lead to the founding of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948. Kalu also recalls that it was in the 1923 meeting that the Yoruba Mission (Anglicans), the Wesleyans, the Dutch Reformed Church, the S.I.M, The Basal Mission, and the British and Foreign Bible Society became members of the Union. It was probably this conference or a subsequent one that Bernard referred to in his report to his employers.

Consequently, the early Presbyterian missionaries held on tenaciously to this (Church Union) arrangement even when other churches had openly transgressed it. For instance, Johnston (1988: 54-55) recalls that the Scottish missionaries' stance was so strong that 'when some Abiriba people living in Umuahia wanted to make a presentation to their old missionary Robert Collins as he was passing through town, he insisted that they bring their gifts to the railway station, lest he suggest any recognition of the worshipping community by going to the church'. Originally, the Church Union allotted Umuahia and its environs, to the Methodist.

This Union gave birth to the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), an association of missionary-oriented Protestant churches founded in 1930. They co-operate in various projects –education, pastoral training, medical, and urban ministry (Agwu Kalu 1978: 11). Although the Union suffered a stillbirth in 1965 due to the 'Methodists' withdrawal and the Civil war' (Agwu Kalu 1978: 66-80), the surviving project of the Union is seriously threatened by the Anglican's seizure of Trinity Union Theological College Umuahia. The theological school was jointly owned by the trio of The PCN, the Anglican and the Methodist churches and was 'founded on October 6th 1948 at Awka, but transferred to Umuahia in 1950' (BPP 2006: 235). The Anglicans eventually ousted the others from the school in 2002 and possessed it for themselves.

The study hopes to address these questions by considering the growth and expansion of the synod. It will also analyze the socio-cultural (political, economic and religious) life in the synod before examining the efforts of the synod so far.

4.2 Growth and Expansion

This sub-section outlines the growth and expansion of the SCS, as we deem relevant to this study.

Numerically and materially, the SCS can be described as a growing church. The Presbyterian Church Desk Diary⁸³ shows that the SCS has 115 ministers, 7 presbyteries and 39 parishes compared to the 30 ministers, 3 presbyteries and 11 parishes it had at inauguration in 1996 (BPP 2005: 90-93). This increase in personnel does not include its streaming intake of new local church workers and ministers in training (we are not able to determine the number correctly here). In spite of these signs of growth, the often lopsided ministry (or mission) of The PCN persists in the life and theological mission ethics of the SCS.

For instance, the SCS is breaking loose from its parochial vision for evangelism. It is also embracing a more inclusive and aggressive evangelism into the hinterlands. As a result, contemporary Presbyterian congregations exist in the hinterlands of Rivers State (Bori, Bodo City, Bori, and Ahoada) and Bayelsa State. This approach is also evident in the non-Presbyterian areas of Abia (Ngwaland, Akwete, Imenyi and Umunneochi) and Imo (Orlu, Uratta and Egbu), to mention a few. It was almost inconceivable for Presbyterian churches to exist in these areas during the pre-inaugural days of the SCS. The Annual Report of the Synod to the 14th GA Meeting also shows that the SCS embarked on the 'establishment of mission stations at originally non-Presbyterian areas, namely: Yenegoa, Edoha, Abayi Umuokorato, Akpamnato, Abonema, and Omagwa' (GA Report 2004: 182). In other words, the SCS has made some considerable achievements in terms of expansion. However, the influence of the SCS on the political, economic and religious life of the society is questionable. This claim will become clearer as we consider the socio-cultural life in the synod area in the next paragraph.

⁸³ This is an annual handbook of The PCN.

4.3 Socio-cultural Life in the SCS

This sub-section discusses some socio-cultural realities within the environment of the SCS. It considers the location of the SCS and the socio-political, economic, and religious life in the synod. The discussion seeks to validate a claim of this study; i.e., that some distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based ethical visions are fundamental to the dilemmas of the SCS. For clarity, we shall first comment on the location of the SCS.

4.3.1 Location

This segment outlines the location of the SCS within the political history of Nigeria. It also gives a hint on the pervasive influence of the said distressing legacies on the people's occupation in the synod. We seek to pave ways for discussions on the resultant philosophy of these perplexing bequests in political, economic and religious lives within the synodical areas in the subsequent paragraphs.

The SCS is located within the tropical rain forest, and the riverine regions of the Southeast and South-South geo-political zones of Nigeria. This location encompasses four state capitals namely, Port Harcourt, Owerri, Umuahia and Yenegoa. The region also houses the highly industrially concentrated city of Port Harcourt⁸⁴ as well as a popular commercial city, Aba.⁸⁵ The Igbos constitute its dominant tribe. With respect to religion, majority of the people practise African traditional religion or Christianity while Islam is trying to gain grounds in the area. The main occupations include agriculture, trading and mineral exploration but some of the people also work in the civil service and industrial sector. Attaining selfhood within the context of African communal spirituality is, as in other local contexts, an appreciable religiosity.

Within this Nigerian environment, *to be is to belong and to belong requires active participation in social affairs*. The individual exists as part of a collectivity where each person is a relational being, that is, in a relationship with God, the clan, the family and the ancestors. Of a truth,

⁸⁴ Port Harcourt is the capital of River State as well as the centre of the oil industry in Nigeria. It is also known as 'The Garden City' because of its many trees and is located within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.. Though it is now the second most important seaport in Nigeria, Port Harcourt did not exist until 1913 when Lord Lugard's administration founded this Port town in honour of his master at the British colonial office in London, Lord Lewis Harcourt. Harcourt was an explorer and the British Colonial Secretary (Omoruyi 2002: 22, 24).

⁸⁵ Aba is a major urban city and the commercial centre of Southeastern Nigeria. Currently, many of the industries in Abia State are located in Aba. The town is known as *Enyimba City* –the Peoples' Elephant (as their football team, which won the CAF Championship cup in both 2003 and 2004 is also known) - because of its great population and the extent of the sustenance it offers to human beings and industries within, and outside Nigeria. It is also known as the 'Taiwan of Nigeria' because of the people's great creativity in commerce and industry. Aba is a very busy city with a teeming population and is less than 50km from Port Harcourt.

individualism is a strange experience here. It invaded this *religio*-centric environment through the Enlightenment-based projects. An extract from the incumbent Moderator of the SCS, Rev (Dr) Terty Onoh's address, presented during the 11th Annual Synod Conference can assist us in gaining a more significant understanding of the state of affairs within and around this Presbyterian Church. To quote him,

Simply put, we are saying that *the SCS of The PCN* is called, charged, and challenged to understand, believe and begin to move to the ends of the earth in thoughts, words, and actions.... We are....challenged by the Lord in this theme to drop all our parochial, self-centered impressions about the Messiah and Salvation, to surrender ourselves unreservedly to the perfect divine plan to move....beyond our familiar comfort zones.... Beloved Sisters and brothers, the Lord is calling us to radically allow our hearts, mindsets, and lives to be transformed by the Holy Spirit in our understanding and response to Mission....Let us therefore respond to this call by pragmatically meditating on these timeless questions: Has the SCS reached the ends of the earth with the Gospel of Jesus Christ? How can I concretely contribute to the realization of this divinely inspired vision? The place to start is here, and the time is now.... The trust policy of the Synod *inter alia*, includes the catch *phrase*: "Everyone, everywhere, a missionary;" and to "establish a functional Mission field in each of our Presbyteries in the Synod before the end of the year 2008."

(SCS 2007: 51-52).

At first glance, Rev Onoh's explication and appropriation of the 2007 GA theme, *To the Ends of the Earth*, echoes more a missional sermon. However, it is also a very significant challenge to all Presbyterians especially, members of the SCS. The Synod Moderator's challenging words, and the state of affairs within this geographical environment point towards the pervasive influence of the truistic bequests of the Enlightenment projects in Nigeria. Its truistic philosophical fervor, mechanisms, content and context of the pursuit of selfhood in the synodical area call for questions. These vices create and heighten the chasm between the weak and the strong, the rich and the poor, the included and the excluded, and the haves and the have-nots, within the vicinity of this church. An over-adventurous quest for power, fame and wealth, migration, hegemony and religious bigotry characterize much of the contemporary social interaction within this altruistic and *religio*-centric environment. We hope to show this state of affairs and its effect on the socio-political, economic and political life of this *religio*-cultural environment.⁸⁶ The *pseudo*-

⁸⁶ David Bosch's description of the rich as those who 'through their avarice, haughtiness, exploitation of the poor, and godlessness, have wilfully and consciously placed themselves outside the range of God's grace; being only interested in what they can get out of the present moment' (Bosch 1991: 99) is relevant to the SCS context. As we indicated above, an over-adventurous quest for power, fame and wealth, migration, hegemony and religious bigotry characterize the socio-cultural life within the synod area. Bosch sneers at the rich who, because of their greed, exploit the poor, and who are so bent on making money that they do not notice the beggar at their gate. Bosch dismisses such rich people as slaves to money who trust in themselves and powerfully abuse power. Their bodily presence reflects the 'odd grab-bag' culture of an age that is disrespectful of ancient precedents and

philosophies and their associated vices cut across the strata of politics, economics and religion in many communities in the area covered by the SCS. This menace will become clearer as we investigate the socio-political life within the synod area.

4.3.2 Socio-Political Life

This segment focuses on the political confusion in some states within the synod area. It will also consider the issue of gender abuse within the SCS environment, as we deem it necessary to this study.

Agudosy (2004) has remarked that contemporary African democracy relies on responsible political communication as a more stable means for re-invigorating governance. Political communication (or socialization) inspires leaders and followers to see the need for continuing education of human beings. It helps to keep the stakeholders abreast of current issues and what the *status quo* entails in the complicated business of governance. Political socialization highlights the need for growth and development of cultures. It also strives to cultivate and transmit a right sense of values into the nascent generations of African democratic societies (cf. Agudosy 2004:597-602). For de Gruchy (1995), democracy is an open-ended tradition. It seeks to create a freer and more humane experience. All persons share and contribute in the experience. In a true democratic vision, social responsibility rather than individual self-interest prevails. A true democratic vision pleads for a society that is truly just. It seeks to reduce and, altogether, remove the vast gulf between the rich and the poor from the society. De Gruchy locates the origin of democracy in the message of the ancient prophets of Israel, especially, in their messianic hope for a society in which the reign of God's *shalom* would become a reality (de Gruchy 1995: 15-39). Russett (1998) and Thiemann (1997) share related views with Agudosy and de Gruchy.⁸⁷

ignorant of perennial patterns. Tutu (2004) reflects on such 'odd-grab-bag' practice as a capitalist culture, which places a seemingly high premium on success and on unbridled competitiveness. Its philosophy is marked by the deification of success with little or no regard for human dignity and the integrity of creation. In Tutu's words, 'it is a no-holds-barred contest *in which one must* strive frenetically for success at all costs' (Tutu 2004: 35 [Our italics]).

⁸⁷ Bruce Russett regards democracy as an instrument for peace and order in society, vis-à-vis its underlying fundamental values in liberty, justice, dignity and tolerance. In his view, the more democracies in the world, the fewer the adversaries we will have and, the wider the zone of peace. Democracies (or democrats) are unlikely to engage in militarized disputes with each other or let such disputes escalate into war. Russett's (1998: 96-98) view seems to agree with Ronald F. Thiemann's who reasoned that in spite of their divergent positions, democratic opponents are more likely to remain in communal solidarity with one another than opponents who believe they are being deceived or manipulated. The defence of freedom requires particular vigilance against the potential tyranny of the domestic majority (Thiemann 1995: 135-136).

These commentators seem to reflect on politics as a game in which there will always be a *winner* and a *loser*; each of them ought to be accepted in the spirit of sportsmanship. However, unlike de Gruchy and Russett, Thiemann (or perhaps Agudoso also) concedes history to the State and its constitutional democracy rather than to the Church (or religion).⁸⁸ Agudoso's position seems to defame the calling and being of the Church as the bearer of history. The Church politics (does politics) for its Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the author, sustainer and consummation of history. In any case, the political life in some parts of this Nigerian synod seems to degenerated into political confusion leading to unrest in some states of the synod.

The condition in Abia State during the fourth Republic of Nigerian democracy stands as a case in point. For more than three years after the election and the subsequent inauguration of the governor, an opponent continued to contest the authenticity of the election results, which brought

⁸⁸ According to John Howard Yoder, democracy provides more opportunity for humankind to speak to those in power. Where it is meaningfully understood and practised, its elective process exists 'as one relatively effective way the subject population has of making its likes and dislikes'. True democracy, Yoder (1997a) points out, decentralizes authority. Yoder's project acknowledges the resourcefulness of democracy in contemporary societies.

However, the project questions the view that the fundamental novelty of democratic governance is convincing, both historically and theologically. Democracy does not always defend the human dignity it often guarantees. Some persons or groups usually expropriate its power and systems for selfish interests. In many cases, the motive and purpose behind the pursuit of democracy is 'to become politically powerful and to use that power in the interest of one's goals' (Yoder 1997a: 27). From this perspective, the rights and humanity of the less privileged, especially the weak, are rarely protected in the long run. The powerful and influential often interpret and dictate to others what needs to be done and contexts are hardly considered in the implementation of democracy. Thus, it could be from this background that Abdullahi An-Na'im calls for a contextual and continuing reformation of democracy (and democratic principles). As he reasons, much of the Islamic hostility towards (human right and) democracy can be adduced to their conception of the system as a Western imposition of secular culture on Islamic societies. 'In practical terms....secularism is untenable in Islamic societies, not only because it does not represent the experiential and emotional ties of these societies to their own religious and cultural values....it came to Islamic societies in the dubious company of Western colonialism and post-colonial hegemony'. The relationship between Islam and politics in Islamic societies is very strong and any attempt to separate them is conceived as anti-religious, unethical and unacceptable. As he further points out, 'No single *democratic* theory or *practice* can possibly account for all the complexities in diverse societies' (An-Na'im 1999: 105; 119).

Furthermore, such pursuits of democracy often seek power in order to implement religious visions, which can hardly be reconciled with the democratic practices of the New Testament church. It would hardly respect the abstention of Christians who eschew the sword; or promote their testimony against corrupt politicians who give the electorates no tolerable options than casting a vote without conviction or information. This *pseudo-Christian* ethics, as we re-interpret it from Emmanuel Kantongole's view, can be described as 'a policing tactic' meant to resist the substantial proclamation of the Christian faith as religiosity. Katongole mirrors (Yoderian) Stanley Hauerwas' perspective to reflect on such praxis as 'new Constantinianism' or 'democratic policing of Christianity'. It de-emphasizes the historical and contingent nature and task of embodied Christianity (Katongole 2000: 199-200). As far as the Yoderian project is concerned, the mythological explanation of democracy as a fundamentally new (a historical) kind of social order is a mistake Christians should no longer make. Believers in Jesus Christ are called to participate in active political judgment within concrete societies (cf. Yoder 1992b; O'Donovan 2005).

the governor into power, at the election petition tribunal. Goddy Udejah, a Nigerian journalist reported that the gubernatorial candidate for the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) party⁸⁹ was preparing to appeal against the decision of the tribunal for the second time (Udejah 2005). The contender, Chief Onwuka Kalu, refused to endorse the election of the incumbent because he saw it as a fraud. According to Udejah, 'Onwuka Kalu told journalists that he was not in agreement with the Monday verdict of the election petition tribunal that Governor Kalu was the winner of the polls. He confirmed his lawyers' earlier statement that an appeal would be filed immediately at the Appeal court'. Ironically, Onwuka and the governor are migrants from the same Northern Igbo land in Old Bende Division. Their communities (Abiriba and Igberre respectively) share a common boundary. More significantly, this political muscle flexing seeks to govern the geographical entity that is christened, *God's Own State*. It is incontestable that for many Nigerians, until October 2006, Abia State had a rather different identity from that of a peaceful state; even the situation in the neighbouring Imo State does not appear to be any better.

Isiguzo's (2005) report describes the confusion, which arose from the dissolution of the State Executive of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and the constitution of a new Caretaker Committee by the National Working Committee of the party. Members of the defunct executive rejected the decision and went ahead to suspend the Chairman of the committee. Each of the factions claimed to be the genuine one. They also accused one another of falsehood. The situation left many at crossroads, i.e., being unable to identify which faction represents the genuine State Executive of the party.

These apparent political confusions affirm our suspicion that most of the crises facing democracy in this continent arise from the conquerors' ethics. They often arise from the unwillingness of political losers to concede defeat. Political winners often punish their opponents and reward their supporters (cf. Magesa & Nthamburi 1999:1). Until now, Abia and Imo States are yet to experience relief from political confusion even though the people are predominantly adherents of the Christian religion. The *status quo* is pathetic. It also inspires one to ask if such politics can exist without an associated vice, visible 'gender injustice;' that is, the unbridled subjugation of the opposite sex by the other within the various spheres of life in this Nigerian

⁸⁹ APGA was one of the political parties that contested the election.

context. Perhaps Eme's⁹⁰ (2004) work will help us to respond to this puzzle. It can also validate our position that The PCN, especially the SCS, is yet to go beyond women ordination in its nuanced demonstration and continuing celebration of the integrity and human dignity of the female gender.

In the Introduction to his book, *Gender [In]justice and Nigerian Women*, Eme confirms that Nigeria is a patriarchal society. Gender injustice manifests in multidimensional concrete expressions. Its legacies have more devastating effects on women. Many Nigerian women labour as victims of structured cultural domination, discrimination, and exploitation more than any other group. Traditionally, females are often regarded as inferior beings, domestic ornaments, weak vessels, etc., with no significant right of self-expression. Local traditions demand that they always surrender totally to men as their owners. Eme deplores such injustices on women. He also urges the church, as the light of the world, to take active part in restoring their (demeaned) human dignity (cf. Eme 2004:1). Sharing Eme's view is Oduyoye (cf. 2003; 2001b; 1998). She calls for the proclamation of women humanity. Such an exercise can afford women more space (in church and society) to make more substantive contributions in articulating an African prophetic theology. However, unlike Eme, Oduyoye suggests a women's hermeneutics (Oduyoye 2003: 59-60). Consequently, one can reason that Eme's view describes the position of many women in within the socio-cultural environment of the SCS. Religious and other institutions are creating awareness on the evils of these social ills. Nevertheless, women subjugation and exploitation, torturing, oppression and disinheritance of widows, and even children, persists within the synod area.

Given the sordid socio-political situation, we reason that the SCS should embody John Calvin's plea to Christians. Calvin appeals to Christians to ensure that the Gospel is not blasphemed because of the infamous activities of some members of the church.⁹¹ In other words, the SCS should draw significant resources from its rich theology of grace to ensure that its contemporary theology addresses these issues in more substantive ways. Christian discipleship is also a political responsibility. The gracious Christ-event has meaning for Nigerian women especially, in contexts where traditional structures and developments seem to outrun the capacities of the

⁹⁰ Rev Ndukwe Eme an ordained minister of The PCN. He became the incumbent Principal Clerk of The PCN in August 2008.

⁹¹ *Institute XX* (p.30)

contemporary democratic political vision and systems. In the next section, a consideration of the socio-economic life within the synod area might assist us to listen more attentively to the above-mentioned affirmations.

4.3.3 Socio-Economic Life

Here we discuss the socio-economic life within the SCS environment as we deem relevant to this study. As earlier hinted, the host *religio*-cultures of the SCS emphasize communal spiritualities.

This *religio*-centric environment witnesses a plethora of pseudo-ideological and chaotic manoeuvres. Social vices exist, which result in unhealthy struggles to control the means of exchange. Many of its citizens consider the contemporary economic life as a *success* or a *capitalist* culture. Socio-economic life in the synodical area thrives more in unbridled competitiveness. Thus, some recent incidents make it more arguable that the SCS environment is edging deeper into this *pseudo*-tradition, which also negates indigenous religiosities.

For instance, within the eight years tenure of Chief Obasanjo's presidency, three Speakers of the Upper House of the National Assembly were dishonourably relieved of their posts on charges of bribery and corruption. Two of them hail from the synod area. Again, the Federal Minister of Education, who was involved in over a fifty million Naira (N50, 000,000.00, i.e., more than US\$ 500, 000.00) bribery scandal in the year, 2005, also comes from the synod area. The Bayelsa State governor,⁹² who was arrested and detained in London for money laundering, also hails from the area. These manifestations of 'high-level' financial mis-appropriation tend to support the views of two Nigerian literary giants, the Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe, among others. In their views, the trouble with Nigeria is corrupt leadership. There is a high level of financial expropriation within the political class. Nigerians are not economically poor *per se*. They are simply plagued by poverty of leadership, and poverty of the mind (cf. Soyinka 2004: 22; Achebe 1983).

The three illustrations mentioned above, make it more convincing that those political leaders tend to see the Nigerian economic life as a 'no-holds-barred' contests. Such embarrassing

⁹² The BBC News World Edition of 28 September 2005 reported that the governor was arrested on 15 September 2005 as he passed through the Heathrow Airport and he was denied bail by the magistrate when he appeared in court. When finally granted bail, he shamelessly *jumped bail* and sneaked back into Nigeria through a means that has not been easy for both The British and The Nigerian governments to explain. However, he was impeached as governor and he has since faced trial in Nigeria.

activities can vindicate Achebe's submission that if Nigerians wish to hold any useful discussion on corruption, they must locate it within the ranks of the leadership (cf. Achebe 1983: 38). The *status quo* can also substantiate our view that the present 'high level' of corruption within the Nigerian polity and politics is rooted in some negative bequests of the Enlightenment-based political ethics. Economics is almost worshipped as a religion. Corrupt politicians, rather than saintly theologians (or theologically influenced economists), constitute the bulk of its priesthood. However, to God's glory, the EFCC⁹³ was constituted to address these cases as well as other related (financial) crimes against the nation and its citizenry.

The unhealthy ethical practices make it necessary for one to ask the following questions: If the leaders are that corrupt, would the followers not follow suit or, at best, replicate a portrait of bribery and corruption? Do these ills not speak of the need for the SCS to embark on a prophetic witness and commitment? Would such a significant witness not also find authentic expression in politics and economics as Nigerian churches respond to the unprecedented challenges of the global economy? Can we not agree with Niebuhr's (1994: 463-467) view that attaining a just political order is less feasible without the reconstruction of the economic order? Moreover, do not political and economic Powers constitute the greater part of 'the power-factor' (Bediako 1992: 375), which exerts great influence on human life?

The study will provide some important answers to these questions in the last chapter. However, it holds that the researcher's experience in his seven years of pastoral ministry in the synod can substantiate Niebuhr and Bediako's positions on Nigeria.⁹⁴ As earlier pointed out, unbridled economic exploitation, marginalization/oppression of the poor and the less privileged, especially women and children, are evident while ecological degradation equally thrives within this geo-political region. This apparent state of affairs makes Martin Luther King's non-violent outburst from his Birmingham jail relevant to the SCS. He declared that, 'injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere' (King 1994: 428). Callousness and indifference to the plight of the suffering are visible in the synod. The spate of injustice make the following statement more appropriate to

⁹³ The EFCC is the abbreviated form of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. It is a body set up by the President Obasanjo-led administration to recover the nation's stolen funds. It is also empowered to rusticate culprits. We offer a fuller discussion on its activities in the last chapter of this research.

⁹⁴ Olo lived in Aba from January 1998 to August 2001 and in Oyigbo (about 5km from Port Harcourt) from September 2001 to December 2004. He served as Minister, Clerk and 'one-time' Moderator of Port Harcourt North Presbytery; Synod Evangelism Co-ordinator, as well as Chairman of the Synod Congregational Ministries' Committee (CMC).

the SCS: That for human communication of the goodness of God to be responsible and meaningful, empathy and compassion must play determinative ethical roles. Such a godly ethos can also teach Nigerians that evil and injustice do not have the final say in the affairs of human beings. As this study shows, Nigerians are *religio-centric*. They can embody human communication of God's goodness as an indispensable religiosity. This research challenges the SCS to confess and embody this ethos, *inter alia*, in its proclamation of the Gospel.

The capitalist culture in Aba as an instance can also provide a platform for our view. As earlier noted, economic activities within this city shows Aba as a beehive of commercial activities. The activities range from production to distribution of goods to the final consumers. Aba is dominated by a capitalist market economy, which *inter alia*, permits private ownership of industry as well as an open market competition. As a result, selfish (rather than responsible self) interest often defines its religiosities. This *pseudo-ethics* despises weakness or vulnerability (including failure), and trust, etc., which play crucial roles in African religiosities. Such non-negotiable components of indigenous (African) ethics also provide educational spheres in which human beings learn empathy and compassion and discover the yearnings of the soul (cf. Tutu 2004: 37; Koopman 2004). Vulnerability and trust, among other indigenous virtues, create opportunities for humanity to experience and communicate God's goodness. They also inspire us to communicate God's goodness to *the other*, who bear the brunt of the pains of economic scarcity in the society. Economic scarcity, as Barrera (2005) shows, also serves as an opportunity for human beings to partake in God's goodness, holiness, righteousness and providence. Such a humane approach to the practice of economics is not against the teachings of the Scriptures. It is biblically true that Christians may not reduce human communication of God's goodness to economics, yet the wisdom literature of the Bible also condemns unjust economic measures and devices (cf. Prov. 20: 10; 28: 8). Those who seek grace ought to communicate grace to the others, particularly, as it relates to economic issues. The socio-economic milieu provides a medium for human beings to demonstrate their concepts of the divine-human relationship. Human agency and participation in economic communication also represent an aspect of human responsibility in the communication of the goodness of God. A western theologian, Oliver O'Donovan recaptures such humane communication of God's goodness in a more nuanced way:

In communicating the goods....with one another, we discover a radical equality with one another in relation to God. For none of us is the source of communication....since we all hold whatever we communicate directly from Christ. To communicate something is to hold it as a common

possession.... The transmission of any good from one person to another creates a relationship through which we enjoy the object in a new way together

(O'Donovan 2005: 244).

In other words, economic communication is constitutive of the *missio Dei*. Therefore, vulnerability and failure can also engender greater depth in human participation in divine perfections and activities. God, in the gracious Christ-event, appropriated vulnerability in order to communicate grace to humanity. We as human beings are also invited to participate in extending such communication of grace to others. Meaningful communication of God's grace involves economic sharing as well. It can also create a more nuanced relationship in which humanity can enjoy the act of sharing in more appreciable ways.

Given this insight, it becomes more embarrassing for one to learn that this slogan; *Get all you can! Can all you can get! Can the can! Sit on the can and die on the can*,⁹⁵ tends to summarize the economic philosophies in *religio-centric* Nigeria. Such an idolatrous capitalist philosophy seems to be more evident in Aba than in other cities in Nigeria. A cutthroat practice is endemic in the open market and massive importations of sub-standard goods are carried out daily. Furthermore, provisions for the future of employees are not guaranteed while remunerations are below the minimum wage of Nigeria. This apparent exploitation of the less privileged (employees) also breed counter-productive reaction, that is betrayal of trust on the part of many employees. Furthermore, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) ranks Aba among the cities, which are classified as dumping grounds for foreign goods in Nigeria. The tragic end of such a philosophy is that the final consumers, often, the exploited poor masses, are at peril. Aba also serves as a feeder market to many cities and rural areas in Nigeria and beyond.⁹⁶ The exploitative capitalistic culture is also evident in Port Harcourt, Umuahia, Owerri, and Yenegoa, etc. Idolatrous capitalist philosophies take the forms of exorbitant house rents, as well as open market competition and exploitation within the geographical environment of the SCS.

These vices place an incredible pressure on family, relationships, and personal integrity. Such vices also cause sleepless nights to many, especially the less privileged. Levinas' call for a

⁹⁵ This slogan simply represents a self-centred and an unhealthy consumerist (capitalist) philosophy.

⁹⁶ Aba is a populous city with teeming Christian adherents. At least eight (8) out of every ten (10) person on its streets belong to a Christian denomination. Sadly, its economic practice is plagued by exploitation, selfishness and obvious cheating.

responsible self, which can sacrifice its own self for the well-being of the *other* may witness an initial hostile reception in this geo-political zone (cf. Levinas 1998; 1981; 1969). Many conceive *the other* as the object of exploitation and expropriation, who is scarcely esteemed as a relational partner in progress. All these issues combine to persuade one to argue that the *status quo* shows that the Church hearkens to the dictates of the market economy more than it does to the authority of God. They also re-echo the need for the SCS to address the ways in which business practitioners (which includes market women and men) can understand the morality of business. Christian responsibility includes believers' commitment to imbue an unchristian society with its ideals. Christian ideals are of a higher and nobler order. Hope and fulfilment are constitutive of inevitable expectations. This study argues that the SCS is often indifferent or is yet to catch the vision, that is, to see that injustice is rooted out through a substantive, persistent and determined action in Nigeria.

Given these present conditions, one is also burdened with the following questions: Do the SCS and its neighbouring communities ever understand John Calvin's admonition that the more usury is practised, the more often, cruelty and other fraudulent activities arise (cf. Calvin 1994: 453)? Are the less privileged also less human beings? In other words, were they created without the *imago Dei*? Must the less privileged always live and die in hopeless hopes, or hopes without any fulfilment? Furthermore, given that poverty of the spirit is also a virtue to strive for, as the Beatitudes teach us, must people be structured and restricted to abject and man-made *poverty*⁹⁷ and suffering in order to be virtuous? Should not the Church's proclamation of the Christ-event also seek a social realization of the Kingdom vision and its useful effects on economic relationships in Nigeria?

Generally, there is a great chasm between the rich and the poor - between *the haves* and *the have-nots*. The poverty level in the synod area is very high in spite of the large volume of daily business and the various forms of economic activities that go on there. This pitiable socio-

⁹⁷ The study supports Archbishop Ndungane's position (in Guma 2002:7) that poverty is more than lack of access to resources. It also has to do with situation and structures, which eat away humanity's dignity and make its victims susceptible to chronic human suffering. Poverty also means living below the UN poverty datum line of US\$1 a day. Poverty is a complex amalgam of physical and spiritual pain, which robs the person and the community of dignity and meaning as much as it deprives the body of nourishment, shelter, and beauty. Poverty includes but is not limited to access to lack of resources; joblessness, homelessness, perennial food insecurity, illiteracy, etc, as Jeffrey Sachs presents it (cf. Sachs 2005). Poverty includes an absence of morality in identity formation. 'Poverty not the poor, as de Gruchy (1995: 269) puts it, is an enemy of democracy and incompatible with a just world order'.

economic situation is not bereft of its attendant vices such as gangsterism, prostitution, women/wife and child abuse, etc. Given this sordid state of affairs, one is further compelled to reason that when people wallow in poverty in the midst of such an affluent but insecure society, even the status of the Church as a hope for secure and liveable society also becomes questionable. If believers are truly convinced that Christ is the universal Lord, in whom people are united by love, should believers not demonstrate their 'distinctive' identity and joy of salvation by also sharing their benefits with others? Again, do the prevalent conditions not call for a renewed vision? Would such a vision not recognize the urgency of the moment and sense the need for a powerful antidote to combat the disease? More pointedly, does not the Gospel also come to human beings as a loving and active divine encounter, which engages humanity with the reality and awesomeness of the divine presence in their experiences? Should the SCS not interact with these challenges in ways that can enable Christ believers to respond to the ecological crisis in Nigeria in the power of the Holy Spirit?

The ecological situation in the synod area is altogether, a crisis. This evil is pivotal to the unhealthy mass urban migration and the concentration of sustainable development in the urban areas of Nigeria. This study conceives such a vice as another negative effect of the translated and transiting legacies of the colonial era. The study share views with a Roman Catholic Priest and the Head of Department of Religious Studies at Abia State University, Uturu, Nicholas Omenka, that these practices are serving their purposes, within this *religio*-cultural environment (Omenka 2003). They also bequeath most cities with distressing legacies, which include, among other things, over-population, consumerism and environmental pollution.

The ecological crisis in most parts of Aba, Port Harcourt, Oyiibo and even Umuahia and their environs provide us with a warrant. In many cases, reserved spaces for recreation and vehicle parking have been sold or leased out for residential and commercial structures. This situation causes much hardship to the citizenry. For instance, this researcher often had to waltz through some flooded roads in these cities to discharge his duties. In many cases, uncleared heaps of refuse spill into drainage systems to obstruct the flow of water. Often, these health-threatening monuments also spill into the motor ways and cause perplexing traffic congestions as well as hazardous air pollution. The researcher has also had to attend to formal and informal mediatory meetings, which often centre on cases of women, wife, or child abuse, among other issues. At times, such meetings also involve mediating in cases of economic exploitation, which may

include unfair remunerations and betrayal of trust. Much of the ecological crisis originates from, translates and transits as reflections of the consumer-oriented bequests of the Enlightenment-based political ideologies. Within the vicinity of the SCS, this pseudo-ideology gives birth to a less responsible and dangerous type of ‘consumers in a Consumer Society’ (McFague 2000: 81-97). Often, the Enlightenment-based consumer legacies do not spare anything, including the pollution of wild and aquatic lives.

The FGN, the NGO’s and other well-meaning individuals are calling for the celebration of the integrity of creation but there is no significant response from the people within the synod area. Most of these unheeded cries seem to reach persons and bodies, who merely analyze society without sustained and embodied efforts towards change. Even churches (including the SCS) seem to give this crusade against ecological crisis a peripheral and ephemeral attention in their mission agenda. Thus, the effect in terms of epidemics, flood, pollution, scarcity of wild and aquatic food, etc., is scarcely contestable. At least, two cases that were reported by Bisi Olaniyi⁹⁸ and Odili Aide⁹⁹ in which flood took over cities in Bayelsa and River States can attest to this observation. Such environmental conditions point to the need for the SCS and other churches to see themselves as also dependent on nature and responsible for it. The SCS ought to be a vanguard of this crusade for the preservation of ecology as God’s human agency for the communication of divine grace. Nigerian Reformed Christians cannot afford to neglect the call for them to confess and embody conscientious self-examination and repentance. Such lived imaginative vision of the purpose of Christian theology can empower humanity with a sense of care and responsibility towards all life. It would mean living out ‘a cruciform life’ (McFague 2001: 210). Christian election demands active participation in restoring God’s *shalom* in society. Consequently, this study also challenges the SCS to respond to the above-mentioned crises in more appreciable ways since Reformed theology also stresses responsible Christian living as part of its ethics.

⁹⁸ Olaniyi (2006) reported in The Punch on the Web of May 16, that three days of heavy rainfall in Yenegoa rendered the Bayelsa State capital flooded, leaving residents to count their losses. According to him, ‘the flood was caused by poor drainage in the area and the extension of the estate....the fence [of which] has been used to block the path of the drainage’.

⁹⁹ Aide’s (2006) report was captioned, *Why flooding persists around CBN, on the 18th*. He reported that the Special Adviser to the River State Governor on Sanitation and Environment blamed the flood on structural defects in the drainage system. He noted that the Rivers State Sanitation Authority had taken measures to open up the drain but expressed worry that the situation did not change. He noted that the Sanitation Authority appealed to the people of the state to assist in improving the sanitary condition of the state.

The perennial (now, notorious) skirmishes in the ‘Niger Delta region’¹⁰⁰ also began as reactions to the economic and ecological exploitations that are epitomized by oil exploration. It is not an exaggeration to say that criminal intentions bedevil some of the present activities in the region. These days, Niger Delta militants are reputed to kidnap oil workers and demand ransom for their release. In spite of these observations, oil explorations in Nigeria, especially within this geopolitical zone, can be described as oil exploitation. Many oil companies operate there as self-centered capitalists. In their varied approaches to maximize profit, these oil explorers engage in practices that do not appear responsible such as gas flaring (ignition of gas in the atmosphere), and laying dangerous high-pressure oil pipelines above the ground (instead of underground). Moreover, many of their employees are *immoral*. These workers destroy farmlands, as well as wild and aquatic lives in the cause of their adventures. Above all, contemporary oil exploration degrades agricultural lands thereby leaving the bulk of the indigenes of this once-rich environment destitute and without such basic amenities as potable water, sanitation facilities, and accessible roads, etc (cf. Okonta & Douglas 2004).

Consequently, those Niger Delta militants, who kidnap and attack oil workers, and vandalise oil installations claim these immoral ecological destructions and the FGN’s inadequate compensations as catalysts for their reprisals. Often, the FGN and the oil companies recognize and appease the elites and the people who speak out against them. The masses who bear much of the brunt of these vices are hardly reached. Contrary to the church’s preferential option for the poor, i.e., solidarity with the poor, the victims of human injustice are usually treated with ignominy; they are often banished and restrained to the status of present-absent human beings.¹⁰¹ Due to the crisis, lives and properties have been lost and oil production grossly reduced. When repressed emotions are denied the opportunity for a non-violent release, they often seek expressions through violent ways (King 1994: 433). Many of these militants have run out of patience or they have become convinced that privileged groups can hardly give up their privileges for the exploited, voluntarily.

With this background, this study argues that the situation calls for continuing disciplined and mature dialogue. The research also contends that such open meetings must be moderated by people who see things from the perspective of God’s reign rather than as selfish capitalists.

¹⁰⁰ The greater part of the Niger Delta is located within the synod area.

¹⁰¹ Present-absent human beings simply refer to the populace whom these perpetrators of evil rarely give attention.

Pseudo-capitalists seek to realize their perverted visions without significant respect for the demeaned *other*. Only sustained and responsible dialogue can act as permanent *catharsis*, to wounded hearts. At least, the South African experience, which arose from the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 1995,¹⁰² is a clear case. Within the region of the SCS, religion (Christianity inclusive) is often practised as ‘inappropriate religion’ (Rasmussen 1996: 103-109) or as ‘therapeutic deception’.¹⁰³ Such *pseudo*-religious practices are rooted in *self-centered capitalistic ideologies*.¹⁰⁴ Religion is seldom practised as the transformer of reality within the socio-cultural environment of the SCS.

¹⁰² This is similar to the Oputa Panel set up by President Obasanjo (cf. Okafor 2003: 580).

¹⁰³ Therapeutic deception describes a medical ethic in which a lie is told by a physician in order to help (or spare) a patient. It seeks to cushion painful or difficult experiences by denying (or smothering) the bitter truth. Augustine vigorously opposed and rejected it (Verhey 2001: 127).

¹⁰⁴ Self-centered capitalistic ideology is *demonic*. Such capitalism may be constitutive of what a (Roman Catholic) Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary, New York, Walter Wink describes in his trilogy of *Power Series* (Wink 1984, 1986, and 1992) as *fallen principalities and Powers*. Wink argues that principalities and Powers are interdependent inner and outer poles of any given manifestation of Power, which only become demonic when they work against the purpose of God. In his perspective, the inner aspects are the spirituality of institutions, inner corporate structures and system, the inner essence of outer organizations of Power. The outer aspect is composed of political systems, appointed officials, the chair of an organization, laws as well as any tangible manifestations power may take. Wink stresses that every given Power tends to have the outer form (visible pole) and an inner form (invisible pole). In his words, ‘When a particular Power becomes idolatrous, placing itself above God’s purposes for the good of the whole, then the Power becomes demonic’ (Wink 1984:5). For him, the invisible pole is the inner spirit or driving force, which animates, legitimates and regulates its physical manifestation in the world.

In his own opinion, a Nigerian Professor of Christian Studies and Church History at Lagos State University (a member of the Aladura Church), Chris O. Oshun, tends to agree with Wink’s position. Oshun argues that a hierarchy of supernatural Powers act positively or negatively (according to the source of their Powers) to affect the created order and the destinies of human governments, groups of persons, or individuals in Nigeria. As long as evil Powers retain control, humanity remains their target and victim, wittingly and unwittingly. In his view, Nigeria has meddled with these supernatural Powers of evil and she suffers from this experience. Oshun thus argues that as a sovereign state, ‘Nigeria is in bondage to these evil Powers, a bondage that is evidenced by a series of spiritual, personal, moral, domestic socio-economic, political, religious and judicious disfunctionalities. To revert (*sic*) this trend, therefore, this bondage must be broken’ (Oshun 1998: 32). He reasons that the Nigerian situation requires a class of spiritually vibrant and adept persons to minister spiritual health and healing to the nation (Oshun 2001: 248).

Oshun’s appropriation of the language power of the New Testament seems to place the strength of the fallen Powers at par with God. From a (Nigerian) Reformed perspective, his view also tends to question the sovereignty of God especially in the meaning of the Christ-event for humanity. Oshun’s position raises the following questions in our mind, among other questions namely, if these principalities and Powers actually determine the destinies of human beings, which of course include the Church, would the essence of the incarnation not become questionable? Does not the Christ-event underscore the crucified and resurrected Messiah as the cosmic Lord whose saving grace also sheds light into all ambiguities and ambivalences in creation? Are evil Powers and society not within creation, which finds its *raison d’être* that no creature can alter or veto successfully and safely, in Christ? May we not associate with the view that the clarity and ambiguity of the language of power in the New Testament points in all its modifications to some kind of capacity to make things happen? Again, is the Nigerian state of affairs dislocated from the framework of the victory of Christ over the principalities and Powers (cf. Col 1: 15-20)? More concretely, is it not also the task of the Church to proclaim the universal lordship of Christ to the Powers, if we may ask? In any case, such demonic or fallen Powers include capitalistic ideologies. Demonic capitalist ideologies can also possess and obsess human beings in all their lives and activities.

Idoltrous capitalist ideologies constitute themselves as an affront to God's *shalom* for all. As their qualifications indicate, these *pseudo*-ideologies pursue self-interest. Their ethics generate and propagate parochial structures of the *status quo*. One can also denounce such structures as *deceptive ideologies* or demonic structures. Deceptive ideologies confuse rather than clarify human differentiations. Such demonic structures also project inappropriate assumptions into their efforts to offer explanations. In the process, they often interject bias into storytelling. Deceptive ideologies also falsify the limitation of the possibilities, which they posit. These *pseudo*-ideologies bewitch our society with a success culture. They often breed countless casualties in the exploited, the unemployed, the marginalized and/or oppressed, the homeless and the poor. Success, popularity and conformity are the bywords of such a society. Everyone tends to crave for the illusive security of being identified with the majority (cf. King 1963: 17). The *pseudo*-structures of ideological capitalism get in the ways of wholeness and understanding, instead of serving their goals.

Consequently, unhealthy political struggles and male domination of females are conspicuous in the synod area. Economic exploitations, women, wife and child abuse, and ecological degradation are also celebrated. Self-centred capitalism only dehumanizes. It could be in this spirit that Tutu writes: '[A] great hardship that occurs from capitalism's endless desire to make hierarchies of worth and human values is that it inevitably generates self-hatred...you hate yourself and destroy yourself by proxy when you destroy those who are like this self, you have been conditioned to hate' (Tutu 2004: 40). To cap it all, self-centered capitalism is also fatalistic and the situation calls for the attention of the SCS. Biblical Christianity ought to teach believers how to live mainly for others. It also offers a guide on how Christians can live with things as people who can also live without them. This means that biblical Christianity would not also espouse or sustain 'pawnsip'; i.e., pledging human beings, or possessions as collateral in order to receive financial assistance from creditors. Perhaps Ekechi's (2003) work entitled *Pawnsip in Igbo Society* can shed more light on the situation.

Ekechi acknowledged pawning as an approved custom and tradition, which probably developed as fallout of economic hardship in many pre-independence African societies. It serves as an essentially economic transaction in which objects or persons were pledged or handed over to creditors as security or collateral for debt. Ekechi locates its contemporary persistence and

perplexity in colonial social and economic ethics. The ethics provides the contexts for its translation and transitions. The pawning of land, in particular, is constitutive of an increasing source of social conflicts in many regions within the SCS environment especially Port Harcourt, Aba and Owerri, just to mention a few. As Ekechi points out, when most poor land owners default in the payment of high interest rates agreed upon in their desperate quest to obtain financial assistance with their lands, they usually end up losing them to their materially advantaged counterparts (Ekechi 2003: 182-183). Pawnship has almost served out its purpose in Nigeria. It is constitutive in capitalistic ideologies. Pawnship promotes injustice, reprisal and counter-reprisal in society: it reflects more of usury, which breeds reprisal (Calvin 1994).

Given the issues raised in this section, the following questions crop up: Should not the SCS seek to recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church within a postcolonial Nigeria? Are theological and cultural reflections not central to any adequate Christian understanding of the moral responsibilities of society? May we not at this point, investigate the influence of this transiting (continuing) theological mission ethics of the Enlightenment-based legacies on the socio-religious life of the synod? Will such an exercise not justify our call for its continuing re-visioning and reformation?

In the next paragraph, an investigation of the socio-religious life within the synod area might help us to answer the above questions more meaningfully.

4.3.4 Socio-Religious Life

This segment lays more emphasis on the consequences of the translation and transition as they affect the theological mission of the church. The socio-religious life is no exception from the success culture, which we have described. What people worship as object of ultimate meaning and importance, and how they worship play a crucial role in their judgments and in their perception of life. Social actions have theological *force motrice*. These issues affect the ecclesiological identity of the SCS in drastic ways.

Earlier, we noted that many Nigerians are incurably religious and ethically altruistic. Their cultures are *religio*-cultures, which, *inter alia*, draw strength from African ethics of hospitality, relationality, vulnerability, and interdependence, etc. From a similar perspective, Okorochoa (1992) argues that it is best to understand religious conversion in Africa, especially among the

Igbos, as (more of) a movement on the part of the recipients. The determinant factors in the people's response to a change agent have their roots in the nature of their religious values. Okorochoa remarks:

Therefore, to understand religious conversion in Africa, one needs to look closely at Africareligiousness and its goals. This understanding will also point the way to a meaningful Christian mission in Africa...

What exists...is a total way of life characterized by interchangeableness and mutuality in all aspects of life.... Communalism or the harambe (Kikuyu) or onyeaghala-nwanne-ya (Igbo) motif remains the font of collective life and existence.... The whole community is held together by religious values under the custody of the priests, the prophets, and the elders who speak for and represent the ancestors.

(Okorochoa 1992: 168-169)

From Okorochoa's statements, it is clear that contemporary Christianity in the synod area cannot neglect the object and ethics of a people's utmost loyalty. Within this local cosmology, 'the triangle of relationships' (Onwunta 2006: 16)¹⁰⁵ interacts in accordance with their status and responsibilities (cf. Oduyoye 2001: 21). The cultural, historical and spiritual depth of indigenous religions of the ancient times sustains their main religious backbone. The pervasive presence of spiritism, mystical and spiritual Powers and forces especially, the ancestors (the living-dead) play crucial roles in local (African) cosmologies (Mbiti 1993: 18; cf. Turaki 2006a, 2006b, 1999: 2-3; Omenyo 2002: 3-5). Their indigenous religions are practised as *religiosity*, i.e., as the religious understanding and practice of a people, rather than as a system in Nigeria.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ This is an African concept of relationship. Here, the Supreme God, dependent divinities as well as spiritual entities such as ancestors, and the physical world of human beings, interact in accordance with their status and responsibilities

¹⁰⁶ This is evident in the manner religious faith is practised in some universities that are owned by religious bodies in Nigeria. For instance, at Babcock University owned by the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Nigeria, vegetarian life is compulsory for all students irrespective of their religious conviction. The students must as a rule attend the Saturday church service at the university chapel. At Madonna University founded by a Roman Catholic priest, Christian denominational services are tele-guided towards a bias for the Catholic faith. While at Crescent University, a Muslim school, all female students are compelled to cover their heads. Jumat Service is also compulsory for every student irrespective of her/his religious conviction or adherence. At Covenant University (owned by the Living Faith Church), a student must be spirit-filled and academically sound to be selected as a student-representative. Female students are barred from wearing coloured hair or hair extension, strapless or backless tops wears. All students, irrespective of their gender, must dress corporately. Female students undergo compulsory HIV and pregnancy tests during admission and shortly before graduation. It is the result of such tests, which also determines the student's fate in the school. Commenting on all these in an article titled, *Havens of Culture Shocks*, Anthony Akaeze, an editor of Newswatch magazine exclaims: Universities owned by Christian and Muslim religious bodies in Nigeria are homes to strange happenings and laws unexpected in such citadels of learning! For him, these religious universities are 'a haven of culture shocks' for a 21st century human being (Akaeze 2007). About 95% of Private Universities in Nigeria are owned by religious bodies especially, churches (cf. Ashimolowo 2007: 19).

Consequently, contemporary Christianity cannot attempt to bypass this integral *religio*-cultural understanding in Nigeria. It will encounter great difficulty in theological mission enterprise. *Religio*-cultural resources are essentially constitutive of the historical identities. Such identities are rooted in the indigenous socio-cultural contexts of the diverse heterogeneous groups. Their organizational forms and ecclesial practices play crucial roles in creating and re-creating effective institutions and practices for social transformation and developments (Adogame 1999; cf. Bediako 2004b). Nigeria, especially the geo-political zone of the SCS, is providentially blessed with religio-centric and heterogeneous ethnic groups and cultures. In other words, the *religio*-cultural landscape in which the SCS does its theological mission is not homogenous. Thus, altruistic spirituality is central to any engagement with its *religio*-cultural world-views, practices and institutions.

The altruistic spirituality and practice make it clear that the conquerors' ideology of the Enlightenment-based theologies cannot provide the SCS with the needed social ethics. The conquerors' ethics is triumphal. As a result, its truistic and abstract visionary projects do not embody religion as a lived, living, and liveable reality. Unlike indigenous religiosities, these conquerors' projects have no significant respect for the ancestral traditions of its host local context. Beliefs in ancestors (or the living-dead)¹⁰⁷ have no place in their vision for social transformation and development. In contrast, beliefs in ancestors also play crucial roles in shaping and upholding these communal spiritualities through *religio*-cultural values.

The religiosities of these communities are grounded in an African community ethics of responsibility to God and to humanity (which, of course, includes the ancestors). Okorochoa recaptures it from an Igbo perspective thus:

The Igbos and other...peoples are always returning to this philosophy for identity and self-organization. *Community*, evidenced in group solidarity, and popularized through commensality is an essential ingredient of true piety for African peoples... The whole community is held together by religious values....To the Igbo, as for (sic) other African people, the goal of humankind's religiousness is not an otherworldly wish for a better life....but a present experience in *fulness of life* (Ezi-ndu) in all aspects. This includes good health, material well-being and possession of children....

(Okorochoa 1992: 169, 171[Our italics])

¹⁰⁷ In these local cosmologies, ancestors do not cease to exist. Rather, they continue to share communion with the physically living; for whom, in whom, and through whom they serve the purpose of the Creator. The living dead do not abdicate their responsibilities to local contexts.

Within these local cosmologies, human beings interact with spirits and spiritual beings.

Consequently, oral tradition marks the foundation and climax of communication (translation) for many of the host *religio*-cultures in the SCS area. Oral communication transforms the people into ‘a people of the word’ (Udoh 1988: 35-40), i.e., human beings who are governed and nurtured by the word, which they receive, bear and translate. Translation often saddles the translator with the duty of receiving the word (from the throne), obeying it and communicating it to the audience. Responsible translation of tradition (or the word) affirms one’s existence in, and commitment to a particular group of people. Oral traditions also make these communities a people of the word. Therefore, Mbiti (2003) describes theologies generated from such traditions as ‘oral theology without footnotes’.

Oral theology is generated and promulgated in and through stories, citations from the Bible by heart, proverbs, songs, hymns, prayers, and dramas. It is heard or seen in verbal and written literature, on placards, posters, mottos and slogans placed on objects. This theology is communicated ‘through the language that is heard and spoken by the visible and invisible participants of the African universe’ (Clarke 2005: 3). Oral theology without footnotes is also found in symbols. For many Africans, including the Abiribas, it describes a people’s concrete experiences in their daily relationships with the God who encounters humanity. Thus, it is not unusual to express, or propagate oral theology through the names people bear. For instance, the name *Mgbeodichinma* (meaning God’s time, or when it pleases God) can mean a demonstration of belief in the sovereignty of God. *Mgbeodichinma* is usually given to children who were born after fruitless human struggles to get one’s own blood-child especially, the ‘male child’. Another name *Onuabuchi* (meaning human voice is not God’s), and *Ndukwe* (meaning if life permits) preach hope in the sovereignty of God. *Ndukwe* can also mean a plea for God to protect and sustain the individual so named. Within this local cosmology, the word, life, is synonymous with God. Life issues from God, thrives in *Dei* and consummates in *Theos*. In summary, these three names proclaim that the sovereign God, rather than human beings or circumstances, has the final say in human destiny. The names also demonstrate that theology without footnotes is heard and seen from concrete life experiences of human beings.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Theology without footnotes could be what an American (Methodist) theologian, Stanley Hauerwas also describes as ‘theology of testimony’ (Hauerwas 2007). In his reflection, theology of testimony is a ‘theology of witness,’ because witness ‘is a characteristic exemplified not only in lives but also in knowledge that such lives

The conquering ethics of the Enlightenment theology tends to bypass, or exhibit ignorance of the place of African religiosity. It often disdains indigenous *religio*-cultural identities in Nigeria. As already stated, it is grounded in abstract philosophies as well as in universalistic and absolutizing political ethics. Such truistic projects are serving out most of their purposes in contemporary Nigeria. They often reproduce de-contextualized Christians who would not compromise their *religio*-cultural identities. Irrespective of their ethnic identities, a majority of Nigerians are incurably religious, ethically altruistic and glued to their primal religion. For them, religious consciousness presupposes tradition, and tradition requires memory. Memory is integral to identity and the loss of identity bespeaks of a loss of history, hence, most Africans cannot compromise their *religio*-cultural identities (cf. Ashimolowo 2007; Bediako 2004a; 1997: 428).

Furthermore, the conquerors' political ethics also claims and imposes its cultures on Nigerians as a superior civilization. Association with the church and civilization involve the adoption of European clothing, manners and dietary habits, usually culminating in adoption of English names. Udoh (1988: 56) points out that, the inception of the Christian faith, also meant a drastic alteration of traditional naming in Nigeria.¹⁰⁹ Names play a significant role in the ethical reflection and practices in this *religio*-centric environment. It expresses the faith, emotion, state of affairs, ancestry as well as dispositions, and relational attachments of many *religio*-cultural Nigerians. This understanding can explain the great importance, which the Igbos and other Nigerians attach to naming ceremonies. It is therefore embarrassing that the conquerors' ethics gives little or no attention to such spiritualities. Should these things be so? Should Christianity not seek to enthrone and translate Christ-like ethos, which strives to transform and take society beyond its traditional boundaries, albeit, through non-violent means? What could be responsible for this *pseudo*-Christian approach to theological transformational mission and development in Africa particularly, within the geo-political area of the SCS?

exhibit and produces. That is also what it means for Christians to claim that what we believe reveals as well, what is in accordance with the grain of the universe.' Theology of testimony 'is based on the notion that the knowledge of God is only possible in the ethical labor of the elect individual who through her moral endeavor do testify to the loving act of...God' (Hauerwas 2007: 3).

¹⁰⁹ Mbiti tends to concur with this point from a continental perspective. According to him, 'Africa has suffered much in the hands of Christians, whether they be missionaries, settlers or indigenous, who have fought with words or weapons, destroying human lives, cultures, property, social values and human relations' (Mbiti 1993: 29).

Udoh, as earlier mentioned in this chapter, retraces such state of affairs to the Enlightenment-based ethics of the translators. In the conquerors' ethics, institutionalization of the Word generates its own ethos. It has little or no respect for indigenous *religio-cultural* realities. He observes that:

In Africa, the gospel arrived in a different and unfamiliar form; that is, the people went to the word instead. The gospel bypassed the traditional oral and personal speech-event/encounter. Replaced with a transcribed literature, the spoken word took on something of the ethos of a stationary "carved drum"¹¹⁰ to which the clients must go. The institutionalization of the Word generated its own ethos.

(Udoh 1988: 38)

Thus, the Enlightenment-based Christian ethics presents institutionalization as evil.¹¹¹ This *pseudo-Christian* ethics presents its translators as appointed ambassadors and instruments of God's rule. Such human agencies often assume 'magisterial' rather than the 'ministerial' ethics, which the biblical Jesus Christ exemplified. A Tanzanian Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Wilson D. Niwagila, draws a remarkable line between *magisterium* (magisterial) and *ministerium* (i.e., ministerial) ethics of power.

Magisterial power reflects that, which draws its strength from the technological and technocratic philosophies of the Enlightenment-based ethics. It is incorrigible and self-centered – it plays down on the contribution of others. Magisterial ethics makes and imposes its decisions, plans and policies on such others. *Magisterium* ethics exhibit arrogant and defaming Powers, which often demand the impossible requirements. Magisterial ethics also reflects an opportunist philosophy. Its philosophical power capitalizes on the deficiency of its victims to arrogate and strengthen its position. *Magisterium* ethics denotes more an unbridled concept, interpretation and appropriation of power. Niwagila (in Helander & Niwagila 1996: 133-134) characterizes it thus: 'This is the power which does not build relationships, but on the contrary brings division, gluttony, selfishness, arrogance and pride'. On the other hand, *ministerium* ethics demonstrates

¹¹⁰ The carved drum is a stationery instrument, which many indigenous African communities use to gather people to come and listen to oral messages or to attend meetings. In other words, people often go to the carved drum, rather than vice-versa.

¹¹¹ Institutionalization, we must point out, is not the cause of disagreement in this matter. Institutionalization also helps to sustain Christianity as a missionary movement. However, institutionalization can turn to a reductionism of the Gospel to institutional captivity (i.e., alien doctrinal formulations). This can happen when it generates and propagates its own ethos as an end in itself. Sustainable and more responsible institutionalization respects the crucial roles of local resources and contexts. These local resources help to illuminate the interpretation and communication of the biblical witness. Therefore, a substantive institutionalization will also seek to transform and adopt some useful local resources where necessary, for the proclamation of the Good News (Guder 2000: 181-204).

power with an attitude of servanthood. It thrives in communal spirituality, partnership, and consultation because it is revealed in vulnerability. Ministerial ethics is foundational in the life and works of the biblical Jesus Christ who is the power and wisdom of God (cf. 1 Cor. 1: 24). Further, Niwagila (1996: 135-136) states that:

The *ministerium* power is, therefore, that power given by the Holy Spirit creating in us servanthood character, making us compassionate, loving, engaging and empowering and engaging us to a more realistic partnership, which has been the purpose of God since the beginning of creation.

Niwagila's position provides us with an impetus to argue that the *ministerium* approach is significant for the SCS. It reflects the indigenous translators' ethic in the socio-cultural contexts in which the SCS finds itself. The translator (or mediator) reaches her/his audience with the message within this *religio*-centric context. The translator is more of a servant to the people, rather than their boss. Thus, Niwagila's view on ministerial ethics also tends to lend credence to Fubara-Manuel's (2004)¹¹² thesis that true Christian ministry also listens to the voice of society. Shutting its ears against the voice of the society could also mean a slight on the sovereignty of God. The sovereign and acting Lord of history, who spoke through Balam's ass in biblical period (cf. Num. 22: 30), still speaks through other components of creation in our time. In the same vein, Fubara-Manuel (2004: 53, 54) remarks on the church and its mission:

The church for mission *offers* listening ears to the roots and manifestations of the destructive principles in the world today. True Christian mission also means listening to what *society* has to say about us, about itself and about our God...if we (*Christians*) cannot be part of the asking of our creation, then we have no basis for saying that God is active...in creation. So the church must listen and it must *also* listen on the terms of the world. Only then can the church truly know its society.

From this position, it becomes evident that the abstract, universalistic and magisterial ethics of the Enlightenment-based theologies exists (more) as alien doctrinal formulations in Nigeria. The resultant multiple encounters of the Christian faith (and ministry) with indigenous religious heritages also reproduce an *Ikogosi warm and cold spring*¹¹³ experience in the theological mission of the SCS, as in many other Nigerian churches.

¹¹² Rev Dr. Benebo-Fubara Manuel is a Systematic theologian and an ordained minister of The PCN. Until August this year, he was the incumbent Principal Clerk of The PCN.

¹¹³ Ikogosi is a tourist centre, and is referred to as the haven of tourism in Nigeria. It is located in a valley at Ikogosi Town, northeast of Akure, in Ekiti State of Nigeria. There, warm and cold water spring from separate sources out of the earth's crust to join in a pool even as both retain their thermal identity in the flow. It is a phenomenon, which also demonstrates the sovereign activity of God in nature.

Consequently, Christianity is more of an *adhesion* than a *conversion* within the environment of the SCS. It reflects a 'come apart and be saved method' (cf. Oduyoye 2003:48). Some of its accompanying outward symbols include the change or addition of a name. Such conversion experiences also emphasize the burning of artifacts, relinquishing of African styles of dress and family/patterns of community organization, and withdrawal from community participation, etc. In short, it is not uncommon to hear contemporary preachers urge their membership to denounce indigenous names as idolatrous. In fact, some God-seekers once approached this researcher to drop his first name, Olo, and adopt a 'Christian name' since he is a Christian. This is a *pseudo*-philosophy of conversion. How else can it stress total renunciation of indigenous cultures, when biblical conversion is not simply a cultural transfer to a new way of life? Biblical conversion is not a grace from Epaphras as a Roman Catholic Professor of New Testament at the Catholic Institute for Biblical Studies, Port Harcourt, Nigeria, Teresa Okure (2002: 62-66) reminds us. Conversion to Christianity exceeds the 'CCC as last ship for salvation' (Adogame 1999: 147)¹¹⁴ and simple 'inner transformation that is accompanied with joy and a turning away from self to God' (Ukpong 1992:135-136). Christian conversion also exceeds empty chatter over the transcendence of God. It is not mere reflections of Docetic Christianity as it is often the case in the SCS. Furthermore, conversion is not an uncritical indigenous culture nationalism (i.e., Constantinianism). Biblical conversion is an embodied demonstration of God's gracious and continuing acts in Christ by human beings. It transform and activates humanity (through the activities of the Holy Spirit) to serve God through visible, active, and responsible participation in community affairs. From this understanding, it becomes clearer that a sustainable and more responsible Christianity may not bypass or claim ignorance of the challenges of indigenous religions and religiosities in Nigeria. The challenges of Nigerians and other Africans stem from

¹¹⁴ CCC stands for the Celestial Church of Christ. It is an indigenous religious movement, which emerged spontaneously around the life and charismatic experience of its founder, Pastor-Founder Samuel Bilehou Oschoffa (1909-1985). The CCC began in 1947 at Port Novo, Dahomey (Dahomey was later renamed Republic of Benin in 1975) and later in Makoko, Lagos, Nigeria in 1950. It is one of the fastest growing charismatic religious movements (CRM) in Nigeria. As Adogame puts it, 'Even though the church originated in Dahomey....it was in Nigeria that the movement gained its present popularity and worldwide fame. Today....a remarkable 'internationalization' of the church has been witnessed as it maintains its quest for global recognition through her 'evangelism,' which transcends African geographical boundaries. Between 1975 and 1998.... CCC parishes or branches worldwide increased from 254 to 2,316. Out of this figure, 1,991 parishes exist in Nigeria alone while 325 parishes are scattered over Europe....Canada, America and other African countries such as Benin Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Ghana, Cameroun, Niger, Gabon, Zaire, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Senegal and a host of others' (Adogame 1998: 1).

The CCC is seen by its members as a movement, which exists in the world to serve as 'the last Vessel of Salvation, as a grace so that all mankind may be saved....anyone who refuses to enter the ship will be drowned in the ocean' (Adogame 1998: 25).

the fact that African religions are embodied. Wherever an indigenous African is, there is her/his religion.

Based on the above misconception of conversion, we argue that the SCS should interact responsibly, with local *religio*-cultures of its host societies. It is necessary for the theological mission ethics of the church to reach its environment with a substantive Gospel witness. Christian theology, as we have noted, is a transformer of reality. The church should also stoop down (as its Lord, Jesus Christ did) to engage its host *religio*-cultures in continuing and responsible dialogues without coercion. Such nuanced dialogues must also seek to recognize, transform and integrate useful resources from its host cultures into the theological mission ethics and ecclesial identities of the church. The SCS has something to learn from its host *religio*-cultures. The Christ-event also seeks to redeem and restore indigenous cultures to serve their originally created purposes in the divine program. Thus, the Christ-event must play a crucial role in the theological mission ethics, which the SCS adopts. The church's witness must contribute more significantly to the host *religio*-cultures of the church.

In addition, the magisterial evangelical ethics of the SCS also reproduces another brand of unconverted Christians. These Christians practice what they regard as scandalous or even criminal to reject. Such Christians' ethics continue in ways and manners they have always known, practised and believed them. As a matter of fact, one can compare such Nigerian Christians with the Colossian Christians who saw nothing wrong in combining faith in Christ with other anti-Gospel religious practices and observances (cf. Okure 2002: 63-64). It is not unusual to hear that some Nigerian Christians (including members of the SCS) consult local deities for their material and spiritual needs. Most ethical reflections and practices of the Enlightenment-based theologies, which the SCS adopts, do not meet the spiritual needs of its hosts. The pervasive influence of spiritual forces and spiritism in the local cosmologies within the area covered by the SCS is undeniable. In other words, Ernst Conradie's plea to contemporary African theologians can become more meaningful in this crisis context of the SCS. He urges African theologians to realize that they are simply witnesses to the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ (Conradie 2004: 269). Fundamentally, this problem of the SCS centres on a theologically deficient ethics.

The dilemma also makes Johnston's observation on the conversion of the Abiribas rather appealing to this research. In his view, Christianity was simply incorporated, as a last resort, into the traditional theology for the good and sufficient reason that the God of the Christians had conquered the god of the country (Johnston 1998: 59-62). The missionaries' God (a warring God of the Arochukwu expedition – an equivalent of *kamalu*, the warring god of thunder?) has no place for local religion and religiosities. For instance, this conquering God replaced and suppressed the hospitable spirituality of the *agwu*,¹¹⁵ a *demigod*, or *chi* (Mbiti 1970: 117-127, 330). It also substituted the humble and gentle spirituality of the deity with an arrogant and imperial spirituality of a terrorizing God. Sharing space with its host *religio*-cultural resources does not reflect in this heroic vision. The conquerors' ethics is summarily triumphal and theologically deficient. It is transposed into an environment where power and justice, holiness or moral rectitude, go together. As far as many contemporary Nigerians are concerned, a warring god is a heathen deity (cf. Udoh 1988: 63).

The adverse effects of this conquerors' ethics in Nigeria prompt the following questions: Does the Christ-event not also charge the Church with the responsibility to criticize and reconstruct *received* theologies in the humane messianic paradigm of the biblical Jesus Christ? Are not the extremities of these *pseudo*-ethics more evident in uncritical cultural patriotism and principled neglect of local *religio*-cultures in the SCS? Do they not demean and endanger African religiosity? Does it not seem that these ideological political ethics are serving out their purpose in post-colonial Nigeria? Furthermore, given that indigenous religious philosophy undergirds the cultural background of most Nigerian Christians, especially Presbyterians, must the church continue to overlook or claim to be naive of the adverse effect of Constantinian-Docetic reflections and soundings in the SCS?

Perhaps a reflection on the ecclesiological identity of the church can assist us in answering these questions.

¹¹⁵ The *agwu* was a family and personal god, which accompanies its devotees to provide protection, direction, and favour, etc. The *agwu* is categorized, located, named and venerated in accordance with its functions. Although it is a lesser deity than great gods such as *kamalu* and *otisi*, the warring and retributive gods, the *agwu* is believed to not only see, hear, and feel; it also understands and communicates human emotions to the greater gods, which communicate to, and receive directions from *the big, high and transcendent God* – the Creator God in heaven. Some *agwus* are not only moveable but could also be 'carried along and venerated in the course of normal daily activities' (Mbiti 1975: 55-60). The convenience offers devotees an opportunity to administer a 'relative' priestly function. Unfortunately, Christianity almost wiped this function off without presenting Christ's universal lordship as overriding its ontology and functions. The life and works of Jesus Christ also give fulfilling hope in proper and relevant ways.

4.3.5 Ecclesiological Identity of Contemporary SCS

Here we reflect on the indistinct ecclesiological identity of the SCS due to the seeming *laissez-faire* attitude of the Church toward the situation described above.

The SCS seems to treat the question of the theological implications of such menace of Constantinianism without significant concern. The church scarcely assumes a meaningful teaching role in its theological reflection and practices in Nigeria. For instance, it is questionable that the synod reflects on, and reforms its doctrine through an officially constituted body. Whether its current representatives on the Board of Faith and Order (BFO) of The PCN are qualified theologians is also questionable. The appointment of such representatives rarely takes the issue of theological status serious. Even the Synod Executive Committee (SEC), which also implements the decisions of the BFO for the SCS often give little or no attention to the theological status of its representatives.¹¹⁶ Consequently, various churches, congregations and/or individuals engage themselves in uninformed attempts to gain liberation from some perplexing legacies of Constantinianism in the SCS. This, of course, does not only display the inefficiency and inexperience of the leadership, it also breeds deficient theological interpretation and communication of the biblical witness in the church. Such uninformed engagements in self-liberation also lead to many strands of unbiblical interpretation and appropriation of Presbyterianism on parish levels and in individual lives. This study regards such negligence as a *laissez-faire* attitude, which arises from the crisis of identity on the part of the church in general, and of the leadership in particular.

Based on his Ghanaian experience, Omenyo (2000: 5-7) attributes such a *laissez-faire* stance to the pervasive influence of Pentecostalism on mainline churches. The phenomenon arises from the fact that a majority of the mainline churches mirror Pentecostal ethics without significant criticisms. Such churches adopt some key aspects of their ministry-type for church renewals without matured critique. Many Pentecostals often reflect, interpret and practice the ‘priesthood of all believers’ without significant emphasis on the theological teaching, which it also demands

¹¹⁶ Until date (June 2008), the SCS does not have more than three trained theologians who have an MTh or a DTh. Miracle Ajah (Old Testament) and U.A.Onwunta (Missiology) – who recently obtained their doctoral degrees from Stellenbosch University and returned to Nigeria – reside within the synod area but are not recognized and treated as its members. The two theologians work in another synod where their membership officially belongs. The SCS has more Bachelor of Divinity graduate and post-graduate ministers in Religious Studies and other Social Sciences.

from the leadership. There is an increasing popularity of the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal ministry in Africa. African Pentecostalism generally turns out a numerous adherents who practise ‘the ministry of the whole people of God’ (catholic ministry); *every body does anything as she/he wills*, in the name of being led by the Holy Spirit. Often, this practice leads to a charismatic chaos in the church, whereas the Bible teaches that God is not the author of confusion but of order.

As Omenyo argues, the mainline churches in Ghana are greatly influenced (positively and negatively) by these Pentecostal or Charismatic Movements. Charismatic resurgence across the mainline churches often takes the form of renewal groups. Their forerunners are usually key members of the mainline churches who are determined to revitalize their churches with the introduction of charismatic/Pentecostal spirituality. Consequently, while they help to initiate renewal, these groups often become catalysts of conflict and misunderstanding in their churches. This study reasons that Omenyo’s Ghanaian experience is not very different from the Nigerian one especially within the environment of the SCS. Nigerian Pentecostalism mostly proclaims a Gospel of personal salvation rather than the real New Testament Gospel of the Kingdom (cf. Nussbaum 2005: 149).

Equipped with these views, one can even dare to submit that the *laissez-faire* (indifferent) attitude toward the Constantinian menace constitutes a threat to the future of the Church in Nigeria.¹¹⁷ It also breeds and sustains an incessant proliferation of churches and ministries even within The PCN. The proliferating churches emerge often because of uninformed attempts to disengage from the negative Constantinian legacies of the transiting Enlightenment theologies in Nigeria. The case of the members of the prayer band who broke away from the Aba-East Parish to start another church, the *Perseverance Pentecostal Assembly*, is an example from the SCS.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ This Constantinian approach is also evident in the questionable manner in which the Moderator of the 5th Annual Synod of the SCS, Rev (Dr) Agwu Kalu, associated the church with the State. For instance, he claimed that the former Governor of Abia State, Chief (Dr) Orji Uzor Kalu, was a member of The PCN (SCS 2001: 28). As a matter of fact, it is doubtful that the former governor is a member of The PCN. Furthermore, the Moderator also eulogized the governor’s mother and called on Nigerian women to emulate her in an official address to the Stateman: ‘Your Excellency, please permit us to salute our Royal Mother....the “Mama Abia,” “The Ugo Abia”....we shall add one more soon at this ceremony. Please let all Nigerian women emulate her enviable qualities (Mama Abia, we salute you in Jesus Name – Amen)’ (SCS 2000: 41). Many Nigerians question the character and activities of this Royal Mother (cf. Adebowale *et al* 2007).

¹¹⁸ These God-seekers derided the personality and ministry of their pastor as being inadequate and unable to meet their spiritual aspirations. In their contention for change, they demanded among other things, the removal of the

The SCS needs to recover the spirituality of servant-leadership, and to embark on a leading theological teaching role. As O'Donovan has argued, 'the word of God rules the church and directs its mission; but to ensure that its authority is supreme within the local church requires attention to the demands and challenges of the place' (O'Donovan 2005: 286). The context of the SCS demands a theologically sound leadership. A theologically balanced leadership can help to direct and realize the church's transformational-developmental (visionary) projects in ways that are more adequate.

Within the environs of the SCS, the proliferation of churches also transmits and sustains a Docetic Christianity. The practice usually reflects a verticalistic Christianity, which locates the churches' witness in the eschatological heaven or kingdom of God. On the one hand, such proliferations of churches and ministries thrive in 'miraculism.' *Miraculism* describes the reduction of every belief, practice and events in Christian life to miracles. It often denies or downplays human responsibility in the practice of the Christian faith. These Docetic practitioners also thrive and exist as *prayer/salvation dispensers or donors*. Their teeming adherents exist as patients or prayer/salvation seekers in need of philanthropic charismatic mentors. Docetic manifestations emphasize conversion to Christianity as spiritual regeneration. It can also transform a person into a supernatural human being, who embodies the divine Jesus Christ as a true witness. Its theologies and practices tend to domesticate and manipulate God at will in the Nigerian experience. Docetic Christianity also suggests a human attempt to 'spiritualize the man Jesus to the point of dehumanizing him' (Hasting *et al* 2000: 173). That brand of Christianity is grossly rooted in dualistic spirituality and paternalism. Young adherents must be discipled and anointed to attain a higher level of Christian (perfect) life. Thus, we reiterate our earlier view on Docetism in Nigeria It often enthrones and sustains negative competitiveness, arrogance, pride, divisiveness, among other things. Docetism also bequeaths the SCS and other churches with these kinds of ethos.

parish minister from the Aba-East Parish. Several mediatory efforts of the Presbytery, the synod and the GA failed. These aggrieved Presbyterians insisted on the removal of the parish minister as the non-negotiable condition for any reconciliatory dialogue. In further pursuance of their stance, they went on to disrupt some worship services as well as ecclesiastical meetings in the parish.

Consequently, the Parish Session suspended them from participating in Holy Communion. The suspension also barred them from holding leadership positions in The PCN. In their anger, the 'suspended members' (SCS 2003b: 2) of the church went out of The PCN to found the Pentecostal Perseverance Assembly. Today, the 'assembly' has split into many factions, several of which have gone on to establish and run independent churches under diverse names.

In fact, concerned Nigerians seldom share the same opinion on the origin of this crisis. Some trace it to the old conflict over biblical authority and ecclesiastic tradition. As Smit (1998a) remarks, whenever people read, translate and study the biblical documents for themselves, the old conflict over the authority to interpret those texts arise: ‘the conflict arose between the Bible and the church, between Scripture and official tradition, between literal meaning and doctrine as rule of faith’ (Smit 1998a: 287). Others see it as fallout of a misinformed celebration of the reconstructive challenge of African Indigenous Churches (AICs) to mainline churches. This indigenous contribution to global Christianity also tapped the vibrancy of primal African spirituality to awaken missionary Christianity to contextual consciousness in Nigeria (cf. Ogbu Kalu 2001a). Most of the indigenous theologians draw from their experiences to redefine their visionary practice of faith in Jesus Christ. Contemporary Christian hermeneutical crisis in Nigeria centres on the question of self-theologization. This calls for caution. Christocentric (Christ-centered) rather than ecclesiocentric (church centered) ecumenical vision and practices have come to stay in contemporary (African) Christianity.

The present situation in Nigeria calls for a Christocentric self (or contextual) theologization. Contemporary reflections on self-theologization are envisioned and practised from *glocal* perspectives. A Christian hermeneutics, which is bereft of (or deficient in) ecclesial vision for tradition (or theology) could be an embarrassment to contemporary Nigerians. It will reflect a prophet without an institution (or vice versa), as in many pre-exilic Old Testament traditions. Pluralism of hermeneutics does not mean privatization and privation of the Christian faith *per se*. More importantly, contemporary churches should not allow their ecclesiastical traditions (or theologies) to reflect the closed canon of the Church. A sustainable and more responsible Christian theology for contemporary Nigerians should be grounded in reformable traditions, which do not suggest coercive political ideologies.

Consequently, this scenario of crisis often inspire some local observers to challenge Christian faith adherents with questions such as the following: Should the SCS and other churches not draw significant resources from the vulnerable, hospitable, interdependent, relational, indigenous ethos of their host *religio*-cultures in order to practise ‘interculturality’ (i.e., the interface of culture)? Must the churches continue to transmit inherited breakaway-and-be-free practices, which often result from competing ideological theologies? Must their polities and politics

continue to sustain and transmit such hostile theological visions and practices? Whose lordship do they proclaim and seek to affirm - that of Jesus Christ or the church?

The proliferations also contribute much to the power tussle, and the competitive and acrimonious co-existence of churches/ministries. Such vices (unhealthy proliferation of churches and ministries) bedevil the Christian faith and practice in Nigeria. Consequently, one can also describe them as the cancer, which riddles and cripples the visions and activities of the various Christian bodies in the synod area. These include the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN),¹¹⁹ the overall body for churches; the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN); and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), the overall body for the Charismatic and the Pentecostal churches – within the socio-cultural milieu of the SCS. PROCMURA,¹²⁰ which ought to attract the interest of Christians, is almost extinct within this geo-political vicinity. Many of the Christian churches and ministries busy themselves with unhealthy scramble for church membership.

In addition, many residents of Aba, Umuahia, Port Harcourt and Owerri, among other places in the synod, will not dispute what we consider as another *pseudo*-Christian practice there; that is, that two or more churches/ministries occupy adjacent and even opposite flats (or floors) of the same building and often worship at the same time in these cities. At times, the situation leads to an unwholesome Christian mission ethics. It is usually translated as self-centred or unhealthy ideological scrambling for church membership. Many of the churches seldom recognize or cooperate with the differently *other* (those who differ in theological vision or ethics) in their attempt to outwit their competitors and gain more adherents. This *pseudo*-witness also leads to a characteristic reduction of Christ's mission to salvation of the soul and individualism. We also

¹¹⁹ Ogbu Kalu (2005a:40) rightly points out that this body was formed in 1975. As a church historian, he reasons that CAN brings many forms of Christianity together to explore new models of presence that could serve as the 'balm of Gilead' in the untoward circumstances. Presently, the claims of CAN could be considered valid on the national level. CAN's former presidents such as Bishop Anthony Olubumi Okogie of the Roman Catholic Church, the former Prelate of the Methodist Church of Nigeria, His Eminence Dr Sunday Mbang, and the incumbent, Rt. Rev Sunday Akinola of the Anglican, etc were very active and vocal in addressing some burning national issues of their day. However, one cannot make similar claims in many of the states that make up our synod, where it might not be outrageous to describe the situation as a celebrated epitome of the triumph of political ideology. Perhaps this also points to the need for including at least a voice of not only a resident Nigeria, but also an active participant in the affairs of CAN and in subsequent series of its historical compendium. Along with Prof. Omoruyi's secularist submission that the unjust political order in Nigeria cannot in any way be an act of God, Kalu's view shows Akper (2006a: 7) as most profound, that is, 'there is no interrelated three-fold theological publics in Nigeria'.

¹²⁰ PROCMURA stands for Project for Christian-Muslim Relationship in Africa i.e. a continental project that was known as Islam in Africa Project when it was initiated in 1959. It took on the name PROCMURA in 1985. PROCMURA seeks to promote peace and dialogue between Muslims and Christians in Africa. We shall discuss this noble project in detail in Chapters 5 and 6 of this study.

consider it as the ‘diligent labour-room midwife,’ who assists these churches to deliver and nurture a ‘sheep stealing’ and ‘number counting’ approach to church planting and church growth in Nigeria. One can also describe it as another bequest of some Gospel-defaming legacies of the Enlightenment-based ethics. Many Nigerian churches reproduce them in their visionary practice of theological mission engagements. Their vision, interpretation and practice of church polity and politics are, in summary, ecclesiocentric (church-centered) rather than Christocentric. Many of these churches articulate ecclesiologies that emphasize corrupt church polities and politics. They usually shift emphasis from Jesus Christ and ecumenical spirituality in the pursuit/realization of the kingdom of God, to church theologies and individualistic efforts. The SCS is not exonerated from the transmission of this *pseudo*-vision of ecclesiology. As we have shown, its vision is rooted in the unhealthy Reformation theology, which the Scottish missionaries bequeathed The PCN (cf. Onwunta & Hendriks 2006).

The current situation is perplexing and pitiable. It is aptly described by Achebe’s maxim, ‘water, water, everywhere but not a drop to drink’ (Achebe 1960: 27). Nigerians seem to be bequeathed with ‘Christianities’, which question the meaning and implication of the Christ-event in local contexts. They also constitute affront to true vision and practice of the (partial) realization of the kingdom of God within history. These *pseudo*-ethics demonize and dismiss African religiosity as evil in essence. This is not supposed to be. Christianity is a prophetic religion, which confronts and transforms peoples and cultures to serve God’s purpose in Jesus Christ. It also strives to transform them in their contexts. Biblical Christianity seeks to reposition people for the Gospel’s particular (normative) identity, i.e., Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible. Therefore, the ethical reflection and practices of the church must seek responsible ways to integrate local *religio*-cultural resources into its ecclesiology. In other words, the ecclesiological vision of the SCS is simply a transmission of the inherited *pseudo*-ecclesial reflection and practices of The PCN. Given the apparent *pseudo*-ideological Presbyterian witness, which contemporary SCS proclaims, we consider its ethics as not only foreign, it is also often consumerist and superficial; and, therefore, deficient in a *religio*-cultural Nigerian setting. Thus, one can agree with Mbiti (1993) and Oduyoye (2003: 42-60), who point out that Africa (in this case, the geo-political vicinity of the SCS) has suffered much in the hands of Christians, who have fought with words or weapons, destroying human lives, property, culture, social values and human relations.

Thus far, in this section, we have examined the SCS; its creation and inauguration; growth and expansion; and socio-cultural life. We have attempted to substantiate the claim that the theology of the SCS needs reconstruction, *re-visioning* and reformation. This theology affects the church's ecclesiological identity in remarkable ways. The effect of the false legacies of some Enlightenment-based visions on the SCS in terms of its ecclesial reflections and practices are simply foreign to Nigerians. In view of the foreign nature of the church's witness of Jesus Christ within its socio-cultural context, the next section considers the efforts of the SCS concerning the unhealthy state of affairs in the area. If the SCS truly understands itself as God's human agent for communicating divine goodness to humanity, it must have made certain efforts to ameliorate this unhealthy situation. The study discusses such efforts in the next paragraph.

5 Efforts of the SCS so Far

This section describes efforts by the SCS to substantiate its engagement in nation building, social transformation and development in Nigeria.

At present, Presbyterianism of the SCS tends to demean its reflection and practice of God's love as the true culture of theology. Much of its unethical witness seems to neglect the crucial role of culture in the communication of God's grace to humanity. The church's witness seldom presents the Gospel as a Christocentric culture that can transform social ethics. A Christocentric social witness can restore socio-cultural practices to their original purpose in God's vision for creation. Human culture is as concerned with the conservation of values, which gives life real meaning, as it is with their realization. Richard J. Mouw (cited in Lammers & Verhey 1998: 778-785) seems to reason from a similar perspective.¹²¹ Thus, one can lean on Mouw's positions to argue that a perennial and diseased Christian tradition is redeemable through a right (or in Jeffrey Sachs word) 'clinical' diagnosis and correct application of historical facts. Clinical diagnosis often reveals issues that have not received due attention (cf. Sachs 2005: 74-89).¹²² With this

¹²¹ In his view on western medical theory, Mouw argues for a formation and formulation of professional medical theories, which are guided by culturally embedded understandings of health, disease, and cure. He reasons that each theory or technology is rooted in a different form of social organization. The theories often embody different and normative perspectives on human nature. Therefore, professional medical theories cannot afford to compromise the crucial role of socio-cultural contexts in their formulations. For Mouw, comparative evaluations of medical theories must be based on the assessment of the larger cultural context from which given perspectives and technologies derive their meanings and effectiveness. In other words, such assessment involves an appreciable knowledge of socio-cultural realities. Recognition of socio-cultural historiography can also serve as a ministry to renewal in medical ethics.

¹²² We shall reflect briefly on Sachs' vision for clinical economic diagnosis in the next section of this chapter.

assumption, one can also reason that the SCS has failed to show significant interest in the unhealthy and pitiable condition of the Christian identity and mission crises, which prevail within its socio-cultural environment. However, their efforts still leave much to be celebrated by critical observers of the socio-cultural realities within the church's environment. They need a more thorough clinical diagnosis and treatment, from a theological perspective.

For instance, the SCS upholds its conviction that the vision of a reconciled community and the need for a higher moral law call for the joining of theology and social theory. It is a meeting together of the body of Christ with the *polis* (city, or community). This Nigerian church as a *polis* seeks to interpret, translate and re-present the rule of God among the nations. It also tries to embody the mind of Christ in Nigeria. The church's reflection on the believers' confession of faith also recognizes a biblical truth: Submitting to Christ as Savior is inseparable from submitting to him as Lord even in the socio-political and economic systems, i.e. in the corporate life of society. In the Reformed theological understanding, the lordship of Jesus Christ covers all spheres and aspects of creation.

From these explanations, one can understand why within the first year of its inauguration (1996); the SCS directed all its parishes and presbyteries to establish schools in cities. The aim of the visionary projects is to assist the church in inculcating godly morals in youths. The vision for a morally regenerated youth is central to a substantive hope for a healthy moral ecology in the church and society (ref MIN SCS 082/1997). Many 21st century Nigerian Christians have a radical understanding of sin. It includes living the way every one does (perhaps) in salient complicity with the structures of evil, which arises from the insatiable desires of privileged individuals. African religiosity also denounces injustice as evil.

Moreover, the explanations can also assist us to understand why the SCS vigorously and sacrificially sustain the above-mentioned vision. The church awards scholarships to five (5) university students to study Sciences and Humanities every four years (MIN SCS 213/2000). The official minutes of the synod show that the SCS sustains these two visions by 'directing the [Education] Committee to revisit the courses covered by the award, having particular regard to courses that might enable the candidates to be self-supporting after completion of their studies' (MIN SCS 406/2003). The SCS also expects the society to develop through the fruits of university education. Sadly, contemporary education in Nigeria hardly acts as a gateway to

transform many distressing bequests of the Enlightenment-based ethics. As we earlier noted, contemporary education in Nigeria often ends up as consumer-oriented visionary practices as well as individualistic struggles for subsistence or survivalism.

Again, it can be said that the SCS also understands its status as a voice for the voiceless, hope for the hopeless, and home for the marginalized. Issues of social concern crop up in the various communiqués issued to the nation after some annual synod conferences. For instance, its first communiqué dwelt on the prevailing state of poverty, unemployment, marginalization and exploitation in the nation. The synod urged the Federal Military Government (FMG) to put in place proper recovery measures to bring the Nigerian economy out of the present inflationary trend.

In addition, the SCS enjoined the FMG to strengthen the existing economic measures in Nigeria. The church also hopes that such measures will help the nation to achieve better and quicker results. The synod decried the greed and selfishness of many Nigerians who constitute themselves as priests for the worship of economics as religion; they also oppress and marginalize their fellow citizens, especially the less privileged members of the society. They inflict much suffering and hardship on the poor masses. Moreover, their activities within the national economy often introduce and sustain high prices of goods, house rent, fuel and other goods and services (SCS 1997:9-12).¹²³ In contemporary Nigeria, the socio-economic milieu tends to provide a determinative position for the communication of God's goodness.

In the light of the above observations, is it possible to understand the SCS as a social critic who also proclaims God's reign as a new order? Does not the vision of the SCS also challenge the Powers and structures that have become demonic in a world corrupted by sin? Can we not also argue that the church's theological (social) reflections further shows that a well-founded understanding of human righteousness should mirror from the incarnated figure of Jesus Christ?

The SCS also focused on social issues during its sixth annual conference (2003). Social matters, the perennial skirmishes and political unrest in the Niger Delta region and the issues concerning labour wage were central to its deliberations. For instance, the SCS decried the incessant

¹²³ This Annual Conference was held at the Trinity Union Theological College Umuahia, from 20 to 22 June 1997.

upheavals in the Niger Delta regions. It even commended the FGN on her recent pronouncement of the intention to resolve finally the problems of the Niger Delta regions. Actually, the Niger Delta region has become infamous in many parts of the world because of its unceasing spate of violence.

In addition, the synod further requested the FGN to look into the problem of minimum wage and other labour issues, which render the economic and social levels of the populace stagnant. These problems hit hard on the poor masses (SCS 2003a:6-9). Given these good intentions, it can be said that the SCS is conscious of Udoh's admonition that a church, which refuses to define its role in socio-political and economic terms stand a chance of being irrelevant in Nigeria today. The SCS reflects ddeply on ways in which it can make significant contributions toward the on-going quest for a more responsible approach to nation building, social transformation and development in Nigeria.

Consequently, the following questions come to mind: Is it not possible for one to argue that the SCS shares our view that a church that refuses to practice solidarity with victims of evil denatures the Gospel? Does not the SCS seek to translate the Christ-event as a mystery, which *inter alia*, calls for the restoration of *shalom* in society? Can we easily dismiss witness of the church as being unconcerned with social issues? Does not the Good News teach us that the realization of the kingdom of God also includes the progressive transformation of all human affairs by the acts, thought and spirit of Christ? Again, given the view that most African countries are threatened by diseases and poverty (Sachs 2005), what is the position of the SCS on Christian involvement and participation in the medical enterprise? Barth¹²⁴ claims that the will to live is also demanded by God; hence, it is to be realized in obedience to God's command.

The SCS does not dissociate itself from the Christian medical philosophy that 'health is wealth' and that God's course includes good health (but is not reducible to good health). Both health and the means to it are to serve God's glory. God's course entails *Ezi Ndu* or the fulness of life. This philosophy makes it clear that the SCS does not deem it less Christian for the Spirit to dwell in a biblically informed and healthy body. For instance, the SCS holds in trust for the General Assembly (GA), The PCN Urban Health Centre (TPUHC) at Aba, which is a GA project for the

¹²⁴ C/D III/4 p.357-363; cf. 1998: 7

rural populace in the suburb of Aba. The project is the only maternity and health care facility that serves a large rural settlement in the said suburb. TPUHC is co-sponsored by the Netherlands Reformed Church (one of The PCN Overseas partners) but located within the synod. The SCS supports and maintains it on behalf of the GA (ref MIN SCS 059/1997).

The medical vision of the SCS is not unconnected with its understanding that Christians are also called to engage in professional medical enterprise (whether as physicians or patients). Christians engage in this enterprise with the responsibility of a God-image bearer whose stewardship extends to all that the Lord has placed in the world. Christian teaching challenges believers in Jesus Christ to distinguish between health as a norm and health as an ideal in their medical theories and practices (Lammers & Verhey 1998: 259).

There is no doubt that the SCS makes good decisions on public issues. It also launches some laudable public projects but overall, the church often falls short in actual practice. For instance, it is discouraging for one to learn that the extent and weight of the practical involvement of the SCS in this project (TPUHC) is lamentable. One can conclude that its commitment is (being) invisible and negligible just as the church's actual participation in the PROCMURA.¹²⁵ Such negligible action on the part of the church is also visible in programs that seek to counter the menace of the HIV/AIDS pandemic or assuage the pains of its victims in the society. For instance, the headquarters of The Presbyterian Community Services and Development¹²⁶ is located within the synod; yet the SCS has not developed a functional synodical unit of this project.¹²⁷ In its vision for nation building, social transformation and development, the SCS usually makes good decisions for such projects without monitoring their implementations. It often leaves such implementations to committees, presbyteries and parishes who treat them as peripheral and contingent aspects of the church's ministry. Consequently, these great visions and

¹²⁵ We noted the *laissez-faire* treatment, which the PROCMURA received within the synod area in the previous section. Detailed discussion of the project is in the fifth and sixth chapters of this dissertation.

¹²⁶ This office manages all projects on HIV/AIDS as well as other related issues for The PCN.

¹²⁷ For instance, the SCS issued out a communiqué to the nation after its 9th Annual Synod stressing such social issues as corruption, health problems, poverty alleviation, political reform, among other things. The communiqué declares that the 'Synod decries the increasing rate of HIV/AIDS pandemic and other related diseases and calls on the church, Government and Non-governmental organizations to work as partners in the eradication of these deadly diseases. Synod notes the efforts of the church in this regard and still appeals for the extension of this work to rural areas' (SCS 2005: 25). Yet, as already noted, the SCS does not have a functional ministry or department that deals with this and many other diseases, which impinge on the health and productivity of the people in the synod area.

decisions usually end up in the official documents of the SCS. Most of the church's visionary attempts to make substantive, feasible and possible contributions toward a more responsible programme of nation building, social transformation and development are scarcely realized.

The present situation supports our argument that the SCS needs to rediscover and recover its identity and spirituality as a social ethic. It also makes it more arguable that the church's social witness suggests insensitivity to Verhey's teaching on the early Christian attitude to medicine and the sick:

In memory of Jesus, medicine was regarded less as an elite guild and more as a form of service to the sick. In memory of Jesus, the Christian community turned toward the sick, not against them, caring for them in their suffering and attending to them in their dying, practicing hospitality to them rather than ostracizing them... Life and health are great goods, gifts of God the redeemer, but they are not second gods.

(Verhey 2001: 125-129)

The SCS should realize that medical enterprise or medicine is more fulfilling when it serves the purpose of Christ. Christ's purpose is central to the church's life hence it is worthy of life's highest devotion. Consequently, the SCS also cannot afford to shy away from this responsibility because the socio-cultural life within its surrounding is sick. A church also exists as God's clinic for reaching diseased and wounded lives. God's course for creation, as we have noted, is *Ezi Ndu*, which includes good health. What further lessons can we then learn on the public involvement of the SCS, with particular reference to the unhealthy and pitiable situation in its area?

The SCS has not been comfortable with or complacent about the distressing and pitiable tension in its environment; yet, its holistic ministry stands to be questioned. The church's actual (ethical) practice is very different from its vision for theological witness, and its synodical decisions and declarations. Many a time, its motivation stems from the need to balance theory with practice. As already observed, the SCS often makes good decisions on most of its visions and projects. Sadly, such decisions often end up in the official documents of the church. In actual practice, the church's *modus operandi* demonstrates its vulnerability to the distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based ethics. Usually, the SCS merely prescribes transformational-developmental theories to its subordinate courts (i.e., the presbyteries, synods and committees), without meaningful efforts to get involved in their practical realization. It does not often make enough effort to assist these subordinate groups to implement the church's decisions. The approach seeks

to super-impose rather than interact with its subordinates, among other things. *Magisterium* ethics celebrates dichotomies between the leadership and followership. We can as well describe it as a ‘top-down’ transformational approach, whose enclosed identity resists openness to the ethics of (generous) hospitality. Magisterial ethical notions scarcely welcome an ethics of hospitality, which takes character formation and reformation, as well as community and contextual realities serious (cf. Vosloo 2004). Magisterial ethics is often grounded in the selfish-interest of the privileged; it shows less significant concern for the contextual needs of the populace. Magisterial ethics plays a substantive role in the said inadequate public involvement of the SCS, as this study argues.

According to Nnanna Kalu (2006)¹²⁸, the approach constitutes one of the most perplexing and distressing dilemmas of the SCS. The ‘top-down’ approach to theological transformational-development exists as a negative political ideology. Often, it subjugates the followership to the dictates of the leadership. *Magisterium* ethics often reduces followers to unhealthy consumers who adapt to bequests with no meaningful criticisms. It also glorifies leadership as a supernatural status. Magisterial leadership has little or nothing to learn from its consumer-oriented followership. In Kalu’s view, this ethic perpetuates a ‘disconnection’ between the vision/needs of the leaders and those of the followers, *vis-à-vis* its selfish foundations. Above all other things, he argues that this ‘top-down’ approach denies the masses of the presence of the leadership in thought, words, and actions. A ‘top-down’ transformational-developmental vision transmits ethical *paranoia*¹²⁹ to both leadership and followership. It usually transforms and initiates leaders into an identity and spirituality of complacent imperialism. The followers are often indoctrinated into despondent sectarianism. Such apparent disconnection between the leadership of the SCS and its subordinates can persuade one to agree with Kalu’s position. How

¹²⁸ Chief Echeme Nnanna Kalu is one of the financial pillars of the SCS. He is a former chairperson of the Aba Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Nigeria and he is the recipient of a national award. These views were expressed in an official interview (in his house) with Olo on December 12, 2006 between 18.15 and 20.30 hours in Nigeria.

¹²⁹ Paranoia or its adjectival form paranoid refers to a state of mental illness, which one can also describe as a delusional belief. It is climaxed in excessive anxiety or fear concerning a person’s own well-being. A paranoid person is considered irrationally excessive, perhaps to the point of being a *psychosis*. Selvey (1994) describes psychosis as the most severe of mental disorders that encompasses a heterogeneous group of conditions in which adaptation is largely lost, relatedness to the environment is at best haphazard, and behaviour disorganized. Paranoia, in its noun form, includes a condition of delusion in which apparent deterioration in intellectual abilities or other explicit features of schizophrenia are less visible. Thus, a person or group that has no space for listening to *the other, but insists on being listened to, and obeyed by others*, can as well be described as possessing sole self-importance delusion, hence, is suffering from paranoia.

else can we explain the *laissez-fairre* attitude that is associated with many synodical decisions on crucial and contextual social issues, which appear as peripheral to the mission projects of the lower courts? Again, if magisterial ethics does not deny the masses of the presence of the leadership, why would the SCS leadership not go to visit these subordinates with a view to interact and discover with them? Should the leadership not stoop down to investigate the concrete reasons why the bulk of its great visions and decisions end up in the church's official documents? Can all these questions not help to resolve the puzzle on why the prophet Jeremiah's lamentation to God in the Bible (i.e., the harvest is past and the summer is ended, and we are not saved) persists as the response of society to the SCS? What then are the inferences from this chapter?

6 Overview

The knowledge of the past is vital for a substantive reconstruction of the history of Nigeria from a theological perspective. Many Nigerians seem to suffer amnesia when it comes to their historical accounts. They do not know who they were and who they are, therefore, cannot envision and embrace their emerging identity in more concrete dialogues. Certainly, Nigerians have a lot to learn from their religiocentric past - it is theocentric. Meaningful knowledge of their theocentric past can provide contemporary Christians with the necessary guidance for resolving some moral and philosophical problems in Nigeria. Christian reflections and practices are required to address such issues in every culture and age. Therefore, knowledge of history can assist the SCS to play a crucial role in the on-going quest for a sustainable and more responsible approach to nation building, social transformation and development in contemporary Nigeria. The church engages such a quest from a theological-social perspective and the SCS is a theological and social entity.

Such a theological-social approach is crucial for this study. The study draws from historical sources to reflect on contemporary Nigeria as a country that was born and nurtured under the influence of some perplexing legacies of the Enlightenment-based ethics. Prior to 9 January 1897, the name *Nigeria* referred to the land and peoples in the geographical expression that was known as the northern protectorate among other British colonies in Africa. The name Nigeria only began to refer to all the conglomerate of nations within the contemporary geographical expression so christened in 1914. The British colonial masters amalgamated these conglomerates

of nations into one country in 1914 having earlier condensed them into the Colonies of Lagos, the Northern, and Southern protectorates. In other words, the name Nigeria simply put represents a geographical expression. The British colonial government amalgamated the heterogeneous states in the protectorate and christened their overall land mass, Nigeria (perhaps without nullifying or restating British former agreement with the northerners).

This failure of the colonial government, i.e., to nullify its previous agreement with the northerners on the meaning and implication of the name is the root of most of the crises in contemporary Nigeria. To restate it in explicit ways, the amalgamation project is central to the current crises in Nigeria. The British Colonial government failed to accord significant respect to the polity and politics of the heterogeneous (multi-tribal) states, which constituted the Southern Protectorate and the Colony of Lagos in the amalgamation policy. These crises are often grounded in socio-religious-politics. Nigeria's multi-tribal states (about 350 ethnic groups) have diverse complex and eclectic *religio*-political structures. Each of these heterogeneous groups has its own distinctive language and *religio*-cultural values. Simply put, Nigerians are thoroughly *religiocentric* albeit; their objects of reverence and ethics differ. Consequently, Ogbu Kalu, Elizabeth Isichei, Omo Omoruyi, among other Nigerians, reckon on the amalgamation project as a colossal political fraud. In their perspectives, Britain adopted such *pseudo*-ethics in order to realize her lopsided political ideology within this *religio*-cultural environment of West African. We offered a discourse on the amalgamation project and its perplexing legacies in Nigeria, in the second section of this chapter.

Today, Nigeria is the most populous black nation in the globe. She is also the 11th most populous nation in the world (with about 140 million people occupying a landmass of about one million sq. km). Significantly, Nigeria is providentially blessed with a good climate, which favours agriculture and mineral exploration. However, her oil sector tends to over-shadow other industries and assume a monopoly of her political economy. Oil is the primal source of political, religious and social violence. It is also the catalyst for corruption in Nigeria albeit, these vices are not without external influences. Most players in her political economy have a stake in Nigeria's oil.

Politically, Nigeria gained independence from Britain on October 1, 1960. She also became a Federal Republic in 1963. Despite varied interpretations and positions on their experiences as

individuals or groups, many of her citizens celebrate the daily challenges of upholding Nigeria's costly unity as one multi-national country. However, some intermittent but influential dissenting voices against the continuing unity of Nigeria also exist. The pervasive influence of the Enlightenment-based ethical vision on the polity and politics is often inspirational to these dissensions. Many distressing legacies of the Enlightenment project confer these protesting Nigerians with some ugly and frustrating honours in the continuing celebration of national unity in contemporary Nigeria. At least, the roots of the events, which led to the Civil War (1967-1970), and the notorious uprisings in the Niger Delta regions are good examples. The continuing co-existence of Nigerians as one nation is, and may be described only as an act of God. These *pseudo*-legacies of the Enlightenment visionary projects affect the polity and politics of Nigeria in negative ways. Such negative effects rarely spare Nigeria's growing Christian mission and developments especially, the mission projects and programs of The PCN. The mission ethics of the church tends to compromise the figure of Jesus Christ in its social witness.

For instance, The PCN contributes extensively towards the improvement and development of education (both formal and informal), health, and recreation in Nigeria. Its conceptual understanding and communication of the *imago Dei* in human beings, contribute in no small measure to the pursuit of freedom, relief and restoration of the dignity of persons in many Nigerian societies. The PCN reflects on the *imago Dei* as the ground for meaningful and enduring identification with the less privileged persons. Such a concern *inter alia*, is evident in the church's promulgation of the Ekpo law which helped to stop human sacrifice at Calabar; the acceptance and re-integration of twins and their mothers into many Nigerian societies (through the ministry of Mary M. Slessor); the ordination and induction of the female folks as Ruling Elders and ministers in The PCN. The church also co-operated with the Mennonite Church and even played an active role in its establishment in Nigeria. These concerns for human development are feasible because most of its missionaries laboured very hard to justify their callings. In fact, some even died in the process. However, this mission approach of The PCN also reproduced a great number of visions and programs, which failed to stand the test of time in local contexts. The church's theological mission ethics also sustains the ideological hegemony and unwholesome cultural transfer of the Enlightenment-based visions in Nigeria. As we have shown in this chapter, the church's theological mission ethics de-emphasizes, and in many instances, dismisses indigenous religiosities as idolatrous.

Most Nigerians, as we have also shown, embody their socio-religio-cultural practices as indispensable religiosities. Thus, the church should not neglect or try to suppress useful *religio-cultural* resources in its witness of the Gospel in Nigeria. The Christian religion is supposed to play a substantive role in nation building, social transformation and development in contemporary Nigeria. *Religio-cultural* resources are essentially constitutive of the historical identity of Nigerians and their socio-cultural contexts. Their organizational forms and ecclesial practices play crucial roles in re-creating effective spiritualities, institutions and practices for social transformation and development. Despite their patriarchal orientation, Nigerians are incurably religious and ethically altruistic. Such an understanding makes it clearer that the theology and mission ethics of The PCN is altogether foreign to Nigerians. Ross notes that:

Built into the fundamental identity of the Church of Scotland is its conviction that...it is a national church, deeply conscious of its responsibility to the Scottish community....The Board of World Mission is the vehicle through which the Church of Scotland expresses this dimension of its identity and commitment.

(Ross 2003: 395)¹³⁰

Over against this emphasis on the Scottish context, indigenous religiosities originate from African cosmologies.

African cosmologies celebrate hospitality, relationality, vulnerability and interdependence as ideal communal religiosities. Human beings are not individuals who live in a state of total independence. People are integral participants in communities thriving in relationships and interdependence. In African religiosity, human existence is conceived and embodied in relationship with others; i.e., ‘those who are alive, those who inhabit the spirit world and the mysterious power of nature’ (Turaki 2006a: 109; cf. Bujo 2003: 77; 1992: 18-37). The theological mission ethics of the early missionaries has little or no significant respect for indigenous religiosities. Thus, one can summarize the theological mission ethics of The PCN as antithetical and foreign to indigenous (Nigerian) religiosities. The ethical mission of the church is often Constantinian and Docetic in practice. Unhealthy disrespect to local religio-cultural

¹³⁰ As earlier observed, it was under the auspices of this Mission Board that the founding missionaries of The PCN planted and transposed the ‘Scottish enterprises’ through ‘godly mechanics’ (Aye 1996: 5). ‘We met them in Calabar not only with the English Bible but also with other documents, all of which were used for religious education and as a guide for social reforms in Nigeria’ (Udoh 1988: 27). Such documents, as we have interpreted from the P&P Section G-01.0601 include *The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger Westminster Catechism, and the Shorter Westminster Catechism*, which the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria is yet to develop to meet its contextual contexts and challenges.

resources is, on one hand, apparent while unwholesome cultural celebration is also evident, on the other hand.

Significantly, the SCS (officially) came into existence in 1996, with its ecclesial identity and spirituality already drenched in the waters of the Constantinian-Docetic rain. The genesis of this *pseudo-Christian* ethics is traceable to the missionary eras, which in our view, are serving out their purposes. The ethics usually usher in political confusion, bribery and corruption, marginalization/oppression of the poor and the less privileged especially women and children. In addition, these *pseudo-ethics* also heighten and sustain ecological degradation in the socio-cultural environment of the SCS. Their spiritualities are grounded in some thriving (negative) legacies of 19th century Enlightenment rationalism, self-centered historical consciousness, and the secularization project.

Above all, these *pseudo-ethics* enthrone, celebrate and propagate abstractions, universalisms, and absolutisms as normative ethics in Nigeria. These *pseudo-Christian* practices should not be. It is possible that these approaches were also adopted to serve as typologies, which seek solutions to what H. Richard Niebuhr (1951: 44) describes as ‘the enduring problem’ of Christ and Culture. However, typology is also conceivable as a serious aid in establishing the logic of events in the mind or in cultures particularly, within the *religio-cultural* environment of the SCS. The challenging socio-cultural realities demand strong and unified human co-operation with God, fellow human beings, and nature. For these *religio-cultural* Nigerians, religion may not be separated from culture. In addition, the church should not also impose culture. It should not proclaim a culture as monolithic in a country of over 350 different ethnic *religio-cultures*. The plethora of *religiocentric* cultures plays crucial roles in the church’s host communities. Such embodied cultural practices form, establish, and demonstrate local religiosities and religions. In other words, the host environment of the SCS embodies altruistic *religio-philosophical* traditions. Thus, the truistic philosophies of the Constantinian and Docetic-faced Christianities constitute affronts to the altruistic *religio-philosophical* traditions of indigenous religiosities in Nigeria. As this study shows, they do not have substantive respect for local contexts and indigenous religiosities.

Consequently, *Constantinianism and Docetism* in the SCS enthrone and sustain unhealthy dichotomies, divisiveness and other social vices. Their truistic theological ethics are also

triumphal. Constantinian and Docetic Christianities also employ the languages of the powerful in seeking to control diversity. In their visions, conformity is achievable without meaningful recognition and respect of *the other*. Our project argues that this unhealthy state of affairs should not continue in the SCS and its environs. They also constitute an affront to the African concept and embodiment of *raison d'être* (i.e., reason for being; or *being*): *To be is to belong and to belong involves active but responsible participation in social affairs*.

Again, these *pseudo*-ethics initiate an average adherent in the SCS into a crisis of identity. They scarcely disciple such God-seekers on how to integrate their past identity with the identity of the *new found love*. As earlier observed, Constantinian Christianity would not guide its devotees towards a responsible cultural inclusivity. It often substitutes the lordship of Jesus Christ with human lordships, as the centre and model of political ethics. On the other hand, Docetic Christianity would not permit its adherents to be meaningfully engaged in the affairs of the society. These *pseudo*-Christian witnesses of the SCS are envisioned from the Enlightenment-based ethics. For instance, they also proclaim and insist on the political ideologies and cultural practices of John Calvin and John Knox as the ideal Christian ethics in Nigeria. These important human church founders interpreted and appropriated Scripture to suit their contexts and biases especially, during the Reformation era.

Simply put, the bulk of Reformation theologies mainly consisted of *pseudo*-ideological reflections. Most Reformation theologies were articulated with the context and bias of the founders. They often sought to subjugate dissenting voices (or even exterminate them). Such theologies were rooted in violent ethical visions. Most of their ethical reflections also drew resources from the visions of their nation states. Their mission ethics needed protection from the sovereignty of the nation states. The nation states struggled to envision and transform their geographical environments into *Christendom*, i.e., Christian kingdoms. These visions were violently executed even where it meant a complete annihilation or subjugation of differentiating position or dispositions, without impunity. Thus, one should not transpose their ethics into contemporary Nigerian settings without significant modifications. As this study shows, Nigeria is not a nation state. The name represents an amalgamation of multi-religious nations. Sadly, the pacesetter SCS is a vanguard of these violent Reformation theological mission ethics. It is an heir of this tradition, which is yet to receive adequate modification from various succeeding indigenous leadership of The PCN.

Consequently, the minds of many Christians in the SCS fold are often locked up in confusion. The church has no explicit teaching on how such devotees can continue or discontinue with their indigenous *religio*-cultural practices. In addition, most adherents in the SCS also assume ambivalent postures in their relationships with other churches and the society in general. They are seldom permitted or disciplined to interact with fellow believers from other church traditions. The said ambivalent posture of the church on the relationship of Christian discipleship to *religio*-cultural practices is problematic. As this study maintains, many Nigerians embody the altruistic philosophies of their religions as indispensable religiosities. Thus, these crises also affect the ecclesiological reflection and practices of the SCS in particular. These *pseudo*-political ethics are reflexive of the distorted and distressing ecclesiologies of the corrupt Christian political ideologies of the Enlightenment era.

The Enlightenment-based ecclesiologies are simply ecclesiocentric. Their truistic visions often substitute the centrality of Christ's figure with the postulates of their (human) founders. In practice, such ecclesiologies hardly share meaningful space with others. Their roots are traceable to the Reformation theological reflections and practice. The differently *other* (or dissenting voice) usually transforms into an opponent who must be subjugated. For instance, in most Reformation theologies such as the contemporary *received* Calvinism of the SCS, dissenting voices are simply adversaries. An adherent to another especially, the Anabaptist tradition, is not a partner-in-progress in the *missio Dei*. In other words, the ecclesiological identity of the Church in the Synod area of the SCS is also pathologic. It is plagued with competing political ideologies. Immoral power struggles, incessant proliferations, dehumanization and demonization of the *other*, acrimonious and rancorous co-existence, etc., are evident. At least, the incidence in which the Anglican Church commandeered the Trinity Theological College Umuahia and expelled its PCN partners is a clear example.

This unhealthy Church, seems less sensitive to the source of the parasite (or virus), and the magnitude of its pathology. Thus, the *status quo* can nuance Kalu's (2005a: 1) Igbo proverb to the SCS, and the other churches within its milieu. In Kalu's perspective, 'those who do not know where the rain first met them are unlikely to know their route and destination.' From this study, it is arguable that the evangelization of the SCS does not adequately *emphasize social ethics as a Gospel, which the blind man can see; which the deaf can hear; and that which the lame can walk*

toward, i.e., *God is love is the culture of theology*. The church's social witness scarcely demonstrates interculturality as a responsible interface of cultures. It does not reflect a substantive interaction with the hosts' religiosities of the SCS.¹³¹ The pendulum-like ecclesiological identity of the church is rooted in this *pseudo-Christian* philosophy.

The combination of these perplexing factors induces a church to refuse the role of a salient majority. Such a church would prefer to associate with the prophetic, priestly and royal calling of the Church from a minority perspective. The church's reflection on its calling and being will also mean a substantive proclamation of God's emphatic '*No*' to injustice. Such a church embodies God's appreciative '*Yes*' to justice, in its social critique (witness). A renewed understanding of its *raison d'être* is central to the church's confession of the Good News of Jesus Christ. A church that refuses to define its role in socio-political and economic terms stands a chance of being irrelevant to the contemporary Nigerian society as this studied has maintained (cf. Udoh 1988).

Of a truth, the SCS has never been indifferent to this renewed reflection on the calling, identity and spirituality of the contemporary Nigerian Church per se. However, its giant strides so far (in addition to normal preaching and teaching, in and outside its walls) have only portrayed the seeming ignorance of, and the insensitivity of the SCS, to the nature and root of these crises. Consequently, this research also suggests that the SCS can adopt Sachs' (2005) vision or inductions from 'clinical diagnosis.'¹³² It can assist the church to discover and apply the best and

¹³¹ This seems to reflect what Akper (2006a) describes as 'principle of isolation on the Nigerian field' in 'the view that to be Reformed is to be set apart'. It suggests that the Reformed faith is best protected when its devotees are isolated from the very society of their origin. As he points out, 'the implication of this development on the present Nigerian Church is that theologians, especially Reformed theologians, who *show* genuine interests towards issue of public nature are castigated by their very members and colleagues – they are seen as 'liberals' (Akper 2006a: 4[Our italics]). However, we note that The PCN is more progressive than Akper's NKST.

¹³² Sachs reflects on clinical diagnosis as a set of rigorous procedures, which medical science and practice adopt in order to discover the actual cause(s) of an ill health, and to administer a more meaningful medication. Clinical diagnosis also enables medical practitioners to offer relevant and lasting solutions to the health crises of a patient. As Sachs points out, the human body is a complex system, which functions within biological and chemical processes of incredible complexity. As a result, every complexity requires a differential diagnosis, which often involves personal interrogation of the patient as well as a prescription of some laboratory tests by the medical doctor before she/he passes any judgment on the illness. All approach to medicine or medical practice is a family (team) affair, which also requires knowledge of the social setting around the patient. Monitoring and evaluation are crucial for a successful treatment. Even a careful initial diagnosis can be wrong; hence, doctors keep charts so that they can know where the patient has been. Medicine as a profession requires 'strong norms, ethics, and code of conduct'. Consequently, medical science and practitioners 'must keep abreast of new scientific findings, including new procedures and medicine, to ensure the highest quality care that they can manage' (Sachs 2005: 75-78). Sachs learnt about clinical diagnosis from his wife who is a senior medical practitioner. As an economist, Sachs adopted clinical diagnosis to explain how economics can borrow medical language and apply it to economics in order to suggest a more appreciable way of meeting the UN's Millennium

most significant ethics. The SCS needs to substantiate its public witness to the distressing populace within its socio-cultural context more concretely. This is necessary because the church's concrete witness, as we earlier noted, is almost at par with its invisible and negligible participation in the PROCMURA project. The same dismal participation is also visible in programs that seek to counter the menace of HIV/AIDS pandemic, or assuage the pains of its victims among other (pressing) contextual issues in our society.¹³³ These inadequacies of the SCS are to be mourned if one takes a cursory look at the immense challenges that are reflected in the settings, which Africans have to deal with.¹³⁴

To confess wholeness is to embody the fulness, integrity and authenticity of the faith in ethos, in structures, in practices and policies. Faith sets life upon a new foundation that justifies human participation in the life, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It becomes a false faith, a dissembling faith, a hypocritical and self-invented faith such as can never be justified, if it is not accompanied by love and faith (Koopman 2007: 6, 2006b: 8-10). In other words, the contemporary dilemma of the SCS is also rooted in the church's reflection of love. The church does so in ways, which tend to reduce its confession of faith to abstractions. Its reflections on social wholeness seem to reduce its vision to an eschatological reality only. The SCS demonstrates love with an ethic, which rarely proclaims the culture of theology as a Christocentric social ethics. Christocentric social ethics is one, which the blind can see, which the deaf can hear; and toward which the lame can walk. The mission theology of the SCS suggests more of ecclesiocentricism than Christocentricism.

This problem of the SCS is less ideological than it is theological. It is a tradition enshrined on the tablets of the heart. The problem thrives as a distressing metamorphosis of some (negative) legacies of the Enlightenment-based *imperial cultural transfer and theologically deficient*

goal of eradicating poverty in the world. Sachs was an economic adviser to the immediate-past UN Secretary, Mr. Kofi Anan of Ghana.

¹³³ John Calvin also teaches that the question of the image of God in humanity is about respecting that glory of God, which peculiarly shines forth in human nature, where the mind, the will, and all the senses, represent the divine order (Calvin 1975:96). In other words, this sordid position of the SCS tends to centre on the church's insensitivity or *laissez-faire* attitude towards the concrete experiences, temperaments, emotions and dispositions of the suffering populace. Such a reduced substantive ethical witness of the SCS towards the state of affairs within its crisis-ridden context affirms another typical anecdote of the Igbos, i.e., *it is only a doctor, who knows the cause of an illness that can proffer effective (and enduring) antidote for it.*

¹³⁴ Koopman (2008: 28-39) outlines such challenges to include the cry for justice, reconciliation and unity; justice as compassionate justice; reconciliation as the embrace of the other; unity as unity in proximity; and hope in justice, reconciliation and unity.

mission enterprise in Nigeria. In short, it is an affirmation that *the predictions and predilections of one generation can become the tradition of the next*. It can nuance Omenyo's view for the SCS, that is:

The failure of historical Christianity to enter into a constructive dialogue with African traditional cultures and religions has long been recognized. The consequence of this theological deficit is the inability of most African Christians to reconcile their worldview with the type of Christianity professed by western Christian missionaries in Africa.

(Omenyo 2002: 3)

Without a balanced theological knowledge, a Christian approach to traditional Nigerian (as well as many African) societies is bound to be ineffectual (cf. Turaki 2006a: 120).

Consequently, the *status quo* in the socio-cultural context of the SCS demands a *prophetic witness*, i.e., a Christian witness, which does not seek to annihilate or condemn everything in culture. Prophetic witness also seeks to commend what is good. Prophetic theologies do not only point beyond the ways of society. They seek to highlight and engage living realities in continuing and creative dialogues as well. Above all, prophetic witness also adopts what re-echoes a *clinical diagnosis*. It treats each phenomenon or state of affairs according to its own merits. Given these positions, what then can we learn from all these inadequate responses of the SCS to public issues? One may ask, what do they indicate concerning the ethical thought and practices of the SCS?

The SCS rather practises more of *mental theology* or what Vosloo (2004: 78)¹³⁵ refers to as 'speculative top-down approach to theology.' This is often alien and anti-thetical to the local spiritualities of its host *religio*-cultures. Nigerians, like many other Africans, make more meanings from theology without footnotes. Theology without footnotes, as we earlier noted, can be generated and promulgated through stories, citations from the Bible by heart, conversations, proverbs, hymns, songs, prayer and acting. It is also derived from oral and written literatures, inscriptions and write-ups as well as symbols (cf. Mbiti 2003: 367). Theology without footnotes (or theology of testimony) suggests a re-presentation of Africans' uncompromising adaptation to the theology of nature (natural theology). Most Africans turn to worship God as they reflect on divine activities within nature. Although Africans often revere some extraordinary phenomena, many would not worship such events.

¹³⁵ Robert Vosloo is a Reformed theologian and lecturer at the department of Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology, University of Stellenbosch.

For instance, stories from such natural phenomena as *Ikogosi warm and cold spring* make a *great and acting* God in Jesus Christ (or Immanuel) more meaningful to a contemporary Abiribas. They cannot quite understand and appreciate the availability and accessibility of a high and lifted, holy and transcendent God who is reduced to the ascended Jesus Christ. Their *agwu* is an accompanying and accessible god. The social witness of the SCS must ensure that the divine-human revelation is not re-presented as a disembodied affair or altogether, an otherworldly activity. The mystery of God-becoming-human takes place within the setting of concrete human life and community (cf. Barrera 2005: 48).

Clearly, the unhealthy state of affairs in the SCS yearns for a re-orientation and re-appropriation of communal *catechisms of the head, the heart, the hands and feet*. Such a renewed vision of catechism involves a corporate and embodied Christian witness. The individual is an integral part of a collective. In other words, the sordid state of affairs calls for communal catechisms on evangelization. Inevitably, such communal catechisms would seek to develop and translate local theologies in order to address specific concerns freely. The SCS needs to adopt and emphasize theology without footnotes, i.e., theology of witness or theology of testimony, as it is relevant to the local context of the church.

However, such contextual theologies of the SCS would also strive to keep abreast with ongoing developments in national and global theologizations. It will also recognize developments within The PCN and beyond. A theological culture, which is bereft of a meaningful embodiment of the biblical phrase, 'God is love', is less important in our contemporary age. In the words of Koopman:

[Love] means the undergoing of the transformation of one's entire existence by God; it means being drawn into the world as it lives and must live before God. Love is always the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. It is as whole...that we are loved by God and reconciled with God in Christ. And it is as whole *humanity* who think and who act that we love God and *other*.

(Koopman 2007: 7 [Our italics])

Contemporary theological mission ethics of the SCS rarely reflect a substantive integration of significant indigenous *religio*-cultural resources and religiosities in its vision for interculturality.

Consequently, the situation also provides one with a platform to ask the following questions: Does not the *status quo* in the SCS call for a renewed missionary ethic of incarnation? Will such an ethic not assist the church to realize an authentic hermeneutics of peoplehood in its social

witness? Is the SCS unaware of the contemporary need to *re-vision* some fundamental principles and practice of Protestant ethics? Should the SCS not demonstrate functional ecumenical mission theology rather than the ideological mission ethics of the Enlightenment eras, as its theology for mission in contemporary Nigeria?

Such ecumenical and consultative aspects of recent advancements in African theological reflections proposed by Maluleke (2005b), and Ogbu Kalu (2005a:21-23) are elusive in the Synod.¹³⁶ The social witness of the SCS is less concerned with the ongoing calls for relational public ministry of the three theological publics as espoused in Nigeria by Akper (2006a), Koopman (2006b), August (2006b), and Swart (2006), among others.¹³⁷ The church also tends to pursue its theological vision for transformational-developmental projects as an island. One can even dare to claim that the SCS insulates its cultural identity from others. Its ethics, as we have shown, are antithetical and foreign to African religiosity. They do not embody the *relational* or *communal* mission theology, which the biblical Jesus demonstrated for humanity.

These *pseudo*-theological ethics reduces Christians to *parasitic (unhealthy) consumers* in a consumer society. Their truistic philosophies rarely bequeath adherents with the right skills and spiritualities to adopt meaningful self-criticism of received traditions. Such Christian ethics exist as *untreated* and *mistreated* translations of the Enlightenment-based visions. Most Enlightenment-based projects breed and nurture their devotees in acculturating practices. For instance, they transform some Nigerians into a demeaned collegiate, which lives and wholly depends (despondently) on the parents for all provisions. This unwholesome social ethics also bequeaths others with the philosophies of an over burdened and (perhaps) exploited parent who (in complacency) disdain and respond to the demeaned collegiate with suspicion and anger, etc.

¹³⁶ In this article entitled, *African Theology*, Maluleke argues that African Christian theologies existed largely in less deliberative, less consultative, less ecumenical and hardly in written form' before the 1950s. Indigenous thinkers articulated their own brands of Christian theologies consciously and deliberately. They relied more on what we have described as oral theology without footnotes. Maluleke thus adopts an inclusive approach to reflect that contemporary African (communal) Christian theology presents the world with a more meaningful approach to grapple with the challenges of the HIV/AIDS pandemic as well as the threats of globalization (Maluleke 2005a: 485-497). Elsewhere, he also argues, '...in addressing these established and relevant agendas (perhaps Africanization, enculturalization and identity)...African theologies will need to do so in consultation....' (Maluleke 2005b: 493).

Kalu (2005a) suggests an ecumenical approach towards church history narration. The large number of churches and their activities makes it a more difficult task for an individual historian to cover. To quote him, '...an ecumenical approach should make the writing of history a process of liberating, self-discovery for the individual as well as the community' (Kalu 2005a: 23).

¹³⁷ This study will reflect on such public (ecumenical) theological witness in subsequent chapters.

Such distressing theological visions sustain the perennial consumer-oriented politics and politics of the British political ideologies. The Church is not spared of these bequests. Therefore, the prophetic cry for the rise of Christocentric believers who can co-operate with God in the restoration of *shalom* in the society rends the air. Only such believers can restore the hearts of the parents to their children, and the heart of the children back to their parents in the socio-cultural context of the SCS. Individualism is also a significant threat to the communal spirituality of many Nigerians.

Inevitably, the SCS needs a restorative vision. A restorative ethical vision can help to illuminate its eyes and hearts of understanding. The church needs to see, feel, and realize how deep its theologies are grounded in some seductions of the Enlightenment-based visions. Its *pseudo*-theological visions do not encourage adequate social involvement of believers. Due to this unhealthy state of affairs, a restorative vision is crucial for the church. It can assist the SCS to contribute more meaningfully and effectively, in the contemporary quest for a more substantive approach to social transformation and development in Nigeria. Restorative vision *inter alia*, strives to accommodate useful values of its object. It also seeks to correct most of its shortcomings by mirroring from the identity of a role model or standard (in our case, the model is Jesus Christ). A restorative vision is transformational. It can take society beyond its traditional boundaries. Above all, a restorative vision leads to a sustainable and more responsible social transformation, nation building and development. This is what a church is also called to engage in, as an active and responsible role player. A restored vision of God's purpose for the SCS will enable the church to envision also how God's heart bleeds over its despondence towards the building of the kingdom of God. Such a vision can inspire the church to retrace its feet from participation in the privation and privatization of God's Kingdom in Nigeria. After all, the Sovereign God seeks the restoration of Creation in Jesus Christ; hence, the SCS is a workmanship of Christ (Eph. 2: 10). It participates in this vision as an aspect of the church's pursuit of the glory of God. Jesus Christ is the Lord of all.

Based on the foregoing, it becomes necessary to agree with Turaki (2006a) and Bediako (2003: 57) among other African theologians. In their reflections, a theological knowledge that is exclusively shaped by the intellectual experience of the West does not provide adequate preparations for engaging with the events and processes that take place in the South. Given this view, may we not reason with this study that looking back into history can help us to renew and

restore an ailing church to its master's vision? More concretely, what can we learn from this survey of the historical context of the SCS?

One can infer that these Constantinian-Docetic faced ecclesiological identities of the SCS are grounded in the ideological political ethics of the Enlightenment era. Constantinian and Docetic identity and spirituality *inter alia*, tend to undermine the normativeness of Jesus Christ in their engagements with philosophies and practices that are deeply rooted in ancestral beliefs and modern civilizations. One can even describe them as a pendulum that swings between two polarized extremes of the Enlightenment-based theological reflections and practices (i.e., inclusivism and exclusivism). These ecclesiological visions of the Enlightenment reflect an unwholesome celebration of cultural inclusivism in Nigeria. Thus, the prophetic voice and vision of the SCS are often compromised in its social witness and agenda. On the other hand, the unhealthy cultural exclusivism of the Enlightenment-based ethical approach denies the society of the fruits of the church's prophetic witness of Jesus Christ in Nigeria. Furthermore, it bequeaths the SCS with a theological ethics, which breeds and nurtures inadequate public witness. As earlier pointed out, they are often triumphal. Constantinian and Docetic witnesses reflect *pseudo*-ideological political and theological responses that are based on abstractions, universalisms, and absolusions in these *religiocentric* milieus. They are grounded in the unhealthy competitive and ideological ecclesiological identities of the 19th century ethics of the Enlightenment theologies. Above all, these *pseudo*-theologies also berate the SCS as divisive, repelling and acculturating/truistic witnesses. They show little or no meaningful respect to local *religio*-cultural resources and contexts. The SCS thrives more on *pseudo*-ecclesiological visions.

This problem points to the very centre of Christian callings. The dilemma also gives a more significant meaning to the Reformed position on the central calling of humanity, i.e., to glorify God in Jesus Christ rather than in competing ideologies. It reiterates a question which most (if not all) postcolonial Third World peoples, particularly Nigerians both Christians and non-Christians ask without ceasing; *who is God to the Nigerian people, and what does his salvation agenda mean to them?* An enduring and fulfilling answer to this question must highlight that Nigerian (as African) Christian (especially Presbyterian) theological reflections and developments must not be done as an end in itself. It should be done in continuity with global ecumenical theologizations on the culture of theology, i.e., *God is love*, without compromising the Gospel. This study associates with Smit's view. For Smit, Reformed theology is an enormous

and liberating tradition with great potential, which yearns for continuing liberation from its failures and idolatries (cf. Smit 2005c: 367). The SCS should make a sustainable and more significant progress in its public ministry.

From these observations, we hold that the analysis of all the challenges in the Nigeria society, the negative impact of some aspects of mission theology, and the inadequate public involvement of the SCS, all plead for a fresh reflection, orientation and appropriation on the public role of the SCS. In conclusion, we reason that an analysis of Yoder's theology will help in this regard – *the problem of faith in the SCS is fundamentally theological and its solution must be re-visioned and sought after, theologically.*

Christian theology stands or falls on its conceptualization, interpretation, and disposition towards Jesus Christ, the touchstone of theology, i.e. Christology. How then can Yoder's Christology fulfil its promises outlined in the previous chapter, *vis-à-vis* his Anabaptist background? We shall address these questions and others in discussions on Yoder's Christology, in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

YODER'S CHRISTOLOGY: '...AS A MINISTRY FOR RENEWAL'

...The work of Christ, the making of peace, the breaking down of the wall, is itself constituting a new community made up of two kinds of people, those who live under the law and those who do not.

Yoder (1994d: 219)

Yoder rather asks that.... the implications of what the church has always said about Jesus as Word of the Father, as true God and true Human, be taken seriously as relevant to our social problems, as ever before.

Hauerwas & Sider (2002)

Yoder's Christology also highlights our vision of African hospitable and modifiable pre-Enlightenment *religio*-culture as an indispensable approach towards contextuality, and as the beginning process for a responsible ecumenical theology in our world.

(Ndukwe 2008)

1 Introduction

From the previous chapter, we learn that the theologically deficient mission ethics of The PCN constitutes one of the dilemmas of the SCS. An unhealthy marriage between these *pseudo*-ethics and indigenous religions receive the blessings of a distressing twin-set of Constantinian and Docetic faced Christianities, in Nigeria. Such *pseudo*-ethics makes it more convincing that the competing ideologies of the Enlightenment-based ethics also created more problems than it sought to solve, for this Nigerian church.

The study also introduces inquirers into a renewed learning, i.e., that contemporary contextual theological reflections and developments in the SCS should reflect global ecumenical spirituality in significant ways. Responsible ecumenism, *glocalized* visionary and mission ethics have come to stay in contemporary Christianities. It has been noted that the SCS is a Reformed church and as Smit remarks, the Reformed theology is an enormous tradition with great potential but it also needs continuous liberation from past failures and idolatries. For Barth, theology stands or falls on its conceptualization, interpretation, and disposition towards Jesus Christ, the touchstone of theology, i.e. Christology. With this background, the following question is posed: Given his Mennonite (Anabaptist) background, can Yoder's Christology fulfil its promises as suggested in the first chapter of this work and muted in the previous chapter?

This chapter seeks to address the afore-mentioned question. It will articulate an intellectual biography of this important theologian by considering his Mennonite context and Karl Barth's influence on Yoder's theology. Yoder's Christology is discussed in the second section, which also outlines some Christological convictions from his theological vision. The theological approach in this study respects Yoder's emphasis on biblical truth as a framework for theological positions.¹³⁸

2 Intellectual Biography of John Howard Yoder

This section considers Yoder's Mennonite context by comparing him with Karl Barth in order to investigate the orthodoxy of his Christology. His progressive Mennonite background (Nation 2006) influences Yoder's intellectual activities and visionary practices, as we can learn from the next paragraph.

2.1 Yoder's Progressive Background

In this segment, we shall examine Yoder's Mennonite background and major theological convictions. They can help to substantiate our reflection on his progressive spirituality, and the relationship between Christology, ecclesiology and social ethics in Yoder's theology.

2.1.1 Yoder's Mennonite Background

Yoder was born into the *Amish Mennonite* family of Bishop John K. Yoder (his great-great grandfather) on December 29, 1927 in Smithville, Ohio. Providence favoured him with a history of a 'politically progressive' (Amish) Mennonite church and family. Quite unlike Amish Mennonites who are often conservative, Yoder's church and family opened up and allowed him to spend most of his childhood in a community and school that were not populated by ethnic Mennonites. Yoder's family was dissatisfied with the schools in Smithville; hence, they relocated to Wooster in the summer of 1935. One of Yoder's closest students, Mark Thiesen Nation,¹³⁹ also drew from this progressive background to write on Oak Grove congregation and school where John Howard Yoder of 'Mennonite patience, evangelical witness, catholic

¹³⁸ Christian theology, as we noted in the first chapter of this work, also seeks to understand the act of faith itself and to bring the various truths apprehended by faith and repentance into some kind of coherent, consistent whole that is modelled after Jesus Christ.

¹³⁹ Nation is an Associate Professor of Theology at the Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisburg, Virginia, USA.

convictions,' was raised. According to him, 'This is the church in which ...Yoder grew up. Without question, it shaped him to be profoundly Mennonite. It also gave him a sense of freedom... During his last years in high school he took a few classes at The College of Wooster, a Presbyterian College' (Nation 2006: 9, 13, 28). Yoder completed his graduate studies at Goshen College (1945-1947), which some leaders of the Mennonite Church during the 1920s saw as too liberal. He graduated from Goshen under the influence of Harold Bender's quest for the recovery of the Anabaptist Vision.¹⁴⁰

Yoder draws significant resources from his progressive background, to re-interpret church traditions, and to re-read biblical history. For instance, Yoder worked hard in his adult life, to *re-vision* the Mennonite-Anabaptist heritage, with a unique political ethics, which he envisioned from the life and works of the biblical Jesus Christ as his model. Yoder's project is a visionary practice, which seeks to bequeath humanity with some Bible-based ways of living out faith in Christ Jesus, in an age where believers are not in power or in majority. Yoder holds the fundamental conviction that *The Politics of Jesus*¹⁴¹ as recorded in the Bible provides Christ-believers with the ethical norm for *Christian Witness to the State*¹⁴² as their political

¹⁴⁰ Bender's vision for Anabaptism stresses discipleship, a new concept of the church, and the ethic of love and non-resistance.

¹⁴¹ *The Politics of Jesus* (1972, 1994d) is the title of his most widely read book. This is the one book in which Yoder stated his fundamental conviction that the political ethics of the biblical Jesus provides believers with a normative Christian ethics for all times and context. Thus, it brought Yoder prominence among both academics and non-academics. *The Politics of Jesus* assists believers in Jesus Christ, to reshape the field of Christian ethics since it was first published in 1972 (and updated in 1994). According to Nation, '*The Politics of Jesus* was deliberately intended to be an ecumenical book. It was written to provide "a 'peace witness,' which Mennonites could recognize as their own, yet which could be aimed at non-Mennonite readers." It was quite successful in achieving this aim. The original 1972 edition carried endorsing blurbs from Markus Barth, a respected Reformed New Testament scholar, and from John L. McKenzie, a respected Roman Catholic Old Testament scholar (Nation 2006: 110-111). Many admirers of the Yoderian project describe it as a classic.

However, in the eighth chapter of his book, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity*, Hauerwas (2000) writes on '*Why the Politics of Jesus is not a Classic*'. In his view, *The Politics of Jesus* is an odd choice for a classic. It is a recent book, which has not had a chance to prove its staying power. Yet when Christians look back on theology in the 20th America, *The Politics of Jesus* will be seen as a new beginning. Prior to Yoder, the subject of Christian ethics in America was always America. *The Politics of Jesus* helps us as believers to relocate our lives in the catholic faith. It helps us to retrieve resources from liberal Protestantism 'to help Christians re-discover ways to serve our non-Christian brothers and sisters by being unwavering in our commitment to the politics of Jesus (Hauerwas 2000: 136).

Yoder updated *The Politics of Jesus* with the addition of the *Epilogue* at the end of the book. He also updated his work with expanded footnotes to meet up with contemporary level of scholarship. Consequently, most of the references to *The Politics of Jesus* in this study will be drawn from the updated edition, which was published in 1994.

¹⁴² *The Christian Witness to the State* (1964; 1977, 1997a) reflects the Yoderian view on the ground for believers witness to the social order. This book, among other things, seeks to refute and correct the impression that the Yoderian vision espouses and sustains believers' withdrawal from participation in social affairs. Many scholars accused the Yoderian perspective of sectarianism and for being apolitical. Paradoxically, Yoder argues that

responsibility. In his multidimensional, occasional and spontaneous writings, Yoder lived and articulated his vision of Christian discipleship to include other believers and non-Christian believers. In his book, *The Priestly Kingdom*,¹⁴³ he argues that his project is a vision of unlimited catholicity, with a biblically rooted call to faith, addressed to Mennonites or Zwinglians, to Lutherans or Catholics, and to unbelievers or other believers (cf. Yoder 1984: 3; 8). Yoder does not seek to found his own church neither does he expect all believers in Christ to become his disciples. Yoder's altruistic and progressive Mennonite background influenced his vision for neo-Anabaptism, which came into limelight during his voluntary humanitarian trip to Europe after the World War II.¹⁴⁴

The (European) trip prepared him for worldwide recognition. As an example of the fruit of this European trip, Yoder and other Mennonites also founded The *Concerned Movement* at Amsterdam. This Christian renewal group was a movement, which drew strength from the rediscovery of the Anabaptist Vision of Harold S. Bender to challenge Mennonitism to be more Anabaptist, more radical, more self-critical, and less mainstream evangelical, in 1952 (Carter 2001: 36). Yoder's neo-Anabaptist vision reworks his heritage to plead for continuing

Christian pacifists (including Mennonites) should also 'care about and engage the activities of the state in which they reside' in continuing conversation (Nation 2006: 135).

Most of the content of this book was first prepared in 1955 as a work paper for a conference on *The Lordship of Christ over the Church and State* held at Puidoux, Switzerland in July of that year. It 'was reworked as part of a study assignment given to Mr. Yoder by the Institute of Mennonite Studies in 1958-1959....' (Yoder 1997a: 4). The book was first published in 1964 by Faith and Life Press as Yoder's 'first published book' i.e. apart from his dissertation (Nation 2006: 135). *The Christian Witness to the State* has a post-humous edition, which was published in 2003. Most of the references to *The Christian Witness to the State* in this dissertation are drawn from the 1997 edition.

¹⁴³ In *The Priestly Kingdom*, Yoder argues that his vision for Christian discipleship cannot be pigeonholed and dismissed as a Mennonite vision. He also highlights that a more meaningful Christian ethics must demonstrate itself as a lived, living and liveable social Gospel. Yoder adopts a hermeneutics of 'peoplehood' to promote the Yoderian rhythm, *But We Do See Jesus* (revealing the grace of God by tasting death for everyone – Heb. 2: 8-9), as the implication of the particularity of the Incarnation and the universality of the truth to believers. According to Yoder, '[the] notion of the royal priesthood or kingdom of priests, echoing all the way from Moses....capsules well that synthesis of apartness and representation, community and authority, whereby the people of God in present history live from and toward the promise of the whole world's salvation' (Yoder 1984: 12). Whichever way it is rendered, the biblical proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ is Good News to all: it seeks the uncoerced salvation, adoption and adaptation of the outsider into the priestly kingdom.

¹⁴⁴ Yoder travelled to Europe in 1949 to serve in directing relief efforts to the Mennonite Central Committee in France. He worked and supervised the transformation of the Mennonite relief program from simply feeding, to the establishment and maintenance of children's homes. He met and married Anne Guth, a French Mennonite serving in one of the homes (their marriage was blessed with six infant-surviving children – between 1952 and 1969). Yoder also played a determinative role in reconciling and re-organizing the French Mennonite churches, which spilt into two between the end of the 1940s and the 1950s. In addition, Yoder's participation in the refugee relief ministry even saw him administering Christian relief program in Algeria (Africa) after the 1954 earthquake there. As McClendon (1998:22) puts it, he '...saw there the beginnings of the violent Algerian struggle against the French.' Yoder also wrote a series of articles about his experiences in Algeria, with emphasis on Islam, the war, and the relief efforts (Nation 1999: 16).

reformation of the Church towards a disciplined community, whose practice of the politics of Jesus seeks a priestly Kingdom. In such a Kingdom vision, we see *The Fullness of Christ* (1987) embodied by *The Royal Priesthood* (1994e).¹⁴⁵ Yoder's perspectives thirst for meaningful and plausible catholic¹⁴⁶ (or ecumenical) convictions in which Christian ethics would seek to realize biblical orthodoxy.

¹⁴⁵ In this book, *The Fullness of Christ*, Yoder re-asserts his view that every member of the household of Christ is saved to participate also in God's mission. He argues that a re-interpreted version of the Pauline description of ministry shows that all members of the Church have valid Spirit-filled ministries. The Holy Spirit favours each believer with at least, one spiritual gift to contribute to the body of Christ as the church strives for the salvation of the whole world. Yoder first published this piece in a 1969 edition of *The Concern*. The work came out as a response to the conversations on the 'universal ministry' of the Church by the WCC. Yoder revised, updated and represented it in the Believers' Church Conference on Ministry at Bethany Theological Seminary, Oak Brook, Illinois from September 2-6, 1987. All references to this book will be drawn from that updated edition, which the Brethren Press, Elgin, Illinois published as a book in 1987.

In *The Royal Priesthood*, Yoder also argues that ecclesiology is ethics. Believers' participation in the sacrament is a social process. They embody and communicate the good news as vulnerable yet provocative and creative ways Christ adopts to transform cultures from within.

The Royal Priesthood is more of a compendium on Yoder's essays (on ecclesiology and ecumenism and was published in the 1980s), which a Methodist theologian and admirer of the Yoderian vision, Michael G. Cartwright edited in 1994. However, Yoder also reasons that some portions of these essays tend to provide his critics with the impetus to dismiss the Yoderian vision for Christian discipleship as standing against the nations. Consequently, he restates these views in his last published book before his death in 1997. To quote him, '...whereas the corpus of older writings in *The Royal Priesthood* can be seen as fitting within the vision of the mission of the Christian community some call "sectarian" or describe as standing "against the nations," the essays in this collection are intentionally devoted to demonstrating the wrongness of that characterization of my stance' (Yoder 1997b 5-6). Yoder would not accept the dismissal of his position as a withdrawal from public engagements. In the Yoderian vision, the confessing-people-of- God is the new world on the way.

¹⁴⁶ Yoder draws a distinction between early catholicity and its subsequent understandings. For instance, Yoder retrieves biblical resources from the New Testament to argue that the earliest instances of the catholic church points to a quality in individual congregations, that is, 'that of being whole or well rounded or as typical as being opposed to one-sided or partial' (Yoder 1990: 562). He does not read the term as the sum of all the congregations from a single one. Yoder argues that catholicity recognizes the New Testament idea of Christian fulness, which points beyond the Christian to the crucified and risen Christ as our foundation. He also observes that it raised the question of the focus or centre of Christian identity without settling it. The earliest instances are 'opposed to being one-sided or partial'.

Thus, Yoder opines that it could be from the second century that Greek-writing Christians began to use *ekklesia* in a new, expanded and metaphorical sense to mean 'all the saints' or 'all the churches'. He further points out that within this period, another sense of the catholic church, which referred to all the churches summed up as one, eventually appeared alongside the former. This term came to have the same sense as the expanded or metaphorical use of *ekklesia* alone. In Yoder's view, this second sense raises again the question of the breadth or extent of Christian identity; i.e., its contents, and the limits of its authentic witness, without settling it. This 'referred to all the churches summed up as one'.

Yoder further narrates that a third sense of 'the catholic church' – now written in English as *the Catholic Church* – appeared alongside the first and second. This meant any community that was or considered itself to be 'regular' or 'ordinary' as opposed to those that the user of the term considered irregular or heretical. This sense was also contested as the first and second, just as contemporary Christians disagree on the content of universal or ecumenical catholicity. Yoder further highlights that the Roman Catholic claims to be the Catholic Church as the Orthodox do, while other bodies also make similar claims. According to Yoder (1990: 563), 'Now these three sense of "catholic" have all survived the transition of Christian discourse into other languages and times – the first in English usually with a small "c"; the second, sometimes replaced nowadays, by "ecumenism"; the third, as a proper name, in the West normally understood as the Roman Catholic Church'.

Yoder also speaks of 'catholic' as 'functional rather than historically institutional' (Yoder 2000: 166). In his visionary reflections and practices, catholicity demonstrates a quality of wholeness in individual congregations

Significantly, this European trip, also offered him the opportunity to further his academic ambition in Switzerland (precisely, at the University of Basel). Yoder studied under some prominent luminaries such as Walter Eichrodt and Walter Baumgartner in Old Testament, Oscar Cullman in New Testament, Karl Jaspers in Philosophy, and Karl Barth in dogmatics. These renowned sages contributed to his scholarship. In addition, Europe granted him with the opportunity to practise and translate his ecumenical vision into action. His writings articulate what it means to engage the larger world in relation to peace. For example, he wrote some essays, engaging Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr, two of the major theological voices of the day who had addressed the question of violence. In 1962 Yoder also obtained his PhD (with a dissertation), which focused primarily on the 16th century Anabaptism. However, it was while he served at the Mennonite faculty of theology that Yoder (for the first time) addressed himself to the concept of Christ and culture (Nation 2006: 21).

One can argue that Yoder sympathized with Karl Barth in his theological approach *vis-à-vis* his pacifism, ecumenical spirituality, prophetic witness, and catholic convictions. Yoder articulated a social ethics that is tied to Christology. His unique vision for pacifism teaches discipleship as a political responsibility of the Church (cf. Yoder 2003a). The Yoderian vision reflects on the *subordinate*¹⁴⁷ believer of Jesus Christ as an embodiment of a visible ethos, which can usher in sustainable and more responsible social transformation and development. Yoder's concept of

of the Church. Yoder also accepts it as dogmatic, devotional, and practical at the same time, provided it points beyond the Christian (and assembly) to the crucified and risen Christ as its foundation. Catholicity (the mark of early Christianity) depicts *the oneness of the church of God in unity, holiness and apostolicity*. It points to the fact that the church of God is a contextual but universal society, confessing one faith, one baptism and engaging in God's mission in the world (in diverse ways). The Church is united to Christ the Lord. In other words, Yoder espouses a catholicity that reflects Christ-centredness.

¹⁴⁷ By subordination, Yoder often refers to the believer's joyous and conscious submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ and its ethical demands on them, even when it hurts. Yoder regards such appropriation of costly grace as revolutionary subordination, which enables believers' 'conscious and conscientious objection' to whatsoever constitutes an affront to their proclamation of the lordship of Christ and his headship of the Church. The Yoderian concept of subordination pleads for believers' freedom to express their 'conscious and conscientious subjection' to the ethical demands of proclaiming the lordship of Christ over the Powers, even at the cost of their lives. As Rasmusson (2002) re-echoes Yoder, the proclamation of Christ's lordship is not a mere pious talk that is unattached to real life in concrete societies. Agape understood in the light of the cross and resurrection is for contemporary Christianity, the way and demand of God's salvation works in history. He states that, 'A Christian discourse-practice of the sort Yoder defends *loops back to* another perspective from which history and social and political could... be read and... *offered* the church as concrete basis for resistance.... What Yoder calls revolutionary subordination is one name for that sort of ecclesial practice and that is the challenge for the church of the twenty-first century' (our italics). For Yoder, believers' subordination is about costly yet joyful demonstration of ethics as obedient life of Christian discipleship: it is a political responsibility (cf. Yoder 2003a, 2003c, 1997a, 1997b, 1971, 1964, etc).

subordination emphasizes the believers' embodiment of the pacifist servanthood of Jesus Christ in the concreteness of their daily lives (cf. Yoder 1994d: 120; cf. 1992a).

As Hauerwas points out, Yoder was born with extraordinary mental powers. People who saw power as a gift for service had a great influence in shaping this unique Mennonite. Yoder esteemed such influences with godly indifference that could be mistaken for arrogance yet he did not compromise his visionary commitment to healing of wounds (cf. Hauerwas 2007: xii; 1998: 15; Yoder 1994e: 1). Yoder also envisioned and articulated an embodied approach to ecumenical dialogue from his concept of the ecumenical movement and the faithful Church. His vision for faithful ecumenism embodies ecumenical patience as a long-term commitment, which seeks to translate his Anabaptist tradition for the wider Christian community (cf. Nation 2006: 108). Yoder's vision is progressive and restorative.¹⁴⁸

The vision also articulates and envisions a cross-shaped social responsibility of the royal priesthood. Within his vision, the confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ rather than ecclesiocentric visions, becomes central for Christian theological concerns 'within the life of the "binding and loosing" body called the church' (Yoder 1992a; cf. Nation 2006: 188). Despite his rejection of a foundational approach to theology, Yoder was 'a very logical and systematic thinker' (Carter 2001: 18) in whose thoughts, the cross of Jesus Christ is central to Christian ethical witnesses.

Yoder was a sage who believed and taught that intellectual honesty inspires believers to admit that there may be some questions for which there is not one demonstrably right answer (cf. Yoder 1996a: 80). He adopted a non-methodological approach to theology, which also draws from his Mennonite patience to teach a Christocentric evangelical witness. Yoder's evangelical witness stresses an embodied vision for catholic convictions, which believers in various socio-

¹⁴⁸ Yoder articulated and espoused an 'embodied and faithful ecumenism' in the light of the apostolic practices of discipleship. For instance, from 1959-1965, Yoder worked with International Christian bodies at home and abroad. He also worked as a full-time administrative assistant at the Mennonite Board of Missions. Along with other Evangelical leaders, he initiated the National Association of Evangelicals and the National Council of Churches where he played various official roles for nine years. Beginning from 1963, Yoder served for more than twenty years in various capacities with the World Council of Churches including being a member of committees such as the study commission on the Theology of Mission, the Faith and Order Colloquium, Commission on World Mission and Evangelism and Commission on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. Detailed accounts of his exploits for the Lord in these bodies can be found in Nation (2006, 2003a; 2003b; 1999), Hauerwas (1998), McClendon (1998), and Carter (note 4 below) among others.

cultural contexts can proclaim within their local cultures. His vision for sustained engagement with dissenting views encourages plurality and pacifism. However, it stresses responsible differentiation between appropriate diversity and a *lazy form of pluralism*.¹⁴⁹ Yoder's visionary project seeks a disciplined unity, which acknowledges the indispensable need for reconciliation.

This study reasons that it could be from the said perspective that Nation (2003b) and Richard Mouw (Yoder 1994e), among others, remark that Yoder's non-foundational theological approach makes Anabaptists intellectually respectable and worthy of attention in wider Christian circles (Nation 2003b: 4; Yoder 1994e: viii). Yoder's vision pleads with Christians to maintain familial relations with others. Such others include the adversary. Yoder reminds Christians of the demand to love their enemies because God does so and commends believers to follow suit. 'Our God, who made himself known in Jesus Christ, is a reconciling, a forgiving, and a suffering God'. Accordingly, the Christian has to do it. If this was 'God's pattern, if his strategy for dealing with his enemies was to love them and give himself to them,' Christians must also do it (Yoder 1985: 20-21).

¹⁴⁹ This phrase bespeaks of pluralism, which dissolves or compromises the particularity of the Christian faith in the melting pot of ecumenism. Yoder stresses the particularity of faith in a pluralistic and relativistic world. For instance, in his book *The Priestly Kingdom* (1984), Yoder discusses this issue under the caption, *But We Do See Jesus: The Particularity of the Incarnation and the Universality of the Truth*. He argues that contemporary believers should not try to translate the early Church's understanding of the notion of pre-existence or participation of the Son in creation into 'the pluralist/relativist' language of our time. The early Christians did not ask, 'Shall messianic Jews enter the Hellenistic world and adjust to its concepts?' Their question was 'how in the transition to render anew the genuine pertinence of rendering the proclamation of Christ's lordship, even in a context (particularly in a context) where even the notion of sovereignty is questionable'. (Yoder 1984: 56; cf. Hauerwas 2002: 222)

Consequently, we reason that this issue is inspirational to Yoder's predilection towards a vulnerable evangel as a more nuanced approach to communicate the Good News with a trans-tribal (or trans-community) validation. For Yoder, the ground for the trans-cultural intelligibility of the meaning of Jesus is summarized in the Incarnation: 'In the concrete historical reality of the life and death and rising of Jesus, the otherwise invisible God has become known normatively' (Yoder 1997c).

This vulnerable approach to the Good News is very evident in his article, *On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation* (1992b). Yoder argues that the Gospel becomes disjointed unless 'it is a genre of communication which is at once particular and communicable, by virtue of the communicators' uncoerced and non-coercive submission to the host culture'. Despite their minority status and non-coercive ethic, such communicators can provide social and even political leadership. The Good News accepts as the price of its communicability that it must suffer at the hands of the addressees. Readiness to bear hostility is part of their message. 'The credibility of the evangel as Good News is basically and 'functionally defined by the fact that when someone speaks it, someone else hears it, and assents to it, joining the community which bears it... Without leaving their own world, the addressees enter the community of the witnesses who had first crossed the border' to join the Jesus-community. Their message is a distinctive as well as an embodied proclamation. Yoder argues in the article that, 'Once come into the world, once enfleshed, the "true light that lightens everyone" was utterly and irrevocably particular' (Our emphasis). For Yoder, 'the real issue is not whether Jesus can make sense in a world far from Galilee, but whether – when he meets us in our world, as he does in fact – we want to follow him (Yoder 1984: 62). Christ-believers' 'responses will and must be empirical and particular' (Yoder 1992b: 296).

Yoder's vision is also a restorative project, which further seeks to transform enmity into friendship, hatred to love, rejection to acceptance (or toleration), exclusivity to inclusivity, etc., in its visionary praxis. Nevertheless, Nation also comments on the other side of Yoder's, position: 'But I also know that John had a love/hate relationship with the Mennonite Church.... Of course, some Mennonites also wanted John Yoder to be better, other than he was. In some ways the Mennonite Church did not quite know what to do with John' (Nation 2003b: 4). Huebner (2006)¹⁵⁰ claims that Yoder never assumed that he finally knew what peace was. Yoder envisions a continuing conversion of the believer to a more significant realization of Christocentric discipleship in contexts.

Furthermore, the uniqueness of Yoder's progressive Mennonitism is also evident in his intellectual life, catholic convictions, and ecumenical participation. These aspects of his life gained (more) momentum after his European trip. Yoder sustained his vision of broad catholicity (or ecumenicity), which did not seek to understand only various church traditions. Yoder also engaged such church traditions in continuing dialogues throughout his adult life. Moreover, he demonstrated his progressive spirituality by accepting an invitation to teach at the Roman Catholic University of Notre Dame in the autumn of 1967 on marginal teaching basis. Thus, he exemplified that the first social task of those who said yes to God's offer of salvation is to embody the Gospel by living the lives of faithful discipleship. In Notre Dame, Yoder helped to create the 'Program in Nonviolence;' a project he would later head (in 1973).¹⁵¹

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¹⁵¹ Yoder was an accomplished academic. For instance, he became a 'lecturer at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries (AMBS) in Elkhart, Indiana, in 1960 and joined the faculty in 1965. Yoder was President of Goshen Biblical Seminary, one of the schools that make up AMBS, from 1970 to 1973' (Schipani 1998: 1). Yoder also served as a full time professor with Goshen from 1965 – 1977, and as an associate consultant with the Mission Board from 1965-1970. Yoder shows how one can draw from her/his tradition to engage in a broad Christian argument in ways that can make it compelling, to many others. Yoder teaches believers how to remain open and respectful as well as truthful and prophetic in ecumenical practice (cf. Hauerwas & Sider 2002: 11; Schipani 1998: 2). He reminds believers, that truth becomes suspicious 'if cannot be commended to every one' (Yoder 1985: 41). Yoder taught Systematic Theology, Anabaptist Theology, Issues in Ecclesiology, Christology and Theological Method, Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution, History and Theology of Ecumenical Renewal, and Theology of Christian World Mission. Furthermore, he was the president of the Society for Christian Ethics from 1987-1988 after serving a term as a member of the board of directors. In addition, this peculiar Mennonite and ecumenical theologian became the co-chair of the SCE's (Society for Christian Ethics) special interest group on war, religion, and society between 1970 and 1992. More significantly, Yoder became a full-time Professor of Theology at Notre Dame in 1977 and later, a fellow of the Institute of International Peace Studies. He spent most of his academic career, teaching and writing out his catholic vision and convictions. Yoder was one of the most influential theologians and formative thinkers

Over the years, Yoder conducted lecture tours, which his fluency in French, German and English boosted in approximately twenty countries. His lecture tours took him to Latin America, Asia, and Western European countries, as well as South Africa, Poland and Australia. Yoder died of a heart attack in South Bend, Indiana on December 30, 1997. He was an ecumenist.

In his tribute to Yoder, McClendon¹⁵² (1998: 21) declares that Yoder is *One of Our Own*, while Schipani (1998:1) remarks that Yoder is a *Teacher of the World Church*. Yoder's visionary witness envisions its boundaries beyond the walls of any Christian denomination. He was a Mennonite who neither honored honors to him, nor sought to be loved or praised (Hauerwas 1998; cf. Yoder 1999: x). For him, 'pacifism is not the point; Jesus is the point. Not only is Jesus the point, but protecting, declaring and unpacking the claims of classical Christology is what Yoder is about' (Carter 2001:17).

Yoder's legacy that 'we do see Jesus revealing the grace of God, tasting death for everyone' (Heb. 2:9) is an ongoing call to embody the politics of Jesus in the midst of a wondrous world created by a gracious God (cf. Nation 2003b: 8). In spite of his personal weaknesses, Yoder's progressive life as a Mennonite re-echoes the rhythm of African communal spirituality i.e., *to be is to belong; and that to belong involves active participation because life is about influencing and being influenced*.

Consequently, in our reflection, Nation offers a persuasive rhetoric on Yoder's progressive background as a Mennonite: 'This Mennonite tradition communicated to John Yoder the distinctive Mennonite convictions and practices that would always shape his life and thought....as John Yoder saw it, the immediate tradition to which he was heir was also progressive and outward looking' (Nation 2006: 190). Yoder continued and carried forward this creative reworking of this heritage throughout his evolving life. From the above observations drawn from his progressive Mennonite background, one wonders if the SCS cannot learn a more responsible approach to its theological mission ethics from Yoder. The Church is a living body, and living entities respond to challenging realities in significant ways.

of his generation (Nation 2006: xvii; cf. Wogaman 1993: 233-235). Above all other things, he was a prolific writer and a pamphleteer who wrote 'for a specific audience and a particular purpose' (Hauerwas & Sider 2002: 9).

¹⁵² He is the late Baptist theological conversation partner of Yoder, James W C McClendon.

Having explored Yoder's Mennonite background in this segment, we proceed to outline the theological convictions of this thinker in the next paragraph. We hope that it can provide us with a relevant framework for reflecting anew on the orthodoxy of Yoder's ethical vision and witness.

2.1.2 Major Theological Convictions

This segment outlines Yoder's main theological convictions. The purpose is not to do a detailed comparism of the theology of Yoder and Barth, but to show the impact of Barth teachings on Yoder's thinking and theology. This exercise could enhance the reception of Yoder's ideas in the SCS. Yoder's theological persuasions revolve around his altruistic and evolving visionary embodiment of the Christ-event as a lived, living, and liveable reality in every age and culture. Such a progressive identity and spirituality is evident in the modifications of his positions from the 1970s (cf. Nation 2006: 40, 53-4). Consequently, this project will focus more on Yoder's works, which were published from the 1970s until his death in 1997; Yoder saw and consented to their publication. Hauerwas has cautioned on the need for readers to be aware that Yoder could be hesitant to have his works of the 1960s published without updates that reflect contemporary shifts in scholarship. Commenting for Yoder on this issue, he writes:

So (Yoder) meant it when he said that the scholarship in Preface to Theology only reflected the state of the field up to 1960.

That is one of the reasons Yoder would have hesitated to have the book published in its current state. In it he clearly accepted some scholarly conventions that have now been called into question or at least required modification. We need to attend to these mistakes with care if we are to read this book with the historical consciousness Yoder instilled in his students, but we do not think they undercut his primary narrative or argument.

(Yoder 2002: 22)

Nation cautions us that the Yoderian project is hard to evaluate from a single methodological perspective (Nation 2006: 195). It is often multifaceted, occasional (for specific audience), and contextual, etc. Yoder's theological conviction adopts the Barthian stance; i.e., that theology and ethics are inseparable.

As we have noted in this study, Yoder's theological convictions are rooted in his fundamental stance, that is, that the socio-political ethical approach embodied and taught through the life and ministry of the biblical Jesus, and the New Testament Christian communities of the early

centuries, provides a normative model for Christian witness of all times and contexts. According to Yoder:

A social style characterized by the creation of a *renewed*¹⁵³ community and the rejection of violence of any kind is the theme of New Testament proclamation from beginning to the end, from right to left. The cross of Christ is the model of Christian social efficacy, the power of God for those who believe....Our Lamb has conquered; him let us follow.

Yoder 1994d: 242 [Our italics])

Yoder's persuasion focuses more on themes such as Christology, pacifism and non-violent resistance, ecclesiology, the kingdom of God, ecumenism, and social ethics among other major themes. Within this visionary practice of the politics of Jesus, the Church cannot compromise its *kerygma* (proclamation) of Christ's lordship, even in its theological missionary witness. Yoder's vision assumes a Christocentric identity and spirituality wherever it is embodied.

Yoder's vision draws its main resources from his fundamental conviction to ask if a Christian position rooted in Christological convictions is irrelevant to the social order. Such a question also provides him with a corollary to claim the confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ as the ground for the Christian community to engage in active and responsible witness within the social order. Yoder's vision also reasons that such a New Testament affirmation of Christ's lordship over the world provides the Church with the ground, standards as well as hope for a meaningful and obligatory witness. It craves for the *shalom* of the society. Yoder emphasizes that Christ's lordship over the Powers extends beyond the Church in which He is the Head, into the larger world. Yoder is not quick to proclaim Christ's lordship over the world and His headship over the Church as grace without a significant distinction (Yoder 1997a: 5-15).

¹⁵³ This preference of the word renewed (to new) ethics or ethical community stems from our understanding that Yoder does not claim originality neither does he claim to start from the scratch (Yoder 1997b: 10; cf. 2002: 11; Nation 2006: 196; Huebner 2006: 22-23). Yoder even writes that 'The posture I propose is not innovative; it is as old as Jeremiah, or as Paul. But the challenge of pluralism is not new either. My point is that the awareness of the acceptance of dispersion of God's people in the ancient definitional epochs can recast the question and free us from the anxiety of trying to recover something that never existed, save an illusion' (Yoder 1996b: 133).

Yoder re-presents pacifism and non-violent resistance ¹⁵⁴(which he describes as ‘messianic ethics’) as the central mark of this distinctive grace, which the Church embodies. For Yoder, ‘[t]here is no such thing as a single position called “pacifism”, to which one clear definition can be given and which is held by all “pacifists”’ (Yoder 1971a: 10). Yoder argues that in the incarnation, the concrete historical reality of the life, death and rising of the fully human and vulnerable Jesus, the ‘Lamb who takes away the world’s sin’ the otherwise invisible God is known, distinctively. True celebration of the Christian faith underscores ‘that what we recount is not our own strength in the presence of suffering’, but a ‘committed *witness* to persevere *beyond* repressive tolerance with normative witness to Christ who never changes’ (Yoder 1997c: 217, 222 [Our italics]). The embodied proclamation of this messianic ethics marks the distinctive task of the Church’s communication of God’s grace in the world. For instance, in *The Politics of Jesus* Yoder argues that such a messianic witness makes more significant differences than other visions:

It does not mean sacrificing concern for liberation within the social process in favor of a delayed gratification in heaven... It means that in Jesus we have a clue to which 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 (the inner logic of things) and the Lord (“sitting at the right hand”).... 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 behavior is more than merely poetic or motivational.

(Yoder 1994d: 246-247)

In other words, Yoder states that the possibility of Messianic ethical witness inducts Christians to concentrate more on the story and meaning of the Gospel events. Messianic ethic can persuade contemporary Christianity to adopt the witness of the crucified but living Messiah, rather than the violence and triumphalism of the Enlightenment-based ethics. Such a cross-shaped ethic constitutes a *renewed* kind of community leading a radical life, that is, of *non-violent resistance*. The Christ-event inaugurates and plays a determinative role in Yoder’s visionary praxis. It is a

¹⁵⁴ Yoder’s pacifism does not preach non-resistance. Believers’ prophetic witness against evil also permits them to withdraw their co-operation with the perpetrator but they can embark on that withdrawal of co-operation in a non-violent ways. In the Yoderian visionary practice, non-violent resistance is a Christocentric ethic. Heilke (2001: 39) shows that non-resistance ‘is not always revisionist’ in its historicity and practice. It holds that ‘history involves opportunities and choices, not merely necessary acts and outcomes. It is therefore a revisionism that is based in part on counterfactuals....’

More details on the distinctiveness of the Yoderian pacifism can be found in his book, *Nevertheless*. According to Nation (2006: 138), ‘[T]he most obvious instance of Yoder’s efforts on this front is found in his book *Nevertheless*. It was originally published in 1971 and was significantly expanded in 1992. In the expanded edition Yoder discusses twenty-nine different types of religious pacifism.’

non-violent resistant political witness. Yoder looks up to his reflexive vision of *moral osmosis*¹⁵⁵ for concrete and significant impact on social transformation and development. Yoder's messianic witness is a visionary practice whose source and model are rooted in Christology. His vision for Christian witness is a pacifist Christological stance (cf. Yoder 1997a: 7).

Consequently, his Christological (visionary) paradigm appeals to Christians to retrieve their Jewish heritage. The Jewish-Christian heritage, *inter alia*, stresses pacifism and diaspora identity as embodied ethos of the non-violent Messiah. Yoder's suggestive vision for a middle axiom¹⁵⁶ allows believers to adopt a conscientious objection (resistance) to evil, even to the point of dying for its convictions. Yoder's vision for ethics would not permit believers to withdraw utterly from co-operating with those who differ with its views, even in the pursuit of the *missio Dei*. It also re-interprets Christian unity (in diversity, rather than uniformity) as a theological and social imperative. Yoder reflects on geographical unity as a true Christian internationalism, which the Servant church must seek to restore. His vision is also a restorative project, which seeks an ecumenical ecclesiology that is rooted, and results in Christocentric Kingdom witness as true catholicity or ecumenism (Yoder 1990, 1971b: 123-124).

Significantly, one can describe Yoder's vision for ecclesiology as Christological ecclesiology. Christological convictions form and inform the heart of his Free Church community and its ecclesial practices. Yoder draws from Jesus' embodied proclamation of the Good News in the New Testament to announce the kingdom of God as a lived, living, and liveable reality in every age and human cultures. The Yoderian emphasis on the life and ministry of the biblical Jesus

¹⁵⁵ Yoder describes *moral osmosis* as an ethical process in which Christ-believers' moral lives, transform society through a long-suffering approach. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, such distinctive characters seek to coax the attention of the wider society. In the Yoderian vision, formal and informal Christian education can (in the long run) affect the wider society with unique social values of Christianity, which include honesty and industry (cf. Yoder 1997a: 20-21).

¹⁵⁶ In the Yoderian perspective, middle axioms represent ethical concepts, which believers put forth to non-believers especially rulers, in their sustained attempts to broker and maintain peace in the society. Such a believers' ethics appeals to categories of conduct, which the outsider can also understand and practise. Heilke (2001: 41) remarks that middle axioms are ethical concepts, which Yoder formulated and used 'in the context of analyzing a Christian witness to the state, which may, perhaps, be distinguished from the Christian study of history and politics'. Yoder is also hesitant in drawing a line between Christian study and practice of history and politics. This claim is most evident in his later writings. In the Yoderian Kingdom vision, there is no such thing as being apolitical. 'The Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power. The path of Christ, the political commitment to truth, servanthood, proclamation, and suffering love, is despite its appearances the channel of the power of God' (Yoder 1997b: 236). For Yoder, middle axioms mediate between the general principles of Christological ethics and the concrete problems of political application. 'They claim no metaphysical status, but serve usefully as rules of thumb to make meaningful the impact of Christian social thought' (Yoder 1997a: 33).

Christ as the *original revolution*¹⁵⁷ that can transform hostilities to covenanted relationships brings hope to the hopeless; provides home for the homeless; and accords tolerance to the adversary. Thus, one can describe it as an annunciation of Good News to all (Yoder 1997b; cf. 1997c, 1971a, and 1971b). Yoder's ecclesiology seeks the restoration of a Christocentric vision for an unlimited catholicity of the Church.

Yoder's (visionary) ecclesiology speaks of generous but responsible hospitality. It accepts meaningful interculturality as a more significant approach to the ecumenical pursuit of the *missio Dei*. Yoder's vision for faithful ecumenism also acknowledges 'in humility, that it may be others who hold to the truth we have to learn, the morality we have yet to embody. Simply put, we may be wrong' (Nation 2006: 107-108). His vision pleads for a sustained engagement with all who name the name of Christ. Such embodiment of the politics of Jesus also entails that believers are called to co-operate with the differently *other* in seeking the *shalom* of the larger society, albeit, as 'worthy of the Gospel'. Yoder argues elsewhere that when described 'as "priesthood" and as "priestly Kingdom," the believers together are not called out of but sent into the real (public) world where sacrifice and sovereignty happen (Yoder 1997b: 36). *To be is to belong; and to belong involves active and responsible participation in social affairs*. The Yoderian project speaks of a Christocentric practice of ecclesial witness.

Significantly, Yoder's vision for ecclesial witness would not accept lazy pluralism. It reflects on faithful Christian discipleship as the political responsibility of Christ-believers. Yoder's ecclesial vision stresses 'binding and loosing' as indispensable in the church's proclamation of the rule of Christ. Binding and loosing is a Scripture-based imperative, which in Yoder's perspective, empowers the Church to permit or withhold fellowship from the differently *other*; i.e., those who differ with its views, positions, or practices. When understood as a political responsibility of

¹⁵⁷ *The Original Revolution* (1971b) is the title of Yoder's compendium of essays on Christian pacifism. The book began as a re-written and expanded sermon, which Yoder preached for the last time, at Eisenhower Memorial Chapel, Pennsylvania State University on 24 November 1968. Yoder coined the title from the prevailing language of the day in order to comment on the contingent understanding of the Gospel. Yoder argues that what most churches preached was not the Gospel because true Gospel 'is Good News having seriously to do with people's welfare' (Yoder 1971b: 15). In this book, Yoder also criticizes various forms of Constantinianism. For Yoder, an original revolution is about a nonviolent Kingdom ethical witness. Yoder holds a unique Christian pacifist evangelistic stance that is rooted in Christological convictions. It initiates and defines the believers' ethical approach to nation building, social transformation and development. The Yoderian unique pacifism (though not expressed explicitly in this book) also seeks the restoration of wholeness in society. We will offer a detailed discussion of this Yoderian phrase from the next chapter. *Original Revolution* is the theme of the last chapter of this dissertation.

Christians, discipleship transforms and demands an open, respectful, repentant and doxological consciousness of the particularity of Jesus' historical identity (Yoder 1984:3; cf. 2002:11).

From the foregoing, Yoder's vision for christological ecclesial witness represents a peculiar biblical realism. It sustains the earlier movement, which made ecumenical developments and Christian hope more understandable. This movement of biblical realists led to the renewal of concern for ecclesiology and eschatology. It stood in creative tension with contemporary cultural functions focusing on metaphysics as well as the personality of God (Yoder 1994d: x). In contrast, Yoder's vision for biblical realism focuses on ethical perspectives without losing sight of its stance that theology and ethics are inseparable. Within Yoder's vision, ecclesiology receives a new importance as an ethical vision that can offer hope for peaceable and liveable societies in a violent and hurting world. Believers can accept (necessary) Christian suffering as an aspect of the Kingdom proclamation. Accepting innocent suffering can also mean an expression of the result of the social character of the Church. Christocentric Yoderian devotees would rather die than compromise their freely chosen belief in Jesus Christ.

Yoder's vision for ecclesial realism inspires in its believing communities the act of 'remembering together the common heritage.' Yoder's biblical realism seeks to sustain its identity as well as spirituality in pluralistic societies (Yoder 1994f: 90). Thus, its preference of the "copulative and"¹⁵⁸ to the "either/or" theological vision transforms *prescriptive and descriptive* theologies to *demonstrative* or *lived out* theologies (or religiosities). Yoder's ecclesial vision also craves for a sustainable and more responsible ecumenical vision. Reconciliation is central to its core values. Forgiveness is indispensable in its message of hope as well as

¹⁵⁸ Yoder, in his *non-triumphal inclusive* approach, may not have clearly stated that he holds a 'copulative and' theology. However, reading his historical-anthropological approach to biblical realism, one is introduced to this understanding. The understanding is evident in Yoder's recommendations for a reformulation of thought patterns that underlie moral choice. For example, Yoder appeals to the works of Ernst Troeltsch, A. Strobel, Martin Werner, and Graydon F. Snyder, in criticizing the western thought, which separates theological reflections from ethical practices. Yoder reasons that Jesus demonstrated the moral justification for the relevance of his political life by embodying personhood, which is integrated into the social life of the community (cf. Yoder 1994d: 107-111). Yoder's (*both/and*) theological vision does not separate theology and ethics; nor does it separate politics and economy from theology unlike the 'Catholic Church' explication, which 'too often assume[s] that these....things are so distinct that they can be discussed and developed separately from each other' (Long 2001: 59). The promise of Yoder's work is that, by contrast, he offers a more complete attempt to return theology to its proper context in the church as the body of Christ and thereby moves it decisively beyond theory (cf. Huebner 2000: 489). Yoder's Christ-centred (or Christocentric) historical-anthropological approach to biblical realism can offer values for analyzing the *subject-object dichotomy* of the Enlightenment-based ethics. His adoption of a '*both/and*' theological approach favours him with a more appreciable approach to fulfil the Barthian (christologically determined) biblical realism, albeit, from a Diaspora perspective. It can also nuance his visionary practices of a Christocentric political ethics for the Church, as this study shows.

restoration of wholeness and communal spirituality in the society. Thus, one wonders if such an understanding could explain Yoder's position on the implications of the jubilee; that the jubilee initiates ordinances that must be put into practice here and now as refreshment, prefiguring the re-establishment of all things (cf. Yoder 1994d: 70). In Yoder's vision for restoration, ecclesiology is ethics; hence, 'ecclesiology should be done as a form of ethics' (Cartwright 2003).

Yoder's proclamation of social ethics as Gospel re-echoes the Barthian view that Christians may no longer hide from other concrete communities. In Jesus Christ God is no longer hidden from humanity (cf. Barth 1967: 26).

However, this study further reasons with others (as we show later) that Barth espouses his vision of a Christocentric public ministry of the Church in a seeming magisterial and universalistic manner, which also tends to de-emphasize the Christian community's role in the moral formation of society.¹⁵⁹ By contrast, Yoder draws more strength from the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit to emphasize a unique Christian ethics, which preaches 'peoplehood' and 'body politics' as a meaningful practice of the rule of Christ. In his perspective, each member of the body of Christ is graced with one or more spiritual gifts whose application and manifestation edifies the community and nuances its ministry (cf. Yoder 1997c; 1992a; 1987). Normally and normatively, the body of Christ actualizes the implication of the biblical understanding of *plurality of members and charisma* (cf. 1 Cor. 12). Responsible pluralism enables the church to attain a more meaningful credibility in its witness of Jesus Christ. Yoder's ethical vision and practices anchor on Christology to plead for believers' active and responsible participation in social affairs.

Significantly, Yoder also argues that such credibility may be hard to realize where foundationalist (or magisterial) traditions reflect a ruler (or a professor, or a priest) who by virtue of her/his office makes and imposes decisions on the community (Yoder 1996a: 76).¹⁶⁰ The

¹⁵⁹ Rasmusson makes a similar comment in his article, "*Deprive them of their Pathos*": *Karl Barth and the Nazi Revolution Revisited* (2007). According to him, 'The sharp edge of Barth's theology, not least its so-called Christocentricism....are enough to make it controversial. Barth's response....was also a straightforward attack on the then dominant types of theology....and Barth's attack found something of a target in all of them, including theologies ostensibly quite close to Barth'. Also evident in this work is Rasmusson observation that 'Barth thinks that the church should ideologically starve the state' (Rasmusson 2007: 370, 371).

¹⁶⁰ An American Reformed theologian from Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, Douglas J. Schuurman, offers a critique of this Yoderian stance. Although his work, *Vocation, Christendom, and Public Life: A Reformed Assessment of Yoder's Anabaptist Critique of Christendom* only reflected more on Yoder's books, *The Royal*

corpus (body) of Christ is a community where in remembrance of Jesus' ethics, members are able to instruct one another. It is a community of moral discourse (Verhey 2001: 3-48). Within the Yoderian ethical vision and practice, the Church becomes the people who gather to do the will of God in Jesus Christ rather than a mere building. For Yoder, the credibility that matters is that the Gospel witness continues to evoke the same community-forming ethical reflection and practices (cf. Yoder 1997c: 219). His vision for 'peoplehood' is a minority ethical stance for social engagements.

Yoder's ethical vision also recognizes and emphasizes diversity (rather than uniformity) of human cultures. This approach further provides the Yoderian vision with a platform to classify and denounce monolithic cultural absolutism as a manifestation of 'principalities and powers' whose sovereignty must be broken and transformed to serve the lordship of Jesus Christ. Yoder's Christocentric vision draws strength from the historical origin and particularity of the Christian 'evangel' to argue that Christian social ethics may not only speak diverse languages, the visionary practice can also penetrate 'history and the soul through more than one door' because the believers are servants in the discerning community (Yoder 1996a: 76, 81; 1996b: 125, 135; 1992b: 297). His vision for social ethics also suggests a trans-community visionary project.

Thus, Yoder's visionary practice adopts a 'non-foundationalist' (or multidimensional) approach. It holds that there has to be concrete human experiences in the believers' description and practice of relationships. In the Yoderian understanding, it is within concrete social fabrics that human relationships are mediated through the practice of the jubilee as a communication of God's grace to humankind. Yoder argues that, to test, relive, and initiate the congruence of this Christological role is the historical task of the cross-shaped discerning community (or the church). Yoder's socio-ethical vision explains that the confessing people-of-God represent the renewed world on its way. This kind of unique ethics is not the popular way to administer the world. It is a mode of

Priesthood and The Priestly Kingdom, his submission can help the SCS to learn few things from the Yoderian multidimensional, occasional and contextual project. To quote him, 'Yoder is acutely aware of the need for creative fusions of Christian beliefs and practices with the cultural contexts in which the church finds itself...There will even be stronger pressures to privatize Christian faith, or to make idolatrous accommodations with the dominant public Powers. As this process continues, Christians have much to learn from Yoder. His....insistence that Christians not be become co-opted by those in power, and his vision of discipleship are all crucial for Christian reflection. But Christian vocation should include efforts to shape the broader society by intentional efforts to engage issues of common concern to public life, especially as these issues confront Christians in the callings in the broader world. This does not necessarily mean the church should try to Christianize the public order' (Schuurman 2007: 21, 22).

vulnerable but also provocative, creative presence within the world, through which Christ transforms culture from within (Yoder 1994d: 60-75; 1994f: 78-79; 1992b: 297; 1994e: 374). Yoder's vision for social ethics is tied to his Christology.

Consequently, Yoder also claims that the proclamation of the kingdom of God ought to replay its embodied presence as subordination to the ethical reflections and practices of the biblical Jesus Christ. Yoder's Christocentric ethical convictions underscore the believers' proclamation of the Kingdom as social ethics. Yoder would not regard it as a compromise of believers' commitment if the subordinate Christian community also becomes an instrument for serving and saving the larger culture. He affirms:

We know more fully from Jesus Christ...than other ways...in that the lordship of Christ is the center which must guide critical value choices, so that we may be called to subordinate or even to reject those values which contradict Jesus.
....[I]n the order of knowing and in the order of valuing, the priority of the faith does not exclude or deny everything else. Insights which are not contradictory to the truth of the Word incarnate are not denied but affirmed and subsumed within the confession of Christ...calls his disciples....this *is* exemplified by the analysis of“The Kingdom as Social Ethics”.

(Yoder 1984: 11-12 [Our italics])

For Yoder, the people of God in present history live from, and toward the promise of the salvation of the whole world.

Yoder's main theological convictions are rooted in his fundamental persuasion, that is, that the ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ provides a normative standard for Christian political activities in all age and cultures. Non-violent-resistance is central to his Christology while ecclesiology as ethics espouses his reconciliatory message of grace as a fount of flexible creativity. Yoder also demonstrates his Kingdom vision as a socially realizable order; it is also theological. He pleads for an ethics-demonstrating lifestyle, which does not only see itself as a sign and means but as an instrument to take society beyond its traditional ways. In this visionary project, Christians have much to do, with specific reference to the proper shape of ethical thinking, choosing, doing, and feeling. Yoder's ethical project is also an inclusive vision for restoring Christocentric ecclesial reflections and practices to the Church.

In other words, this study hopes to show that Yoder's ethical project can play a substantive role in checking the pervasive influence of the Enlightenment-based ethics in most contemporary

theologies. Its vision for social practice can offer valuable solutions to the subject-object dichotomy of the Enlightenment-based ethical projects. Yoder's ethical vision also reflects on Christocentric human responsibility as an inevitable and active participatory response to *God's self-initiated-and-sustained* call for, and continuing activities, in the divine reconciliatory program for society. Consequently, we reiterate Nation's view that Yoder's Mennonite heritage contributed much to shaping this progressive theologian:

Yoder continued and carried forward this creative reworking of his heritage... For although Yoder was a committed ecumenist, he was profoundly shaped by his Mennonite heritage. At least the way Yoder saw it, his broad Christian commitment grew from the Mennonite soil that nurtured him.... This Mennonite tradition communicated....the distinctive Mennonite convictions and practices that would always shape his life and thought.... As John Yoder saw it, the immediate tradition to which he was heir was also progressive and outward looking.

(Nation 2006: 29; 190)

Nation (2006: 1-29) also describes John Howard Yoder as a 'particular Mennonite with a Catholic vision'. Nation further sums up Yoder's life and intellectual activities in the title of his book, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions*.

Having outlined Yoder's major theological convictions as a Mennonite, we proceed to draw a brief comparison of his theological method with Barth's. Again, the purpose is not to do a detailed comparison of Barth and Yoder but to demonstrate the influence of Barth on Yoder. Such an exercise can assist us to investigate Yoder's orthodoxy in a fuller discussion of his Christology later in this chapter. Barth's theological method exerted a great influence on Yoder's life and theology and the Barthian influence can make Yoder's Christology more meaningful in the sordid context of the SCS.

2.2 Yoder and Karl Barth

In this segment, investigation into the areas of agreement and disagreement between Barth and Yoder can enrich our perspective on the extent of the Barthian influence on Yoder's Christology, ecclesiology, and social ethics. Yoder does not re-read Barth hagiographically (i.e. with saintly eyes) neither does he adopt Barth's theological approach without necessary criticisms. To pursue our investigation, we appeal to *Carter*¹⁶¹ (2001:61-88) who also provides a more comprehensive

¹⁶¹ Craig A. Carter is the Vice President and Academic Dean of Tyndale College in Toronto, Ontario, where he teaches theology and ethics. He is a Protestant who wrote his doctoral dissertation on Yoder under the

account of Yoder's diverse but logically consistent works. Nation (2006: 195-196) remarks that Carter 'used categories that...Yoder himself would have been willing to use' to describe the Yoderian project. Carter also engages with several of Yoder's outstanding theological conversation partners such as Niebuhr and Hans Frei. He has also interacted with the views of some of Yoder's fellow Anabaptist theologians in his critique. In our opinion, Carter has pointed out a remarkable methodological difference that marks a watershed between Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas, which requires more clarification. Consequently, a reconstructive critique of Carter's work can assist us to establish Yoder's orthodoxy as it relates to his Christocentric biblical realism and relevance to contemporary discussions on responsible Christian ethics. The critique can further strengthen the choice of Yoder's social ethics as a lens for *re-visioning* ecclesiology in the SCS.

2.2.1 Areas of Agreement and Similarity

Carter introduces eight key points of agreement on method between Yoder and Karl Barth, namely inspiration, natural theology, pacifism, doctrine and ethics, ethics as obedience, the church and the world, and the mission of the church. We shall consider each of them below.

supervision of Professor John Webster (a Systematic Theology professor at Toronto School of Theology but now at University of Washington). In the introduction to his book on Yoder, *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (2001), Carter remarks that Yoder has been grossly misunderstood as reducing Christology to ethics and spirituality to politics. Many people also argue that Yoder is sectarian and withdrawn from the society; hence, his work has no relevance to orthodoxy in contemporary theological reflections. Carter, therefore, proceeds to address the question of the orthodoxy and relevance of Yoder to the theological and ethical debate of the 21st century. He observes that Yoder is orthodox and he theologizes in a rational but not rationalistic manner. Yoder rejected the fundamentalist epistemology of the Enlightenment without compromising the truth of the Gospel. He insists that Yoder makes historic orthodoxy powerfully relevant for our day by his imaginative re-reading of the Bible and classical orthodoxy relevant from a non-establishment minority perspective. Carter also argues that one of Yoder's most important methodological contributions is to demonstrate why Jesus Christ, as normative for the moral posture of the Christian community, is the most honest alternative available to Christians. Carter further notes that Yoder unites his Anabaptist theological heritage with the theological method and major themes of Karl Barth's thoughts to create a distinctive Post-liberal alternative to Christian Realism, Liberation theology and privatized evangelical religion. He says of Yoder: 'He shows us how to remain faithful in a post-Constantinian and post-Enlightenment cultural situation in which Christians are no longer in control of most cultural institutions.' Further, 'He entered into significant dialogues with the evangelicals, Catholics, the World Council of Churches, Latin American Liberationists, conservative Calvinists and Jewish theologians, including such figures as Karl Barth, Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr, Paul Ramsey, Albert Outler, Jose Miguez, Richard Mouw, James Turner Johnson, Michael Walzer, and Rabbi Steven S. Schwarzschild'. Carter also claims that, 'the charges of withdrawal and irrelevance which are often made against believers' church tradition, are not well founded, at least as far as Yoder's ecclesiology is concerned' (Carter 2001: 16, 21, 223).

a) Inspiration: Carter observes that like Barth, Yoder reads the Bible as a narrative that centres on Jesus Christ. Yoder rejects the scholastic doctrines of verbal inspiration and inerrancy as well as humanism. Carter thus appeals to Biggar to imply that Yoder, like Barth, interprets the Bible from the work of God in Jesus Christ as it was broadly conceived by classical orthodoxy (Carter 2001: 61-63). There is no significant break in the history of salvation. The Bible as the inspired Word of God is a unity of unchangeable narrative stories, which finds fulfilment in Jesus Christ, in various ways, times and spaces (cf. Yoder 1994a: 4, 87; cf. 1997a: 94-96; 1984: 9; Mouw & Yoder 1989: 130, 132-133). In a similar way, Smit describes the Bible as an inspired library, or book of canonical books that shows a wonderful harmony from beginning to the end. The Bible also touches us, changes us, inspires us, moves us, and saves us (Smit 1998a: 277-280; 1998b: 314). The Bible coheres and springs from the Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate, whose life and works (Christology) reveal God to all creation, in many concrete ways (cf. John 1: 1-14).

b) Christology: Carter remarks that like Barth's, Yoder's biblical realism leads him to adopt a Christology, which rejects liberal views of Jesus. Such liberal views tend to project Jesus as less divine. Carter also distances Yoder from Hauerwas' Christology, and argues that Barth would have found Yoder's biblical realism to be quite compatible to his own approach. Yoder clarifies his position in such a way that an 'antirealist reading of Hauerwas may not be imposed on' him. Thus, Yoder's realism places on him the responsibility to affirm the priority of the biblical story over all other narratives (cf. Carter 2001: 64-70). Yoder does not emphasize an ethics of virtue; he is hesitant to ask believers to imitate Jesus Christ.

In this line of argument, we reckon that Vosloo's (2004: 83-86) contention that an ethics of imitation fails to take the discontinuity between God's identity and our identities seriously, might receive Yoder's acknowledgement.¹⁶² His view also seems to strengthen Carter's charge against Hauerwas. Carter accuses Hauerwas of projecting what is reminiscent of classical liberalism in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, as Yoder's position. Carter argues that in this particular work, Hauerwas contrasts Yoder's Christological ontology with a concern for the ethical implication, which would 'tend to make Jesus' life almost accidental to what is assumed to be a more profound theological point' (Hauerwas 1983: 73). Carter maintains that Yoder actually believes

¹⁶² Vosloo even stresses that such a plea for the moral importance of the identity of the moral agent enhances a broader understanding of ethics. Emphasis on the importance of the character of the moral agent also creates more space for ethics to integrate imagination more fully into human understanding of the moral life. This plea for the moral importance of imagination, among other things, has the potential to link in a more constructive way, the concepts of goodness and beauty, or ethics and aesthetics to the moral agency (Vosloo 2004: 83-84).

that God is more real than anything else. God as revealed in Jesus Christ is also in history as its author, sustainer and consummation. The Christ-event is an eternal project, as the Bible demonstrates, particularly, in Paul's epistles to the Romans, and to the Ephesian Christians. For Yoder, the narrative of God's action in Scripture is authoritative; it describes the real world in terms of which humanity understands itself. Given this position, we reason that Carter introduces a 'seeming' Christological point of departure between Yoder (and Barth) and Hauerwas' approach to biblical realism. This view raises some questions, namely: Does such a difference actually exist? If the answer is in the affirmative, will such a position make a significant contribution to the vision of this study, particularly, as it relates to its investigation on the ecclesiological identity of the SCS?

The next chapter will examine Carter's charge by focusing on its envisaged significance to the Christian identity crisis within the context of the SCS. It might shed more light on the ambivalent ecclesiological identity and theological mission ethics of the SCS. However, we do note that a simple description of Yoder's work as, 'standing "against the nations,"' (Yoder 1997b: 6) is a mistake. Yoder is *for the nations*.¹⁶³ He even describes *The Peaceable Kingdom* 'as selective and... idiosyncratic,'¹⁶⁴ that is, like Hauerwas' earlier writings (Yoder 1997b: 9, note 24). Thus, Yoder might find more sense in Bediako's lived *Christology*. In Bediako's Christological vision, Africa's experience of Christ as a unique human experience can provide a way forward for a contemporary (Bible-based) proclamation of Jesus Christ in the world. It will project contextuality and inclusivity as indispensable identities of a true *glocalized* engagement in the theological mission enterprises of the church. Yoder is not confrontational but dialogical

¹⁶³ For instance, the Yoderian project argues that the church and its embodied witness exist as Good News for the nations. The Church draws resources from its environment to tell the world what it does not know (cf. Yoder 1997b, 1994e). Nonetheless, the Yoderian Church would not impose the Good News on its environment. According to Yoder, 'What accredits news as "good" is that it enables or even commands a wholeness or fullness, a validation or a flourishing, not actualized in its absence. It cannot be imposed by authority, or coercively. It is rendered null when assent is imposed' (Yoder 1992b: 292). The news bearer entering the scene submits to the language of the host culture. Readiness to bear their hostility is part of the message.

¹⁶⁴ Hauerwas seems to concede to this point in the Foreword to the book, *Beyond Secular Reason: The Relationship between Religion and Ethics in the Work of Stanley Hauerwas* (2000). His appraisal of this book written by a Ugandan Roman Catholic Priest, Emmanuel Katongole tends to accede to the view that some of his (Hauerwas) works are idiosyncratic. According to him, '...Reverend Katongole is a philosopher; he provides a framework that makes how I do theology less idiosyncratic' (Katongole 2000: vii). In his own book, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy and Postmodernism* (2000), Hauerwas grants insight into the peculiarity of his mind or habit: 'In many ways my reading remains still far too laden with theory, which always threatens to become a substitute for the church rather than an enhancement of ecclesial practice' (Hauerwas 2000: 136).

in his approach and can be said to hold an *incarnated Christology*,¹⁶⁵ which he also describes as *jesuological* (1997a: 241; 1997b: 217). Moreover, Yoder's Christocentric (visionary) practices are restorative. He calls on believers to restore and adopt an embodied Christocentric Kingdom ethics as a true demonstration of 'Christian unity from below' (Yoder 2000).¹⁶⁶

c) Natural Theology: Carter recaptures (Barth and) Yoder's focus on the particular narrative of Jesus Christ as the starting point of all theological reflections. As Carter reminisces, the approach offers Barth and Yoder a ground for rejecting natural theology, apologetics and systematic theology. Carter also explains that Yoder rejected systematic theology because it reflects a system of thought that is based on general first principles. Yoder, like Barth, reasons that natural theology presents humanity with the right to set the terms under which God can be recognized. Carter agrees implicitly with the duo that accepting natural theology is only being *Constantinian* i.e., compromising the lordship of Jesus Christ. Given such an understanding, this study also contends that the reality of the incarnation relativizes every other thing 'because everything is affected by the reality of God become flesh' (Carter 2001: 70-74). 'Theology without footnotes' is also a valid basis for adequate Christian theological reflections.¹⁶⁷

Theology without footnotes (or theology of testimony) makes more meaning of a great and acting God (or Immanuel) in Africa, than a high and lifted, holy and transcendent God, in heaven. Natural phenomena such as the Ikogosi warm and cold spring or the Victoria Falls reveal God's miracles in nature. Theology without footnotes also challenges Africans to embody

¹⁶⁵ This term is our conception based on Yoder's demonstration of the lessons that can be learnt from the historical Christ-event in his works. Incarnated Christology or 'ecumenical Christology' (cf. Van Engen 1996: 185) is not too cosmic that it only demeans transformation and its possibilities, but its continuities. Incarnated Christology does not assume or demonstrate that Christ is the truth means that no truths can be found outside Christ. Rather, it holds that all such truths are fragmentary and broken unless they become integrated in Him as the centre. One can argue that this understanding has inspired the position of Hauerwas and Sider on Yoder's orthodoxy: 'Yoder helps us to see that Christians become creedal because of the kind of life they must lead to be faithful disciples of Jesus. The early "Christologies" developed in the New Testament were expressions required when followers of Jesus confronted with challenges of making their way of life, a way shaped by following Jesus' teaching, intelligible in contexts that had no way of imagining how God could be found in this Galilean' (Yoder 2002: 16). In Bediako's words, they present it as a 'lived Christology'. Incarnated (or lived) Christology demonstrates that Christ is the image of God, by whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together (Col 1: 15-20). It is endued and sustained by the Holy Spirit, but lived out in faithfulness to the Gospel, and within the context of community at all times and spaces. Incarnated Christology demonstrates the inevitability of Christ as centre, without whom, *things will fall apart* and we will *no longer* be *at ease*. This can also explain Yoder's reference to it as 'evangelical Christology' (Yoder 1984: 61). Yoder reminds humanity that everything is systematized in Jesus Christ.

¹⁶⁶ *Christian Unity from Below* is the title of Yoder's last published article before his death. This work will draw resources from this essay. Although its publication came after the author's death, Yoder completed and updated it for eventual publication in January 1998 but he died in December 1997.

¹⁶⁷ They do not thrive in what Yoder describes as reflexive solipsism. In the Yoderian understanding, reflexive solipsism is an ethical approach, which assumes that the *other* in a multicultural setting is self-contained and only makes sense to her/himself without also recognizing truth from others (Yoder 1997a: 16-17).

the ethos of 'fear and trembling' (cf. Philp 2: 12) while approaching the sovereign God. It creates some sense of awe and reverence in the life of its admirers, for the initiator, sustainer and consummation of such natural phenomena. Thus, many Africans draw from God's grace in nature to embody, celebrate, and communicate the message of Scripture in ways that are more meaningful. Africans also glorify God in Jesus Christ, not *in* nature (cf. Mbiti 2003, 1975a, 1975b, 1969; Turaki 2006a, 2006b, 1996; Okure 2003, 2002, 1993; Okorochoa 1992; Ukpong 1999b; Bediako 2005, 1992:375; Udoh 1988). In other words, theology without footnotes is a valid theological approach. Nevertheless, it does not offer humanity with a clear and meaningful ethics to appropriate God's gracious work of salvation as in Jesus Christ.

It is significant also to note Yoder's remark that biblical faith must not overlook or downplay the challenges of other religions (including African). Christianity as a biblical faith must engage them (perhaps) in continuing and peaceful transformational dialogues in order to celebrate diversity as a gracious divine endowment (cf. Yoder 1996b: 136-138).

As earlier noted, one can argue that systematic theology also seeks to fit theological postulations into an encompassing and valid framework of biblical truth. Systematic theology even presents Christian theology as committed (human) attempts to understand the act of faith itself. It strives to bring the various truths apprehended by faith and repentance into some kind of coherent, consistent whole, which is modelled after Jesus Christ. It is interesting that Carter also describes Yoder as 'a very logical and systematic thinker' (Carter 2001: 15). Everything Yoder argues, he systematizes in Jesus Christ (cf. Yoder 1994d: 141).

d) Pacifism: Carter (2001: 74-79) observes that Yoder concentrates on the particular narrative history of Jesus Christ, and this makes him to emphasize that Christocentric pacifism is decisive for Christian discipleship and ethics. Carter is not quick to link Yoder's conclusion on pacifism to Barth's. Additionally, Carter reason that there is an incomplete pacifist stance as well as non-advocacy for practical pacifism in Barth's writings. However, Carter argues that developments in Barth's thoughts express the significance of pacifism for Christian discipleship and ethics. He claims that the differing conclusions (of Yoder and Barth) on the imagination of possible exceptions to Christian pacifism do not demean the essential similarity of their theological methods. Yoder and Barth grounded their pacifism in the person of Jesus Christ. Given this Christocentric submission, it becomes more convincing that the views of Conradie (2004:

253)¹⁶⁸ and Koopman (2003: 67) could have appealed to Yoder. Both theologians agree that acknowledging human limitations while addressing contextual challenges can offer Christian theology an opportunity for renewal and transformation. Yoder also emphasizes the priority of contexts in ethical reflection and practices in his pursuit of non-methodological, unequivocally non-violent resistant pacifism. Consequently, this study reasons that Yoder might restate his views on non-violent resistant pacifism, in contemporary Sudan and Nigeria, for instance.¹⁶⁹ Yoder often treats issues based on their contextual merits; his vision for a *glocalized* doctrinal and ethical reflections and practices respects contextual realities (cf. Yoder 1996a: 32, 1996b: 136).

e) Doctrine and Ethics: Carter (2001: 79-80) conceives Yoder's identification of doctrine and ethics as two sides of the same coin and 'simply the implementation of Barth's method'. For Barth, dogmatics is ethics and ethics is dogmatics. Thus, Barth and Yoder reject natural theology (perhaps, a western concept) as basic for Christian ethics. Their views are based on the ground that ethics is Christological because Jesus Christ is grace incarnate. In their perspective, theological ethics bespeaks of grace in which obedience, right action as well as the realization of the good become obedience to the revelation of God's grace. For Yoder and Barth, Christian ethics is the proper response of the Christian to the doctrine of God's grace revealed in the incarnation. With this strong Christological stance, Carter's view tends to support Uka's (1998: 171) emphasis that the politics of Jesus needs to be revisited by his present-day followers (we shall discuss Uka's view in the next section). Theology and ethics are inseparable. Yoder's strong stance on the merits and meaning of the Christ-event in the ethical proclamation of Christ-believers makes Smit's (2005c: 364) view on Reformed theology and ethics most meaningful to Yoder (and Barth). Smit remarks that the emphasis by Calvin (on life and ethics as integral to faith) interested Barth very much in the 1920s. The Reformed confession also involves the issue

¹⁶⁸ Yoder would have called Conrade's attention to the secularization thesis he may have unconsciously espoused in the submission (Conradie 2004: 267), '...even though we know quite well that God is nowhere up in the sky'. God is also in the sky and sovereignly directs all activities of Creation to serve his purpose in Jesus Christ. Yoder would not compromise the Gospel.

¹⁶⁹ Nigeria and Sudan are examples of African countries where Muslim hostility and violence to people of other faith, especially the Christian faith, are most prevalent, unimaginable and intolerant. For instance, there was suspicion that the late first Vice-president of Sudan, John Garang (from the Christian dominated South) was 'assassinated by the northern Islamist government in Khartoum led by Sudanese President Omar Hassan Ahmed el-Bashir' (Kayode Soyinka 2005:5; cf. Wakabi 2005). In the case of Nigeria, a mere Danish cartoonist's response in an 'interview with a British newspaper' (in Europe – to defend the right for a free press) resulted in the burning of churches and destruction of lives and properties in Borno and Katsina States by militant Muslims. The Islamic faith provided the 'spiritual ammunition' for terrorism (Hill & Asthana 2006). However, this study notes that although these hostilities are perpetrated by some Muslims, violence may not necessarily be the position of Islam.

of Christian ethics as believers' conscious obedience to Jesus Christ, when properly appropriated.

f) Ethics as Obedience: Carter (2001: 80-81) consents to the view that Yoder's concept of ethics as obedience reflects Barth's in many ways. Yoder and Barth do not pay much attention to imaginary (or speculated) situations or discussions on virtues, in their theological reflections. Rather, both theologians concentrate on the 'theological description of the Christ, history, and the church'. Thus, Carter notes that Yoder's Barthian concepts of ethics as obedience to the command of God as well as his Barthian understanding of the commandment of God as grace are keys to Yoder's whole approach to social ethics. This submission raises the question of whether Carter considers Huebner's (2000: 488) support of Milbank's stance that Barth's ethics is over determined by the notion of command. It also raises the question of whether Carter's submission can exonerate Yoder's concept of 'ethics as obedience' from this charge.¹⁷⁰

g) The Church and the World: In Carter's opinion (2001: 81-83), Yoder's distinction of a church-world relationship is crucial to social ethics. It builds on, and extends Barth's distinction between the Christian community and the civil community. Barth's *True Church Law* highlights that Christian ethics is for Christians. Christians address the world with an indirectness, which differs from God's imperative to the Christian community, which the church obeys. Carter shows that Barth and Yoder reflect on this distinction as fundamental to the method of doing social ethics. In addition, Carter explains that Yoder's distinction respects the rights of some

¹⁷⁰ In this critique, Huebner (2000: 488) observes that Milbank's objection against Barth still stands. Barth's position is also weakened by the failure 'to accord the church substantial role in moral formation' in his theology. Huebner also acknowledges that Milbank's theology is also problematic; i.e., to the extent that it is based on a version of conceptual essentialism, which tends towards abstraction. It makes conceptual matters more important than the actual church practices that they are supposed to explain. However, Huebner remarks that, for Yoder, Christology is unintelligible apart from the concrete practices of the Church. Huebner also argues that Yoder goes much farther than Barth and Milbank to task the church with concrete ethical responsibilities. In his recent book, *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (2006), Huebner concludes his argument thus: 'The promise of Yoder's works by contrast is that he offers a more complete attempt to return theology to its proper context in the church as the very body of Christ and thereby move it beyond theory' (Huebner 2006: 95).

This study, therefore, argues that Huebner's submission sounds justifiable. Yoder argues that the Church is a political society whose biblical practice of 'diversities of ministries' offers the larger society a more insightful recognition and interpretation of human dignity. Yoder's approach also draws its model from the vulnerable Jesus, the Lamb who takes away the world's sin' and whose suffering enables 'committed witnesses to persevere beyond repressive tolerance.' Eschatology is the trial balance for its believers' faithfulness to the teachings of Jesus Christ (1997a: 18; 1997c: 217, 222; 1994d: 93-111). Thus, this study reasons that Huebner's submission initiates an opening for aligning Koopman's theological anthropology of vulnerability, relationality and (inter)dependence that is *sustained by hope* with Yoder's *Eschatology* as Carter (2001: 137-154) presents it. Yoder argues that the absolute agape, which lets itself be crucified, is not foolishness and weakness but the wisdom and power of God (I Cor. 1: 18; 24-25) to the Church within the world.

people to refuse to believe the Gospel. Thus, Carter's submission that Yoder went further than Barth in unpacking the implications of the church-world distinction for social ethics tends to nuance Cartwright's (1998) view.¹⁷¹

Yoder's vision of unlimited catholicity emphasizes that the Church's mission must purge and renew authentic human interest and values of the whole society well beyond the bounds of explicitly known and confessed faith. Yoder's visionary approach seeks to demonstrate the distinctive faithfulness of the Church to the mission of its primal calling; i.e., to embody, translate and communicate the politics of Jesus Christ in the world (cf. Yoder 1984: 4-11; 1997a: 94-95; 1994e: 300-320).

h) The Mission of the Church: Carter (2001: 82-83) reflects on Yoder's view of the Church's mission (that is, as witness of Jesus Christ) as a prototype of the Barthian stance. Barth stresses that the Christian community is sent into the world and it exists for the world but is charged with a task - *to bear witness to Jesus Christ by being itself*. Carter also points out that Yoder's entire concept of social ethics is built on the premise that Jesus calls the Christian community into being that it might be a continuing witness to him on earth. For Yoder (1997a: 8-28), the Church has a task in history - to embody the witness of Christ's lordship over the Powers. The church is 'a foretaste of God's loving triumph on the cross' as well as a 'foretaste of His ultimate loving triumph in His Kingdom'. Yoder insists that for such witness to be clear, the church has to exist as a community. Thus, Carter appeals to their common views to submit that Barth and Yoder are in agreement with each other.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Cartwright recaptures Yoder's witness as one, which offers an emphasis on the catholicity of the Gospel in which Christian evangelization receives the capacity to meet new worlds. Yoder underscores it as incumbent on a community whose vocation is to be a *polis* (whose life under the rule of God is visible in space and time) that would embody the Gospel that is meant for all nations. Cartwright submits that such an evangelical stance also informs Yoder's most matured way of reading the Bible, as it is expressed in *But We Do See Jesus*. This study considers that such a submission will not belittle Elna Mouton's (1997: 254) view that Christians' perspective of reconciliation in South Africa needs to listen to the stories of all peoples, especially those who were disregarded in the past. However, Cartwright's submission on Yoder might lend more credence to Tutu's position that in Jesus Christ, the whole world saw a veritable miracle unfold before its eyes in the emerging new South Africa.

¹⁷² Nevertheless, the position of Long (2001) and Huebner (2000: 481) tends to subvert Carter's view of their stance on the mission of the Church. Huebner has also charged Barth with generalized ethics, and a lack of ecclesiology. Long observes that Barth did not finally give Christians sufficient alternatives to check Kant's ethical defence of religion. This poses danger to theology. Barth's 'radical move to make dogmatics ethics,' which refuses to think in terms of a 'both/and' or an 'either/or' approach did not also explain how the Church can embody the act of God's grace. Long argues that, paradoxically, Barth has appealed to miracle in a manner which can be misread as perpetuating the Kantian debt. In his critique, Long also appeals to the ambivalent positions of public theologians such as Max Stackhouse and Ronald Thiemann, to argue that Barth's approach further subordinates theology to ethics. With this ambivalence, theology becomes subservient to ethics thereby stripping the Church of its status as the bearer of history. Thus, Long submits that humanity should look at Yoder's (as well as Stanley Hauerwas and Oliver O'Donovan's) reflections on Christ for a substantive vision

Having analyzed the areas of agreement between the Yoderian and the Barthian methodologies, in the next paragraph, we shall consider the areas of disagreement as identified by Carter.

2.2.1 Areas of Disagreement

As noted above, Yoder does not re-read Barth hagiographically. He does not adopt the Barthian narrative theological approach without necessary criticisms. He re-interprets and appropriates the Barthian Christological vision from a Diaspora perspective (cf. Rasmusson 2005). Thus, Carter (2001: 83-88) identifies their areas of disagreement since Barth's belief that the 'exceptional case' or *Grenzfall* (in suicide, abortion, self-defense, capital punishment and war) is also necessary for Christian ethics. Carter also outlines possible reasons for Barth's position to include:

- the concern not to have a system of casuistry that individuals can manipulate as a way of avoiding obedience thus making themselves sovereign rather than God;
- casuistry's temptation to void God's commandment rather than upholding it as a concrete, definite and personal address of the living God to the individual;
- the point that casuistry destroys freedom of obedience by intervening between God's command and the individual called to obey God.

of theological politics (Long 2001: 61-104). For Yoder, the Christian ministry of remembrance is a Christological task that seeks to retrace the sameness of Jesus Christ across the generations (Yoder 1997c). However, Kroeker (2004: 58), like Zimbelman (1992: 383-384), argues that Yoder so links the mission of the Church to its eschatological vision that it precludes any form of religious coercion. Kroeker charges Yoder with less attention to inner formation of the wills and minds of Christian witnesses in their contextual exercise of political discernment. In his view, Yoder's voluntariness lacks attention to the complex character and transformation of the human *voluntas*. Yoder's ecumenical approach to theological politics requires further development as an emerging political discernment. It seeks to restore the connections between various human communities and cultures, in a reconciling, life-giving mutuality, over against the violent destructiveness of imperialism. The Yoderian vision resists violence, imperialism and complacency, among other social evils. Significantly, Kroeker (2005) also appeals to Coles' (2002) view to appraise Yoder's 'non-summing practice' as 'wild patience that can take any particular forms needed for vulnerable witnessing, discernment and participation in the mysterious judgment and ways'. As 'unanticipated breaking-forth' of divine wisdom, it 'frees the Church from "compulsiveness of purpose" that understands political ethics as "moving history in the right direction"'. Rasmusson (2005) seems to reflect on the Yoderian approach in a more appreciable way. In Rasmusson's view, Yoder sought to insert much of Barth's theology into the Diaspora theology and develop it in a fruitful way. Thus, Rasmusson analyzes the Yoderian practice as 'unassuming' and 'sharing space with others'. Yoder also re-presents collective responsibility as a distinctive feature of the presence and power of Christian revolutionary ethics (cf. Yoder 1997b: 97-161; 1984). From the foregoing, this research holds that Rasmusson also burrows a tunnel for Smit's *ecumenical theology*, which adopts and projects an inclusive as well as unassuming stance for its *reformable* Reformed heritage into Yoder's theology (in active ecumenical participation); as this study hopes to show.

Carter deciphers a thin but perceptible line between casuistry and non-casuistry in Barth's thoughts. In his view, Barth also 'engaged in a form of casuistry'. Barth discusses specifics (or special ethics) as 'instructional preparation for the ethical event'.

Consequently, Carter justifies Yoder's criticisms of Barth's position as being weak and grounded in common sense or natural theology. Carter also concedes Barth's ambivalent stance on pacifism to be inconsistent with his (Barth's) 'rejection of the identification of the church with the state' in the ideology of Christendom. Carter's sweeping predilection towards Yoder's position on this issue has a tendency to elicit certain questions, especially on 'Christian discipleship,' which serves as the backbone of Yoder's theology. Moreover, one can argue that Carter's position tends to subvert the popular view that Yoder is convinced that Christian discipleship is a continuing learning process. Yoder's project recognizes human vulnerability in its pursuit of Christ's historical identity. Carter's submission also contradicts his own position that Yoder simply refuses to accept that the Reformation is over (Carter 2001: 190). Yoder is open to the continuing reformation of the Church and Christian practices from a Christological perspective. Thus, Barth and Yoder share a related stance in rejecting the church-world relationship as espoused in the ideology of Christendom.¹⁷³

Yoder and Barth – as well as some African theologians such as Koopman (2006b) and Turaki (2006b: 15-25) – present the cross of Jesus Christ as the primary Christian symbol of vulnerability. The cross stands as the biggest criticism of, and protest against all forms of evil and injustice in the world. These theologians affirm that God is a God of justice, 'who is in a special way the God of the poor and wronged, the broken and the vulnerable' (Koopman 2006b: 11).

Having surveyed the major similarities and dissimilarities in the theological convictions of both Yoder and Barth, we shall make further observations on Carter before concluding the discussion on Yoder's intellectual biography.

¹⁷³ A South African Methodist theologian, Wessel Bentley presents Barth's Church-State relationship stance as one that constitutes a dynamic relationship, which can assist Christians to realize the vision of the Church in society. Bentley (2006) also opines that, in Barth, the church's mission is to remind the State that God permits its authority. As a theologian of global repute, Barth persuades the Church not to abdicate its responsibility to adjudge the unfaithfulness of the State in exercising its delegated power (statecraft) in accordance with what the Church believes to be *the Will of God*. As a corollary, Bentley remarks that in Barth, the Church is not powerless, but assumes a better way for humanity to respond to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, i.e., the way of the cross (or vulnerability). In other words, he argues that Barth, like Yoder, does not only make the mission of the Church vitally powerful again, both theologians also place the mission of the church under the scrutiny of the Spirit.

2.2.3 Observation

In what follows, we seek to strengthen our prophetic critique of Carter's attempt to substantiate Yoder's orthodoxy by relating it to the Barthian approach.

This study argues that credit should also be given to Carter for devoting the fourth chapter of his work to affirm the similar views of Yoder and Barth on the Creed. Carter regards Yoder's Christology as *solid* or *classically* orthodox. He argues that Yoder is not a theological or ethical relativist as many critics who rarely engage in meaningful interaction with his (Yoder's) works often dismiss him to be. Yoder accepts the doctrine of the incarnation as that one particular, historical event, in all its historical particularity. Yoder reflects on the incarnation as a revelation of the Creator God. To buttress his point, Carter notes that Yoder follows the thread of doctrinal development through the first four centuries to Nicea. Yoder continues his survey of the development of Christology up to Chalcedon. Yoder also shows that, having affirmed the unity of Jesus and the Father, the Church then had the problem of how to relate the Son of God to the man Jesus. Carter explains that Yoder holds the Athanasian view of the Trinity as biblical, and the Arian as fitting best with Constantinianism. Yoder's reading shows that the Nicean and Chalcedonian creeds protect the biblical proclamation about Jesus (expressed mostly in narrative form in Scripture), by means of Greek thought (cf. Carter 2001: 121-122). Yoder's biblical realism prefers contextuality of biblical and practice-based church traditions to intellectualistic, universalistic, and abstracted traditions (cf. Yoder 1996a, 1996b, 1994a, 1994f, etc).¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Carter also contrasts Yoder's biblical realism with an analysis of the Yoderian debate with H.R. Niebuhr over the doctrine of the Trinity. The exercise unveils solid textual evidence in Yoder's writings, which nuances the Yoderian interpretation of the Christ-event as a solid orthodox Christology. This evidence reveals Yoder's Christocentric Trinitarianism as Barthian. Carter further re-emphasizes that, like Barth, Yoder understands the human action of the disciple to correspond to the divine action in Jesus Christ. The model of the human Jesus enables and elicits a response from the disciple. Such a Barthian response exists as a continuing project, which must also seek to conform to the identity and spirituality of Jesus. Yoder's approach would not permit believers to imitate Jesus or acclaim themselves as super human beings. The Yoderian Christology simply calls on believers to live their Christocentric and cross-shaped daily lives as normal human beings. This scandalous Christology is neither esoteric nor authority assuming. Yoder makes it clear that the Christ-event and its merits for humanity are not difficult to understand. He presents its practice as a simple, generally accessible and (apparently) dogmatically naïve approach (cf. Yoder 1997d). Yoder's Christology seeks to inspire its practitioners to envision and live out their normal daily lives as witnesses of the biblical Jesus. The Yoderian visionary practice strives to implement the Barthian vision as orthodox Christology of the New Testament expressed in the Creeds. Such an orthodox stance constitutes the foundation for their (Yoder and Barth's) view that the humanity of the politically relevant Jesus is normative for his disciples' ethical reflection and practices. In other words, Carter seeks to justify his position that *Christology is the source and result of Yoder's social ethic*. Yoder's ultimate point of reference is the person and Gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. Rasmusson 2005).

However, Carter overlooks the divergence in Yoder and Barth's concept, interpretation and approach to the question of the otherness in the *other*, which is a burning issue in the on-going ecumenical conversation on a responsible theology in a pluralistic world. A Reformed Theologian from the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Nkhoma Synod in Malawi, Wallace Ezra Chikakuda (1994) points out in a significant way, what can be regarded as Barth's violent reaction to the *differently other*. Chikakuda's view seems to lend credence to our contention that the Yoderian non-violent resistance approach is a more meaningful social ethics for the SCS. Yoder's non-violent resistant ethics embodies (generous) hospitality, particularly, towards the *differently other*. Perhaps Emmanuel Levinas' work, *On-Thinking-of-the-Other Entre Nous* (Levinas 1998) can clarify our position.

With Levinas stance on existing for the *other*,¹⁷⁵ this study recognizes Chikakuda's observation as an aspect of a 'principled neglect and dismissal of the other' in Barth. Chikakuda observes that divergent views on natural theology led to a radical break in Barth's relationship with his friends and theological partners, especially Emil Brunner. Brunner's position (that natural theology was significant for ethical, dogmatic, ecclesiastical and evangelistic issues) angered Barth who reacted with an emphatic 'No' (Chikakuda 1994: 20-23). According to Chikakuda, 'One of the painful changes which Barth experienced during this period was the loss of his theological colleagues, friends and co-workers such as F. Gorgaten, G. Merz, E. Brunner and others. He lost them not by death, but because they developed their own theological thinking and pursued it' (Chikakuda 1994: 23). This African scholar attributes Barth's angry reaction to Brunner's increasing interest in natural theology, which Barth adamantly opposed. Barth dismisses natural theology as idolatrous. In the Barthian perspective, natural theology is simply a deification of reason.

¹⁷⁵ Levinas (in this work) relates ethics to the philosophical tradition of the West without rejecting the place of reason. He acknowledges that *being* is not only a process and event but also an adventure that is vulnerable to indifference to the *other*. Being is at first preoccupied with itself as an end. From this backdrop, Levinas argues that the selfish ideological *survival instinct* of the self is the origin of all violence; it is often paranoid. Survivalism hardly reflects more on the fate of the other. Thus, Levinas reflects on the *devoting-of-oneself-to-the-other* or pre-occupation with the other, even to the point of dying for her/him as responsibility for the *other*, which shatters indifference. Levinas identifies such shattering of indifference, that is, the possibility of *one-for-the-other*, as constitutive of an ethical event. Levinas further underscores it as a 'vocation of *existing-for-the-other* that is stronger than death' when human existence interrupts and goes beyond the self. Given his view on the *other*, this research considers Levinas' stance as a justification for our assumption on Barth.

This study reiterates its view that theology without footnotes is also a valid way of affirming the sovereignty of God in many African cosmologies. Such natural phenomena as the Ikogosi warm and cold spring as well as the Victoria Falls, among others, also inspire Africans to reflect and worship the Sovereign God. Based on this seeming paranoid stance of Barth, is not possible to argue that he (Barth) certainly did not escape the *finality and authority-assuming* influence of *the self-preoccupied and imposing* Enlightenment theological ethics? Does Chikakuda's observation not highlight such modern influence as the source and host to 'principled neglect and dismissal of the other' in ethical witness?

Chikakuda seems to vindicate Vosloo's (2004; 1997) observation that modern ethical theory neglects virtue. He also tends to support Vosloo's plea for constructive and responsible Christian ethics of virtue for our contemporary society. Unwholesome adaptation to identity can easily become a way of celebrating masked conservatism that is linked with the inability to face change. Vosloo opines that what is needed is emphasis on human identity, which can show a meaningful openness to the *other*, and *otherness*. He identifies one of the challenges facing our generation as the challenge of facing the stranger, strangeness and even estrangement. Vosloo stresses that such openness invites humanity especially Christians, to break free from their enclosed (insulated and isolated) identity. Altruistic spirituality teaches and initiates humankind into welcoming the *other* in her/his *otherness*.

From Vosloo's submission, we see a more responsible ethical approach in welcoming and witnessing to the *other* than in the principled neglect and dismissal of such differently *other*. Although this study will discuss Yoder's approach to the *other* later, we opine (here) that Yoder would have continued to esteem and dialogue with Brunner as a *partner-in-progress with a freedom and right to choose*, rather than Barth's *emphatic* (or paranoid) refusal. The Yoderian approach offers sustained listening ears as well as suffering presence to the *other*. With its identity as an enduring vision, the Yoderian approach seeks to transform disagreements into friendship, and hostility into hospitality. Thus, we reckon on the Yoderian ethics as a more meaningful approach to win the *other* especially, the outsider, for Jesus Christ. As a point of reference, Yoder's evangelistic approach to Richard Mouw and Stanley Hauerwas, among others, attracted them over to his theological approach Cartwright (1998: 2). More importantly, Yoder also describes the calling to witness to the *other* as a constitutive component of the self-definition of Christianity since Pentecost (Yoder 1996b: 138).

Given that we have offered a critique on Carter's comparism of Yoder with Karl Barth, what lessons can we learn from Yoder's intellectual biography? Again, what contributions can such inferences make to justify our confidence that Yoder's Christocentric vision for social ethics can offer the SCS a sustainable and more meaningful device to *re-vision* its distorted ecclesiology?

Yoder's progressive life and intellectual activities as a Mennonite affirm an African rhetorical philosophy for communal spirituality: *that to be is to belong; and to belong involves active participation in society. Life is about influencing and being influenced by others.* Yoder's unique life and intellectual activities arise from his fundamental conviction. In his perspective, the biblical Jesus Christ is the real and fulfilling paradigm for Christ-believers' political involvements for all time and space. Yoder envisions this progressive life and thoughts from the biblical Jesus Christ. This (peculiar) progressive spirituality calls Christians to repentance from stereotyping the culturally, or differently *other*. His '*copulative and*' theology, *inter alia*, seeks to transform prescriptive and descriptive theologies to *demonstrative* (or incarnated) theologies. In Yoder's vision, theology and ethics are inseparable. Yoder emphasizes Christian discipleship, which seeks human welfare in its active and responsible participation in community building, social transformation and development of society.

Consequently, the following questions come to mind: Could these factors combine to make Yoder's vision plausible and feasible in the on-going ecumenical conversation on responsible theology for our contemporary pluralistic world? Would their unity not justify our choice of his vision for social ethics as a sustainable and more responsible approach for the theological mission ethics of the SCS?

Yoder also demonstrates his Kingdom vision as a socially realizable order as it is theological. He espouses a hermeneutics of 'peoplehood,' in a way that Smit (2003b) describes as ecumenical hermeneutics.¹⁷⁶ Yoder reckons on human responsibility as inevitable and active participatory response to *God's self-initiated-and-sustained* call for, and continuing activities, in the divine reconciliatory program for society. Yoder pleads for a voluntary minority vision of inclusive theology, which can offer valuable solutions to the subject-object dichotomy of the

¹⁷⁶ We will return to explain this concept of ecumenical hermeneutics in another section of this study.

Enlightenment-based ethical visions that are pervasive in most contemporary theologies. Yoder's vision is not utopian. It signifies a Christocentric biblical realism whose Kingdom vision seeks to re-enliven Jeremiah for our generation.¹⁷⁷ Yoder craves for a minority identity and spirituality in contemporary Christian approach to community building, social transformation and development. His vision, particularly, his restorative approach, is tailored towards a realization of a non-violent resistant ethical witness of (Christocentric) Kingdom vision through a minority approach.

Based on such a peculiar vision of the Kingdom, can we continue to describe or dismiss Yoder as a mere advocate of an alternative society? Can we not agree that Yoder's vision also entails an ethical-demonstrating lifestyle, which can re-present believers' (embodied) Christocentric social witness as a sign, means, and instrument to take society beyond its traditional ways? In particular, would Yoder's plea for such a distinctive, culture transforming, and practice-based life of the subordinate disciple not substantiate his vision as a Barthian Diaspora practice for restoring wholeness in society?

In spite of significant divergence in their reflections, one can argue that Yoder's vision is a Barthian precursor in Mennonite Anabaptism. Yoder, as we learn from Carter, simply unites his Anabaptist theological heritage with the theological method and major themes in Barth's thoughts. It enables him (Yoder) to create a distinctive Post-liberal alternative to Christian realism, Liberation theology and Privatized Evangelical religion (Carter 2001: 23-28). Yoder's Christocentric disposition derives from his Barthian conviction, i.e., that Christian discipleship requires an open, respectful and doxological awareness of a particular historical identity. The cross is central to Yoder's (Barthian) theology. Therefore, one can also argue that Yoder's location of theology in a Diaspora or minority group and his view of the *other* constitute a necessary ethics towards the contemporary quest for responsible ecumenical theological witness to Jesus Christ among the nations. They represent a Diaspora fulfilment of the Barthian vision

¹⁷⁷ Yoder also draws biblical resources from Jeremiah 3 to call on believers to return from Constantinian (which he also interprets as western-based) ethics towards the 'Jeremiah shift'. Such a more meaningful shift nuances the believers' presence and their (Christian) ethics for the nations. It would not permit unhealthy withdrawal of the church from the larger society. Yoder argues that seeking the *shalom* of the city where Yahweh sends the people of God implies that though a minority in contemporary worlds, believers are summoned to active but responsible social witness. In the Yoderian perspective, to participate in the work of Christ can be described 'not only as "serving God (what priests do)" but also as "ruling the world (what kings do)." Described....as "royal priesthood" and as "priestly kingdom," believers....are not called out of but sent into the real (public) world where sacrifice and sovereignty happen' (Yoder 1997b: 36).

(cf. Rasmusson 2005). Yoder's vision thrives in *catholicity*. Community is the locus of his theological vision for mission ethics. His restorative vision seeks peaceful coexistence of humanity, within its host nations.

Given the foregoing, can we not recognize Yoder's theological approach as orthodox and relevant to the 21st century conversation on a sustainable and necessary Christian vision for (social) ethics? Does his biography not also present us with a *renewed gateway* into the contemporary theological reconstruction of the Church? Again, would his life and intellectual activities as a Mennonite not offer us a possible and more feasible answer to the perennial question of meaning and implication of the Church in a broken and hurting world as ours? More significantly, would that answer not also present the SCS with a meaningful *break* from the continuing theological seduction of the Church as highlighted and sustained in intellectualism, truistic historical consciousness and the secularizing projects of the Enlightenment-based ideological ethics?

So far, this section has tried to explore Yoder's intellectual biography. It proceeds to investigate his Christology in the next section. It is hoped that a survey of Yoder's Christology and some of his Christological convictions can provide us with meaningful insights to address the above-mentioned questions. Yoder's Christology determines his *paradigm for ecclesiology and social ethics*, and these will be considered in the Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, respectively. An analysis of Yoder's vision for Christology in the next paragraph can also help to substantiate our confidence in his social ethics.

3 Yoder's Vision for Christology

This section discusses Yoder's Bible-based vision for Christology as an orthodox reflection. It describes Yoder's Christological vision as a Christ-centered (Christocentric) community-based and community sustaining project. It also presents the lordship of Jesus Christ as the cause of disagreement in Yoder's critique of H. Richard Niebuhr's vision for Christ and Culture. In this section, we consider that the proclamation of Christ's lordship is Yoder's ground for a community-based Christological vision. Fundamentally, this study holds that Yoder's Christological vision can assist the SCS to transcend some distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based visions in Nigeria.

Yoder's vision for Christology holds great potential for the SCS to transcend some distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based approach in the church's theological witness. It adopts a non-violent resistant stance in its progressive (altruistic and evolving) identity and spirituality for Christocentric ethical witness about Jesus Christ among the nations. For instance, in *The Politics of Jesus* Yoder argues that a social style that is characterized by a renewed community-forming vision and the rejection of violence reflects the true New Testament proclamation of the lordship of Christ by the Church. According to Yoder, 'The cross is the model of Christian social efficacy, the power of God for those who believe....Our Lamb has conquered; him let us follow' (Yoder 1994d: 242). Yoder's vision for Christology is nonviolent resistance. It is biblically Christocentric. For Yoder, the (biblical) human Jesus is normative for Christian ethics. Yoder (1994d: 10) prefaces his argument with this question: 'What becomes of the incarnation if Jesus is not normative for man? If he is a man but not normative, is this not the ancient ebionic heresy? If he is somehow authoritative but not in his humanness, is this not a new Gnosticism?'

As we have noted, Yoder's Christocentric vision is orthodox. He re-reads biblical history and it enables his vision to re-present the incarnation as a metaphysical mystery, which believers can translate and celebrate in diverse cultures without losing sight of its historical source and practices. The merits of the gracious Christ-event provide the Yoderian vision with the impetus for such continuing translation and communication of Christology in diverse cultures. In Yoder's Christocentric vision, the continuity that matters is that which ensures that 'the same Gospel witness evokes again and again the same community-forming responses' from its beneficiaries (Yoder 1997c: 219). Yoder's vision for Christology entails a non-violent resistant (Christocentric) trans-community proclamation of the meaning and implication of the Christ-event in contexts.

Unlike the Enlightenment-based visions, Yoder's Christological project adopts an altruistic and evolving identity and spirituality in its re-interpretation and communication of the biblical witness. His Christocentric vision strives to witness the universal lordship of Jesus Christ with significant ethics.

[These] ...are not especially focused on "mission" in the classical institutional sense. They pursue other dimensions of the fact that Christians as "sent" to and for the world. Since the Christian community is normally a message bearing minority....there is no setting where the missionary dimension of being Christian should demand (and reward) clarification....they are more basic than....the Enlightenment.

(Yoder 1997b: 7-8)

Yoder reasons that the Enlightenment, among other events, is one in which the gracious Christ-event empowers the subordinate Church to recount as a historical event with meaning. Yoder's project is a Christocentric reflection, which envisions a restorative movement towards his vision for an unlimited catholicity of the Church (cf. Yoder 1984: 3-10). Yoder's Christological vision, as this study re-presents, is also a restorative project. It engages all creaturely sovereignties in continuing transformational dialogues (cf. Yoder 1994d: 139-149). Yoder's Christological vision re-interprets and appropriates the proclamation of Christ's universal lordship as the ground for, and the primary task of Christian witness to the social order (cf. Yoder 1997a: 8-45). Given these reflections, one becomes more persuaded to argue that Yoder's vision for Christology can assist the SCS to check those perplexing issues mentioned in the second chapter of this study. It can also inspire the church to transcend some of such distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based approach to its missionary witness in Nigeria.

Yoder's Christological reflection envisions a Christocentric royal priesthood and priestly Kingdom. It also envisions a faithful ecumenical church. Yoder holds that the believers' corporate and embodied confession of Christ's lordship can also mean serving our God and ruling the world (cf. Yoder 1997b). Cartwright notes that Yoder, is very much concerned with the practical details for corporate proclamation of the Gospel, by the Church. Yoder's 'vision of the royal priesthood (*and priestly Kingdom?*) rests on a claim about the theological meaning of history....under Jesus' lordship....Yoder's vision of the faithful church can hardly be conceived as withdrawing from concrete engagements with the world....the church's witness to the world takes shape as "evangelical nonconformity" in the world' (Cartwright 1994: 1-2 [Our italics]). This study reiterates that Yoder's vision for Christology is orthodox; it is Barthian.

Carter argues that there is a textual evidence to substantiate Yoder's works as 'holding to a solidly orthodox Christology.' However, he points out that:

One reason why Yoder did not feel it necessary to emphasize or even be at all explicit about his orthodox Christology is that he was not particularly a systematic theologian working on the problem of Christology; rather, he was applying Barth's theology to social ethics.

(Carter 2001: 134-135)

Carter stresses that Yoder's vision for a nonviolent-resistant social (ethics) witness is tied to his Christology. According to Hauerwas in his *Foreword* to Carter's book:

...Yoder's understanding of as well as commitment to Nicea and Chalcedon is inseparable from his defense of nonviolence. That Yoder maintained that peace is at the heart of the Gospel and enshrined in the creeds of orthodox Christianity, of course, is one of the reasons that he remains so misunderstood.'

(Hauerwas 2001: 9)

Hauerwas and Sider also reason that:

[Yoder] had no reason to distance himself from being identified as orthodox....it is more important for him that we understand that....Christians do not become "creedal" because we need to get our theology....as an end in itself.... Yoder helps us to see that Christians become creedal because of the kind of life they must lead to be faithful disciples of Jesus.

(Hauerwas & Sider 2002: 16)

In their reflection, Yoder's retrieval of the Christian tradition can help all Christians to see their tradition through fresh eyes. Yoder's Christological vision relativizes all accounts of Christ's person and work that separate belief from practice. Yoder's vision for Christology grew out of his fundamental conviction that Christian discipleship requires an open, respectful, repentant and doxological consciousness of its particular historical identity (Hauerwas & Sider 2002: 11, 15). For Yoder, Huebner remarks, Christology is unintelligible apart from the concrete practices of the Church. The promise of Yoder's works is that he offers a more complete attempt to return theology to its proper context in the Church as the very body of Christ; and thereby move it beyond theory (Huebner 2006: 94-95; 2000: 488). As we noted above, Yoder provides both an explanation of and solution to the Barthian-Milbank debate on the deficiency in Barth's ecclesial project. Yoder's vision for Christology is a community-forming and sustaining project. As we have also noted above, it is a nonviolent-resistant Diaspora pursuit of the Barthian visionary project in contexts.

Given these reflections as *preparatio evangelica* (forerunner of the Good News), this study deems it reasonable to discuss the Yoderian-Neibuhrian debate and other responses to Yoder's Christocentric vision in the next segment. The issue at stake concerns the Church's social witness of the universal lordship of Jesus Christ in various contexts. Consequently, the segment investigates Yoder's vision for Christology and its relevance to the context of the SCS. This study hopes that Yoder's focus on the life and works of the biblical Jesus Christ can provide us with a framework to demonstrate his Christology as a practice-based ecumenical (Christological) vision. Recapturing such a vision might further promote the relevance of Yoder's Christology to

the context of the SCS. Yoder's restorative vision is a multidimensional, occasional and often spontaneous project, which is predominantly addressed to specific people and contexts.

3.1 Yoder's Christology as May be Relevant to the Context of the SCS

In what follows, we shall inquire whether Yoder's Christological vision holds a great potential, which can assist the SCS to transcend some distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based approach to the church's witness of the universal lordship of Jesus Christ among the nations.¹⁷⁸ The section discusses this relevance from a biblically grounded and historically Christocentric perspective.

3.1.1 Biblically Grounded

Yoder's vision for Christology is biblically grounded. Yoder also drew biblical resources from the Epistle to the Hebrews (Chapters 11, 12, and 13) to demonstrate Christology as a historical task. In the Yoderian vision, the Christ-event is a concrete reality, which believers can recount. For instance, this reflection is evident in one of Yoder's last articles before his death, which is entitled, *Historiography as a Ministry to Renewal* (1997c).¹⁷⁹ In that article, Yoder calls on the Mennonites to regard the believers' reflection on history as a Bible-based Christological mandate. Yoder views the ministry of remembrance as the task of the Christian historian. He states that, 'the reason for remembrance, according to the author of Hebrews....is that Jesus....is the same now and tomorrow as yesterday. The ministry of remembrance, which is the task of the *Christian* historian, isat heart a Christological task. Its vocation is to trace the sameness of Jesus across generations' (Yoder 1997c: 216 [Our italics]).

In Yoder's vision, the ministry of remembrance is fundamentally a Christological task. It seeks to trace the sameness of Jesus across the generations. This background provides him with a foothold to argue for the meaning and implication of the Church's social witness of the Christian faith: to retrace the sameness of human participation in God's mission by way of incorporation into the body of Christ. What believers recount is not their personal story, but that of Christ who does not change. Such a biblical story as it is evident in the Epistle to the Hebrews can as well

¹⁷⁸ Such bequests include a truistic, universal and abstract theological mission ethics, the disregard for local religio-cultural resources, and the pursuit of distressing political ideologies of the founding missionaries' nation states in Nigeria.

¹⁷⁹ This article was published in the Mennonite Journal, *Brethren Life and Thought*, Vol. 42: 216-228, Sum-Fall.

teach believers about their forerunners (i.e., ancestors) who looked up to Christ, persevered and successfully ran the race before us (cf. Heb 11; 12). The ministry of remembrance, *inter alia*, refreshes and challenges believers to appropriate the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Yoder argues that believers' witness of Jesus Christ must seek to relive the merits of the Christ-event in their daily life engagements. Yoder's vision for Christology expects the *historic cross* of Jesus to play a central role in their embodied proclamation of Christ's lordship over the Powers.¹⁸⁰

The memory of Jesus' cross inspires Christ-believers to accept and endure innocent suffering, with joyful hope. Remembering Jesus' historic cross persuades those believers to 'consider him who endured such opposition from sinful persons'. Christ-believers are not 'to grow weary and lose heart' in times of hardships (cf. Heb 12: 4). Allan Verhey explains that with this memory of Jesus, the Church receives strength to face the sad truth about the world and 'respond even to suffering and to death truthfully'. The story of Jesus is Good News to the suffering. Through it (innocent suffering), 'the eyes of faith are trained to see the very image of the Lord, and the ears' (Verhey 2001: 111-113) to hear such inspirational words of Jesus, which the author of the fourth Gospel recorded as follows:

All these I have spoken while still with you. But the comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid.

(John 14: 24-27 NIV)

I have told you these things so that in me you will have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world

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The cross of Jesus was historic in that it was a scandalous experience. Crucifixion was one of the most barbarous and dehumanizing forms of execution, which the biblical Roman government adopted to kill traitors, criminals and perpetrators of similar felonies. A living human being was fastened to some timbers, raised to a perpendicular (or any other) position and left to hang for days in order to die a slowly agonizing death. Such an excruciating torture was devised to produce the maximum amount of pain throughout the dying period. Jesus' case was very much scandalous in that an innocent Messiah who knew no sin was simply made a sinner. Humanly speaking, it is incongruent that Jesus the Messiah should die such a disgraceful death. Jesus as the Lukean Gospel tells us, was crucified along with criminals: 'one on his right and one on his left....The people stood watching and the rulers sneered at him.... "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." The soldiers also came and mocked him...."If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself"....One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"' (Luke 23: 32-39 NIV).

The scandalous cross of Jesus teaches believers about the Christian ministry of remembrance. Such a ministry of remembrance enables committed witnesses to persevere beyond repressive tolerance. Christ-believers whose ethics embody the politics of Jesus envision their lives from Christ (and the believing ancestors), and reflect on Christian daily life as normative witness to the Lord who never changes. Christ-believers' bodily presence among the nations, seek to relive the incarnated Jesus, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world as the same now and tomorrow as ever. Yoder's vision, as we show, adopts the nonviolent-resistant-pacifist stance of the biblical Jesus as its fundamental ethos for believers' witness of Jesus Christ in contexts.

Within this nonviolent-resistant Christological vision, Jesus is the author, sustainer and consummation of history. Yoder's Christological vision is biblically Christocentric.

3.1.2 Historically Christocentric

As we have noted, Yoder's Christological vision is biblically Christocentric. He re-reads biblical history to re-present the incarnation as a metaphysical mystery, which humankind can translate and celebrate in diverse cultures without losing sight of its historical source and practices. Yoder further remarks that the incarnation salvation becomes history, which strives to restore a balanced *momentum* (impetus and strength) in the lives of Christ-believers, and their communities. This 'then means that in the concrete historical reality of the life and death and rising of Jesus, the otherwise invisible God has been made known normatively' (Yoder 1997c: 217). Yoder's vision for Christology reproduces Christocentric believers' communities in contexts.

The incarnation 'can be communicated in the language of any addressee' (Yoder 1992b: 290) since 'language as an autonomous *and absolute* power is not to be trusted' (Yoder 1994f: 85 [Our italics]). In Yoder's Christological vision, *Christ the Light of the World* also means that his figure is crucial in the context of unity, mission and its translations in diverse cultures of humankind. The appeal to Christ represents a particular type of confession of truth, which is also a criterion for evaluating ethical faithfulness and unfaithfulness within the Church (Yoder 1994e: 183). The confession, *Jesus Christ is Lord*, also speaks about the world¹⁸¹ as well as a lived, living and liveable reality (or religiosity), rather than mere individual inner piety, intellect or ideas.¹⁸² Yoder's vision for Christology as we earlier noted, also involves an incarnated vision of the merits of the gracious Christ-event.

¹⁸¹ Yoder reasons that when the New Testament speaks of the world, it rather posits a culture of self-glorifying, or culture as autonomous, rebellious and oppressive. In his vision, the world implies cultures, which are opposed to authentic human flourishing under the lordship of Jesus Christ (cf. Yoder 1996a: 70).

¹⁸² This is the reason Yoder's vision for Christology may not be dismissed easily as a mere attempt 'to cloak the dark night of the soul with the story of Jesus that turns too quickly from the bloody tragedies of history and from the unapproachable, overpowering otherness of the divine to an easy, ideological resolution of conflict' (Holland 2004: 142). Yoder re-invigorates the Jesus story from such an incarnated (lived or historical) Christological perspective, which restricts his entire vision to an exploratory, explanatory, and experimental multifaceted project (cf. Nation 2006; Huebner 2006; Hauerwas & Sider 2002). Thus, we reason that Yoder's Christology is not only good for recognition as classically orthodox, his vision also provides a good psychology and spirituality for peaceful social transformation and development in a blessed but fallen world. Perhaps this understanding can also address the question of why Yoder tilts more to the lordship of Christ without much

Consequently, one can describe Yoder's vision for Christology as an incarnated visionary project. His incarnated (lived) Christology would not reduce the Christ-event and its merits to a *logos* Christology. The *logos* paradigm of the Christ-event scarcely does justice to the human psychology of Jesus. The *logos* Christology often 'fails to offer us the humanity of God that can....relieve the oppressions of the downtrodden' in the society when it matters most (Van Engen 1996: 181). It suggests a reflection of *Christology from above*. Logos Christology manifests a lot of Docetic identity and spirituality. As we have pointed out, Docetism often interprets and embodies the incarnation as well as the merits and implication of the Christ-event for believers, as a mystery, which a supernatural person enjoys. On the contrary, Yoder (1985) also argues that the incarnation means 'that God acted in a totally human way and unhesitatingly entrusted his own cause to the hands of ordinary people' (Yoder 1985: 72).

Yoder's vision for Christology would not also restrain the gracious bequests of the Christ-event to an unhealthy reflection of a 'preferential option for the poor.' Such unwholesome pursuit of freedom for the oppressed is often reminiscent of some (Latin-American-originated) liberation theologies. They seek to realize a *Christology from below*. Many of these visions for a theology of liberation hardly give adequate attention to the uniqueness of Jesus' divinity in their pursuit of freedom. They often focus on the humanity of Jesus with lopsided visions. Their approach, *inter alia*, can question the meaningfulness of the post-resurrection works of Christ to the identity, spirituality and social witness of the Church. They scarcely seek to re-present the poor as Christ's moral agency for social transformation and development as well. Reconstitution of the human dignity of the oppressed (for corporate Christocentric participation in social transformation and development) is hardly a priority in such visions for emancipation. In contrast, Yoder's visionary project does not exonerate the poor from active but responsible social witness, in its quest to reconstitute and restore the human dignity of the poor.

effort. Fernando Enns shows that the view is 'to supplement his scheme with the life-creating, life-preserving, and affirmative spirit of Christ that does not "rule" but is given as a gift to the community of believers, that empowers that community to live as a nonviolent, sovereignty-relativizing *alternative*' in his theological foundations (Enns 2007a: 143-144 [Our emphasis]). As this study shows, Yoder also presents the Church as a restorative community and as an alternative. The ability of the Church to grapple with the tension of maintaining a 'balanced momentum' (Yoder 1997c) between its restorative and alternative identity and spirituality without falling into the imperialism of Constantinianism or the despondence of Sectarianism reflects a distinctive otherness of the subordinate ecclesia in the Yoderian visionary project. As a Diaspora fulfilment of the Barthian vision, Yoder's multidimensional, exploratory, *ad hoc*, experimental project shares space with others. We shall reflect more on this understanding from the next chapter. Further, Yoder emphasizes the crucial role of the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit in the embodied ministry of the subordinate Church.

Yoder's vision expects the oppressed to witness Christ in their perplexing condition. He argues that the first task in the re-affirmation of the human dignity of the oppressed is to reconstitute the vision of a Christocentric social witness and a renewed world in their celebrative lives. In Yoder's vision, the poor are constitutive in Christ's moral agents who receive personal moral responsibility for corporate participation in social witness. The proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ inspires such moral agents to witness for their neighbour's welfare (Yoder 1997a: 8-24; 1994d: 171-173; 1988: 53). The Bible teaches that when Jesus ascended on high, he gave gifts to believers to help in building up one another towards (Christian) unity; and for participation in God's mission (Eph. 4: 8-16). In Jesus Christ, believers receive the prerequisites for participation in the Kingdom identity and spirituality; i.e., in the divine nature (cf. 2 Pet. 1: 2-4).¹⁸³

With that understanding of biblical faith, one does not need to look further than the figure of Christ to take cognizance of this biblical truth. Such an understanding could be inspirational to

¹⁸³ This study will discuss Yoder's (suggestive) visionary approach to human dignity in Chapter 5. Unlike Yoder's, visions for liberation theology do not often emphasize innocent suffering and sustained engagement with the differently *other*, as an indispensable aspect of Christian witness in ecumenical engagements. In the Nigerian experience, for instance, the practitioners of such theological visions usually resort to a 'break away-and-be-free' approach to life and issues in order to satisfy their theological desires, at the least provocation. Innocent suffering and sustained engagement with the differently other is often demeaned in such ethics of liberation. At least, the legacies of its manifestation in the unhealthy break away-and-be-free approach to self-theologization in the area of the SCS might serve as a good example. This study comments briefly on this problem in Chapter 2. The kind of quest for freedom and pluralism of hermeneutics as well as various practices of liberation theology in Nigeria, often leads to privation and privatization of the faith. The main emphasis of liberation theology on pluralism and contextual realities seems to undermine the crucial place of faith-particularity in its hermeneutics and pursuit of the *missio Dei*. Akper points out that a Liberation Christological vision simply seeks to fit Jesus and the salvific significance of his cross into the sociological and political life crisis of the oppressed. It does not lay necessary emphasis on innocent suffering and sustained engagement with the differently *other*, which Christ also demonstrated; as an indispensable identity and spirituality of the freedom seeker (cf. Akper 2007: 225). In contrast, Yoder's Christological vision pleads for the embodiment of the particularity of Christ's political ethics even in the face of suffering and difficulties, as true Gospel proclamation. Yoder also argues that the Gospel of Christ does not ask for a blind faith; it demands confession, which does not spare us the decision to recognize Christ as Lord. As earlier shown, Koopman (2006a) claims that to confess calls for embodiment. To confess and embody mean to confess in word and deed, to embody in ethos, in structure, in practice and policies, wholeness and fulness in every sphere of life. Yoder reasons that faith is unavoidable even in human explication, translation and communication of God's gracious bequest of wisdom and power. Yoder argues that such faith would not mean 'a grim and resentful perseverance'. Biblical faith involves 'service in hope, marked by the trust in God's already certain triumph' in Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ is 'in fact a new definition of truth, both as power and as wisdom' (Yoder 1985: 43-45). As already observed, the Yoderian project is also restorative. Faith in Jesus Christ also strives to restore humanity to its originally created purpose for active but responsible pursuit of God's glory.

Yoder's plea for an inclusive Christocentric ministry of the Church. Yoder argues that every member of the body of Christ is graciously favoured with at least a gift (gifting) to contribute to the life and ministry of the people of God. The confessing *laos* (people) of God is a renewed world on the way. Their practice of sacrament as a social process represents diverse 'modes of vulnerable but also provocative, creative presence' of Christ, which transforms culture from within. For Yoder's Diaspora fulfilment of the Barthian vision, the incarnation is a (metaphysical) mystery. Thus, human hermeneutical tools especially, those, which arise from the Enlightenment-based visions, can distort its historicity and witness (Yoder 1987; cf. 1997b: 29-36; 1994e: 359-373; 1997b: 234-245; 1997c). Yoder's Christological vision seeks a Christocentric social ethics, which is 'faith-particular, culturally pluralistic and ecclesologically inclusive' (Van Engen 1996). As earlier stated, it is multidimensional, occasional and often spontaneous. The study will discuss Yoder's Christocentric vision for social ethics in the fifth chapter.

A Christocentric stance of Yoder's vision tends to support the views of Rasmusson (2005) and Carter (2001), among others. For these scholars, one can describe Yoder's biblical realism as a further development and fulfilment of the Barthian theology especially, in contexts where believers are in the minority. Yoder's Christological vision seeks to provide a guarantee that no claims can be more binding on humankind than those of the biblical Jesus Christ (cf. Murphy 1999). It is in the cross of Jesus, 'perhaps more than anywhere else that we see the face of the divine host; the true love of God'. The cross clarifies the nature of divine hospitality, which God offers humanity in the self-emptying (*kenosis*) death of Christ (Boersma: 2004: 16). The Bible records that when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though some might possibly die for the good persons. But God demonstrates divine love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5: 6-8 [Our paraphrase]). As we have noted, Yoder's Christological vision is a community forming and sustaining visionary project.

Given the above reflections, can we not inquire whether such a (community-based) Christological vision is inspirational to Yoder's (1996a) critique of H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* which he claims demeans the lordship of Christ and relativizes the *orthodox Trinitarian* concept to an over-simplified vision of the call of Jesus? Could the inquiry highlight

some Christological problems in the SCS and justify the election of the Yoderian approach as a possible and feasible restorative vision for this Nigerian church?

Niebuhr claims that the complexities in the realities of ‘Christ and culture’ debate are such that neither individuals nor the Church can provide a satisfying answer.¹⁸⁴ In his vision, Niebuhr articulates his position in five typologies: *Christ against Culture*; *The Christ of Culture*; *Christ above Culture*; *Christ and Culture in Paradox* and *Christ the Transformer of Culture*.¹⁸⁵ Niebuhr claims that in making decisions of faith, humanity must note that we only have a church of faith (perhaps not a church of practice-based lifestyle) where human beings do ‘partial and relative work’. No single person, group or historical time is the Church. Niebuhr further reasons that people make such decisions with the understanding that the risen Christ is the head of the Church and the redeemer of the world. Niebuhr concludes that, ‘It is to make them in view of the fact that the world of culture – man’s achievement – exists within the world of grace – God’s kingdom’. While we note that a detailed discussion on the Yoderian-Niebuhrian debate is beyond the scope of this study, we can draw impetus from the debate that will enable us to agree with the views of scholars such as Hauerwas (2005: 200-201) and Dearman (1992: 5-6).¹⁸⁶ These

¹⁸⁴ In his classic on the *Christ and Culture* (1959) debate, H. Richard Niebuhr (a Reformed theologian) addresses ‘the enduring problems’ in the relationship between Christ and culture. He argues that Christianity moves on these two poles, i.e., of Christ and culture. He maintains that their relationship with each other constitutes the problem because they constitute the background of true objects of devotion. Culture calls for preservation while Christ pleads for the embodiment, translation and communication of his political ethics. Niebuhr reasons that the ambivalent and ambiguous nature of the debates may not be divorced from the attempts of many Christians to legitimate a particular position. Christ is actually present in history and shapes Christian faith and practice.

Thus, Niebuhr stresses that Christ cannot be confused with the likes of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Guatama, Confucius, Mohamed, Amos or Isaiah. Unlike these human leaders, whose lives and influences are often territorial and ephemeral, Christ’s lordship, the Bible claims, is universal and everlasting. However, Niebuhr also introduces a perplexity, which tends to suggest the possibility of knowing the risen Christ without the human Jesus. In the course of his argument, Niebuhr further quips: ‘Those who no longer know a “Christ after the flesh” still know the risen Lord as the one whose deeds were described by those who “from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word” (Niebuhr 1959: 13). The identity and spirituality of the ‘Christ after the flesh’ also defines the cultural approaches of the ‘the eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word’.

Moreover, Niebuhr defines culture as the artificial secondary environment that super-imposes on the natural; that is, a human achievement of the minds and hearts. In his reasoning, asking ‘value questions’ on nature and passing value judgments on natural phenomena are debatable issues. Cultural values are mainly concerned with what is good for human beings while all its forms and varieties are concerned with the temporal and material realization of values. Thus, Niebuhr opines that since human beings cannot escape culture, the man of culture does not exist, and no man ever looks at the world with pristine eyes. Jesus Christ and God the Father, the Gospel, the church, and eternal life may only find ‘places as elements in the great pluralism of culture’.

¹⁸⁵ Time and space will not permit us to explain each of these concepts.

¹⁸⁶ In this work, Hauerwas points out that Niebuhr’s approach is bound to leave dissatisfied anyone who thinks ethics should provide guidance for contextual realities. Niebuhr uses his account of Divine transcendence too easily to call truth claims from other alternatives into question. Yet he observes that contemporary Christianity has much to learn from Niebuhr’s digging. ‘Niebuhr struggled to find theological expression that could help

scholars claim that in spite of Niebuhr's inability to provide explicit guidance on ethics, we still have much to learn from his investigations. Again, would such observations not inspire us to argue that what is at stake in the Yoderian-Niebuhrian debate is Christ's cosmic lordship? Perhaps a review of Yoder's critique of the Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* can be of great assistance at this point.

In the study, *How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of Christ and Culture* (1996a),¹⁸⁷ Yoder points out that Niebuhr's vision tends to present Christ as sharing lordship with others. Its perspective calls for caution on the side of readers. He regards Niebuhr's reflection as subtle in its 'unspoken axioms, and the way it directs and divert attention' (Yoder 1996b: 32). In Yoder's perception, Niebuhr's paradigm reflects a lazy pluralism. From this background, Yoder charges Niebuhr with hypocrisy and reticence in pronouncing final judgment on the worth of human conviction on the question of the relationship between Christ and culture.¹⁸⁸ For Yoder, what is at stake is 'the whether and the how of Christ's lordship.' Niebuhr's reticence in pronouncing final judgment on the question of the relationship between Christ and culture denies Jesus' normativeness for ethics and transforms the field of ethics from *normative* to a descriptive science (Yoder 1996a: 40-43).

From this vantage position, Yoder argues that the Niebuhrian vision demeans Christ; it tends to share the lordship of Jesus Christ with others. Yoder also stresses that it reduces the orthodox vision to a relativized over-simplified vision of the call of Jesus (Yoder 1996a: 65). He considers

Christians and non-Christians alike not to be determined by the temptation to live defensively. Niebuhr was convinced that we should and could live lives of trust and openness, and he struggled mightily to help us see how we can so live'.

Dearman analyzes Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* and describes it as an approach that has proved itself more valuable than most contemporary social science analysis has yet to do. It does not abdicate the task of the historian in its socio-historical approach. 'And even where it is generally agreed that his analysis was wrong, his overall approach still commends itself to many interpreters for its heuristic value'.

¹⁸⁷ Yoder first drafted and circulated the outline of this work for a campus ministry study setting as 'one of several series on "how to read a book"'. The present article, which is a later updated version of this campus ministry study guide, which Yoder wrote in the 1960s, is a critique 'addressed to the argument of the book *Christ and Culture* in its status as a classic; not to the man Helmut Richard Niebuhr nor to all his of his thought. Being careful about how we read Niebuhr is our task. The more a text is treated as a "classic," the more it matters that we be critically aware of its unspoken axioms, its tacit biases and lacunae, and the way it directs and diverts attention' (Yoder 1996a: 32). Yoder reasons that the Niebuhr's approach to the burning issue of how to relate Christ to culture subtly demeans the lordship of Jesus Christ as well as the orthodox Trinitarian concept.

¹⁸⁸ In the book, *Seeking Cultures of Peace*, a Mennonite theologian, Pete Dula, describes such reticence as 'the tolerant pluralism of an H. Richard Niebuhr or a James Gustafom. In their major works, they would carefully describe the various options in the theological landscape....but they would *hardly* engage those options agonistically. As Yoder read them, their refusal to do so, in the name of tolerance, immunize them from challenge' (Dula 2004: 71 [Our italics]).

the implicit standard of the Niebuhrian reflection to include glorifying government as becoming exemplary for all of culture (see also Yoder 1991a), deification of the responsible self, and absolution of scholars' analysis as ultimate criterion of integrity, among other issues. Yoder concludes his critique by denouncing lazy pluralism. The identity and spirituality of the Church, which the Christ-event inaugurates is faith particularistic even in ecumenism. The centrality of the Church and the Gospel it embodies is a Christological claim. Yoder's vision for Christology, as we earlier noted, is also a Christocentric restorative project.

Yoder's restorative vision for inclusive Christocentric witness issues from his fundamental conviction that the ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ provides believers with a sustainable and more responsible paradigm for radical political action of all time and space. Yoder's Christological vision is consistent in its persevering plea for the implication of what the Church has always said about Jesus as Word of the Father, and as true God and true man to be taken more seriously than before as relevant to contemporary social problems. The Church exists as a *polis* whose bodily witness proclaims a faithful (Christian) discipleship, which draws on the light of Christ to reflect a distinctive social witness that is definitive of Christians.

In Yoder's restorative vision, the Church's faithfulness is defined by its identity as a fellowship under Christ's lordship. For Verhey (2005: 2001), the Church is a community of moral discernment as it is also a community of moral discourse. Within Yoder's vision, the Church functions in society as a renewed form of concrete culture where the lordship of Christ must be proclaimed as judgment against idolatry. Yoder states that the sovereignty of all Powers must be broken to serve the lordship of Christ. If Christ's victory over the principalities and Powers constitutes Christology, the Church must proclaim it as a message to all and sundry, especially, the Powers. The Church is under obligation to make known to them all 'as no other proclaimer can do, the fulfilment of the mysterious purpose of God (Eph. 3: 10) by means of that Man in whom their rebellion has been broken and the pretensions they have raised has been demolished.' Yoder underscores Christ's victory over the Powers as the ground for believers' prophetic witness (Yoder 1994d: 147-156).

This position seems to support Yoder's contention that Niebuhr's work is grounded in abstractions, universalism, and absolutisms. Yoder argues that the Christ-event is a metaphysical mystery. Thus, believers can embody and translate it in contexts without altering its historical

source and witnesses from Jesus Christ and his early believing communities. Yoder's vision for Christology does not deny the crucial complementary roles, which history, experience and reason play in its communication of the biblical witness. Scripture comes into the scene as a witness to the origin and as a link to the historicity of the Lord's presence. Yoder in his critique of Niebuhr's vision also argues that, 'The issue at stake is not a doctrine of Scripture but the principle of accountability' (Yoder 1996a: 77). In his perspective, Christ is the centre for culture definitions: *the uniqueness of Christ is normative in all diversified cultural contexts*. The lordship of Christ provides the guiding nexus for his subordinate believers particularly, as they engage in critical and contextual decision-making. Such an identity empowers Christocentric believers to reject values that contradict Jesus (Yoder 1984: 120; cf. Nation 2006: 172). In Yoder's restorative vision, the ministry of remembrance bespeaks of believers' appropriation and re-enactment of the historical truths of the merits of the Christ-event in the now. Yoder's Christological vision, as we have noted, seeks to restore and realize the Barthian visionary project for ecclesial witness from a trans-community (*glocalized*) Diaspora or minority perspective.

Yoder's Christological vision expects the Christocentric social witness of believers to correspond to those of the biblical Jesus Christ. The biblical Jesus, as Yoder rereads and appropriates him, enables and elicits nonviolent-resistant-pacifist response from believers (Carter 2001: 136). In Yoder's restorative vision for the Church, readiness to accept (responsible) scandal or bear innocent pains especially hostility is part of the Christ believers' message (Yoder 1992b: 293). The relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause (in Jesus) is hardly a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection. Such an induction could be inspirational to Yoder's agitation that, only a church, which has been freed from compulsiveness and from the urge to manage the world, can then find more meaningful and responsible ways and words to suggest to those outside its bounds, the invitation to a servant identity in society (Yoder 1994d: 219, 232, 240-241). Yoder's Christological reflection expects contemporary churches to restore the orthodox ecclesial vision in their corporate witness of Christ's lordship among the nations; it is a Christocentric community-forming and sustaining vision.

Yoder will not also permit the Church to compromise the centrality of its Lord's figure in social witness if it is truly the body of Christ. His perspective on the church is suggestive of a body of

human beings whose participation in Christ is the doorway to substantiate their justification. Christ's figure represents a particular confessional truth for churches, even in the context of unity. The portrait of Christ reproduces a discernible people who are prepared to order their lives in accordance to their Christocentric Scripture-based convictions (Yoder 1971: 126; cf. 2003c: 107). Given these submissions, the study asks this question: would Smit's (2003b: 147-149; cf. 1990) observations not substantiate Yoder's criticism, i.e., of the ambiguity in the Niebuhrian ethical vision for this study?

Smit's article is entitled *No Other Motive Would Give us the Right: Reflections on Contextuality from a Reformed Experience* (2003b). He observes that Niebuhr's vision for *Christ Transforming Culture* exposes the ambiguity of the Reformed faith; i.e., on the relationship between church and context. Smit criticizes the Niebuhrian reflection for also implying that the Reformed vision cannot be challenged, criticized, and even transformed. Smit further argues that Christians are still called and enabled to respond to the living God's self-revelation and continuing activities in these historical contexts. The way a particular historical context (for instance, the Apartheid in South Africa) is experienced and read does not provide the norm or the content even though it can become an occasion for a confession. Smit reasons that Niebuhr's confessional vision grew out of his longstanding intellectual struggle with radical historicity as well as the diversities of views, and stories of reality. However, Smit also remarks elsewhere that there are 'many difficulties raised by Niebuhr's own position' (Smit 2006b: 206).

In addition, Smit argues in a manner that is reminiscent of the Yoderian understanding of the roles of content and context in the communication of the biblical witness: that the norm or content of historical contexts should come from the true Gospel itself, i.e., the Word made flesh (cf. Smit 2003b: 147). The word made flesh, which dwelt with us, and whose glory we beheld (John 1: 14; cf. 1 John 1: 1-4) is normative for the ethical conduct of Christ-believers. Thus, Smit in his critique of Niebuhr's vision opines that it is on this Scripture-principle that Reformed faith stands or falls. In a correlative manner, Yoder also argues thus:

My reason for taking the Bible serious is....that the biblical texts do in fact demonstrate fruitful ways of illuminating our moral agenda which at some points are more discerning, more helpful and more critical than Niebuhr's grid....as it relates to our cultural obedience to Christ's lordship.... The difference has to do with the context in which they are made, the alternatives he rejects on the way, and the way he classifies other views.

The most inclusive synthetic description of the way the apostolic witnesses addressed the world around them with the proclamation of the Gospel is.... “But We See Jesus”. In each of *the* five cases, the apostle faced the challenge of how to affirm Christ’s Lordship in the face of a value structure, or a meaning system, which denied that Lordship.

(Yoder 1996a:84[Our italics])

In another study entitled, *The Authority of Tradition* (1994a), Yoder argues that, ‘Scripture comes on the scene not as a receptacle of all possible inspired truths, but rather as a witness to the historical baseline communities’ origins and thereby as link to the historicity of their Lord’s past presence’ (Yoder 1994a: 94). Equipped with these reflections, may we not reckon with the view of this study that the Yoderian-Niebuhr conversation is centred on the uniqueness of Christ’s universal lordship? Will it not support our inclination towards Yoder’s Christological vision as a possible and more responsible approach for the SCS? This study (as earlier noted) holds that Yoder’s Christological vision can provide the SCS with a more stable framework to checkmate some distressing legacies of its *pseudo*-Christological visions. Most of these *pseudo*-visions arise from the church’s often-denigrating and truistic stance towards the differently *other*.

Richard Mouw (a Calvinist) has remarked that the Yoderian vision presents a decent and orderly Anabaptist perspective. This makes it more persuasive for mainstream Christianity especially Calvinists ‘to retrace our historical and theological steps as we take an honest look at questions that have been long ignored’ particularly, ‘the Free Church tradition.’ The Yoderian vision presents a consistent approach to other ecclesial visions. Yoder’s Christocentric vision argues convincingly and consistently against systematized schemes as the parameter for deciding theological positions (cf. Yoder 1994e: vii-ix). Cartwright (1998) tends to support Mouw on this point. Cartwright also argues that, for Yoder, the real issue is not whether Jesus can make sense in our world but whether we want to follow him.

Consequently, this study reasons that the views of Mouw and Cartwright tend to vindicate Murphy’s¹⁸⁹ perspective on Yoder’s project. For Murphy (1999: 51), Yoder’s preference for the understanding of the relation of the individual to community (which he attributes to Jesus) is an instance of preferring the sociological analysis of Scripture to that of other sources. In spite of his criticisms of Yoder, Verhey (2001) validates his view that sets the stories of human lives

¹⁸⁹ Nancy C. Murphy is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, USA. She was married to the late Baptist theological conversation partner of Yoder, James W C McClendon.

alongside the story of Jesus so that humanity may be judged and made new by the memory of Jesus. According to him, ‘...Yoder set the story of Jesus particularly, the story of his obedient “powerlessness” on the cross. Yoder did ethics “by way of reminder too”. He is right to set the stories of our lives alongside the story of Jesus so that our lives may be judged and made new by the memory of Jesus’ (Verhey 2001: 463). Renewal, Yoder has remarked, is like stumbling and regaining one’s balance without hitting the ground (cf. Yoder 1997c: 217). The Yoderian restorative vision calls for a rediscovery and retrieval of the politics of Jesus for Christian political witness in every age and culture.

As it is evident in this study, Yoder’s projects bespeaks of a Christocentric socio-political vision. We can also gain such an insight from Bediako’s appeal to Yoder’s perspective on concrete social meaning of the Cross. It can provide us with a more significant way to recast the Yoderian Scripture-based Christological vision to the SCS. According to Bediako:

Jesus won his way to pre-eminence and glory...by humbling himself, to the point of dying a shameful death. In other words, his conception of power was that of non-dominating power. By making himself of no account, everyone must now take account of him (Philippians 2: 10-11) (Yoder 1971: 13-33).

...By his Cross Jesus de-sacralised all worldly powers...the Cross de-sacralizes all the powers, institutions and structures that rule human existence and history – family, nation, class, race, Law, politics, economy, religion, culture, tradition, custom, ancestors.... This ‘concrete social meaning of the Cross’ (Yoder 1972: 134), illuminates Paul’s terminology of ‘principalities’, ‘powers’, ‘thrones’, ‘dominions’, and their cognate expressions....to be relevant to the conditions of modern existence.

(Bediako 2004b: 104)

An African reading of the Scriptures, as Bediako envisions it, can enhance the de-sacralizing power of the Gospel to reach the depth of indigenous worldviews. Such a vision can offer a substantive listening ear to some manifestations of biblical reflections in many indigenous African worldviews. By re-echoing Yoder on Powers and vulnerability, Bediako also re-presents Africa’s experience of Christ as a unique human experience. Bediako’s vision also reflects a way forward for all theologies seeking a more biblical proclamation of Jesus Christ. In Yoder’s reflection, the voluntary Cross or suffering accepted out of faith and piety is demonstrated in thanksgiving. It is indispensable for a true and more fulfilling (Christian) ethical witness, anywhere, anytime. It recaptures ‘the Jewishness of Jesus’¹⁹⁰ (affirming creation and providence, rejecting graven images and sacrifice); the humanity of Jesus (especially his proclamation, his

¹⁹⁰ Michael Cartwright and Peter Ochs collated, edited, and published posthumously, some of Yoder’s writings on this issue under the title, *The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited* (2003c).

suffering and his resurrection), and the involvement of the witness and the appeal to the addressee' (Yoder 1996a: 87). Yoder's Christological vision also seeks to retrieve the substance of early catholicity for contemporary Christianity.

Would such a 'looping back'¹⁹¹ not offer the SCS a more meaningful vision to engage some useful (local) *religio*-cultural resources in continuing dialogues with a view to transforming them to serve the purpose of Christ? Will it not also inspire the church to proclaim a more meaningful and responsible inclusivity in its public witness of Jesus Christ within, and beyond Nigeria? More concretely, will such a vision not inspire the SCS to loop back to Scripture in order to retrieve significant resources, which can assist the church to transcend some perplexing bequests of the Enlightenment-based approach in its (Christocentric) ecclesial witness of the Kingdom as a feasible social reality within history?

In *For the Nations*, Yoder (1997b) also re-reads biblical history to plead for a Scripture-based and Christocentric Kingdom witness. Such an altruistic proclamation of the merits of the gracious Christ-event can assist the Church to transcend some legacies of its Enlightenment-based theological witness. The most distressing bequests of the Enlightenment-based theological visions tend to subvert such Christocentric affirmations. They are often truistic in their foundations and orientations. In contrast, Yoder's Scripture-based Christological vision appropriates and proclaims the Christian faith in the meaningfulness of ordinary human experience under God (in diverse ways). For instance, it draws biblical resources from the apostolic witness (in John 1; Colossians 1; Hebrews 1) to argue further that what things mean, and what is to be spoken, must echo the meaning of Jesus, the enfleshed Word of God. Yoder's Christological vision respects the mystery of providence in the human pursuit of the Kingdom's social witness. However, it also maintains that human wisdom and its hermeneutic grid 'can never replace the Torah or the incarnation as moral guides' (Yoder 1997b: 241-242). This study will offer a detailed discussion on Yoder's vision for Kingdom witness in the next chapter.

The incarnation is not a mere event but a metaphysical mystery, which is culturally translatable without demeaning its historical source and witnesses (cf. Yoder 1997c: 216). Therefore, any

¹⁹¹ Yoder uses this term to describe the practice of returning to ancient traditions to retrieve some useful resources, which one can refine and adopt in contemporary theological enterprises (cf. 1994a).

claim for Christ as pre-existent, as creator or cosmic victor must not be disengaged from the man Jesus and his Cross. Yoder also cautions believers on this issue:

If Jesus is God's word, then no other event can be, in itself, firmly or finally either a revelation or an achievement on the same level. The course of events in the world can give us clues (signals as to when to speak) and clues (hints of larger meaning). It can offer echoes or it can project images of the gospel of the kingdom coming. As echo and image, it sends us back to the original, sends us back the more firmly in the measure in which we take the present seriously as the real terrain of an authentically ongoing saving event.

(Yoder 1997b: 245)

Yoder's vision for Christology tilts the penultimate aim and merits of its reflections on the gracious works of Christ towards the constitution of a renewed society. This position further strengthens our hope that his Christological vision will not permit the SCS to sustain the transmission of *pseudo*-Christological legacies of the Enlightenment-based vision and witness.¹⁹² Such bequests are more concerned with the annihilation of local practices and resources in their visions for social transformation and development. Thus, they often lead many Christians (especially within the geo-political vicinity of the SCS) to neglect or suppress and dismiss local *religio*-cultural resources as idolatrous.

For instance, such believers reject the Christological title, *Ancestor*, as a way of imaging the Christ of the New Testament in Africa. They argue that Jesus cannot be reduced to the role of ancestor; unlike Jesus who died and resurrected, ancestors die and cease to be. This view raises a very serious historical question in the concrete experiences of many Africans, namely: do ancestors actually die and cease to be? If so, how can we explain their continuing interaction with the living? In most local cosmologies, ancestors (the living-dead), as we noted in the previous chapter, still interact with the living. One can also understand such interactions as prayers, in a sense. Communication with the living dead provides the point of contact between

¹⁹² Perhaps this accounts for his (1987b) critique of Wink's book, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Powers that Determine Human Existence* that it opens up a worthy debate with shallowness in argumentation. Yoder observes that in his attempt to demythologize the cosmology of the New Testament, Wink moved *forward with the Bible* rather than *repeating the first century worldview*, to re-appropriate most elements that had been sifted out of our scientific worldview. He acknowledges Wink's clarity on the confession of Jesus' normativeness for ethics but observes that it was not central to his work. Yoder faults Wink for showing less concern for the pastoral living realities the apostle was wrestling with, than speculative cosmologies. Yoder writes that, 'The specific terms most used in the apostolic passages directly on the themes of Christ and the Powers ("principalities," "Powers," "thrones," "dominions") receive less attention than "gods," "demons," "angels," "elements," terms more current in general speculative cosmologies whether ancient or contemporary.' Yoder is of the view that the New Testament provides the story of Christianity; hence, it also provides its critique. Thus, in spite of the seeming meaningfulness of Wink's approach in African spirituality, we reason that it demeans the Sovereignty of God.

the living and the world of spirits. Prayer also represents the major form of verbal communication between Africans and the supernatural. Being the commonest act of worship, the practice of prayer represents ‘one of the most ancient items in African riches.’ In many African cosmologies, prayers are more audible, expressive and spontaneous (Clarke 2006: 294-5). Thus, the ancestors (as most Africans appropriate their reality) only proceed on pilgrimage in death without abdicating their responsibilities to, and communion with the living. Ancestors serve the purpose of the Creator for, in, and through human beings. In fact, ancestors’ concerns for the well-being and destinies of their relations inform and control the spirituality of many Africans, including the Abiribas.

In other words, the ancestor metaphor is simply ‘the beginning rather than an end’ of a process of contextuality in choosing Christological metaphors. Bediako, among other African theologians, conceptualized and adopted it in order to make Christ and his message meaningful and relevant in local contexts (Nicholas 2005: 29). Christ cannot be reduced or domesticated to join the ancestors, or human reincarnation, or a floating spirit roaming the world (cf. Turaki 2006b: 25). Adopting ancestor as conceptual Christological title might not mean unfaithfulness to our biblical Jesus. Even Paul’s Christological titles such as the *firstborn*, *visible image of the invisible God*, as well as Jesus’ *salt of the earth* and *light of the world*, among others, are also metaphorical and may not be absolutized or canonized. In his ministry, Jesus also uses metaphors to make his own message meaningful and relevant to contexts. Communication receives more attention that is significant when it begins with what people know and can understand. Such an approach is necessary in contemporary communication of the Gospel as a transformer of realities; it makes it easier for the addressees to discover the mind and to respond to the expectations of the communicator, substantively.

A graduate of Stellenbosch University (missiology) as well as a former Principal Clerk of The PCN (1996-2001), Rev Uma A. Onwunta (2006) has also reflected on the role of the ancestors in the daily life experiences of most indigenous Africans especially, Christians. This issue still haunts and taunts many contemporary churches in Nigeria. According to him:

Obviously, the relationship between the living and the ancestors shapes matters of daily life.... It has led to the formulation of concepts of good and evil, morality, ethics, and justice that are strictly *communal*. This is the source and nature of *most ethical* values in *religio-cultural* Nigeria.... But in the heyday of Christian missionary activity and colonialism, many missionaries described this belief and practice as the worship of the dead, and the church failed to capture the

worldview that governed the people's lives. Consequently, no relevant theology *has been* developed to adequately address these beliefs and practices. The problem has perplexed and haunted the Church to the extent that some church members have refused to abandon their ancestors, whom they believe have a role to play in their lives here on earth.

(Onwunta 2006: 22 [Our italics])

Consequently, this research laments that contemporary Christian theology, which the SCS proclaims, tends to annihilate this understanding. Contemporary Christian witness does this without adequate demonstration of Jesus Christ as the Word incarnate, that is, Immanuel – God with us; as a living and liveable reality (Matt. 1: 23; cf. John 1: 1-16). The triumphal Jesus, whom the Enlightenment Gospel of the SCS often portrays, reflects more on the triumphant church, which will reign and come with the triumphant Jesus Christ to judge the earth at the *eschaton*. In contrast, the uniqueness of God's salvation event in Jesus Christ as the *Word happened* (or incarnate), lies in the fact that it continues presently and effectively in history. The peculiarity of the true *jesuological* Gospel thrives as the Word expressed and ultimately as the Word proclaimed, from which its witnesses derive their identity and authority (Guder 2000: 59-60). This study thus challenges the pacesetting SCS to initiate and to participate actively in ecumenical discussions. The Church's embodied proclamation of faith can lead to a meaningful theological interpretation and appropriation in which the Word incarnate would define and recognize the concept of ancestor as a significant Christological metaphor for communicating the Gospel in *religio-cultural* Nigeria.

Many indigenous Nigerians and other Africans do not worship ancestors. Rather, indigenous knowledge of the status, role and functions of the ancestors can help us to grasp the deeper theological and biblical meaning of Christ's mediatory role in many African societies. Identity bespeaks of peoples' sources of meaning and experiences. Characterization is also a process of constructing meaning on the basis of cultural attributes or a related set of cultural attributes, which receive attention prior to other sources of meaning (Castells 2006: 6). As a way forward, this research opines that Yoder's Christological vision can greatly assist the SCS to seek more significant ways to resolve for contemporary Christianities, the perplexing issues that surround the concept of ancestor. We will return to this discussion later.

Yoder's Christological vision can incorporate some useful *religio*-cultural resources of African cosmologies into the challenges of *Babel*.¹⁹³ As Yoder reasons, biblical faith must dialogue with such challenges of indigenous religious worldviews with the aim of transforming and integrating them into its proclamation of the Good News (Yoder 1996b: 136). Reconciliation is at the heart of the Yoderian catholic convictions. Yoder preaches an embodied Kingdom ethics, which craves for the restoration of *shalom* in society. One can thus reason with Yoderians that a shift from truistic (and individualistic) Christianity to community minded partnership can offer the contemporary Church a more appreciable and revolutionary step away from some distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based theological mission ethics particularly, as they affect the SCS as well as other members of mainline Protestantism.¹⁹⁴

Yoder's Christology emphasizes renunciation of violence/hostilities, creaturely sovereignties, and revenge in its social witness. It preaches Christocentric servanthood, love for the enemy and reconciliation, etc. Yoder's Christological paradigm stresses 'binding and loosing' as the Church's ground for accepting or withholding fellowship. In the Yoderian visionary Christology, shared identity would not mean uncritical adoption of all citizens as Christ-believers. Yoder's vision for Christology is community forming and sustaining, yet it is faith-particularistic. It is a nonviolent-resistant-pacifist stance for a Diaspora Christianity. Yoder's Christological vision is biblically Christocentric; hence, it is orthodox.

Thus far, we have given a summary description of Yoder's orthodox Christology. We shall proceed to consider Yoder's Christological convictions in the next paragraph. The study seeks to substantiate our claim that Yoder's project holds great potential for the SCS.

¹⁹³ The Yoderian vision draws from the biblical myth of Genesis to describe Babel as the 'multiplicity of culture under the will of God'. With every people at home in their cultures, none becomes intrinsically more authentic than the *other*. They humbly and respectfully engage each other in social interchange (interculturality) as potential and progressing conversation partners. Consequently, in the Yoderian vision, Babel also bespeaks of God's sovereignty (cf. Yoder 1996a).

¹⁹⁴ Yoder's Christological vision is rooted in the partnership model of God's mission, which Jesus demonstrated in his humanity. God invited and privileged human beings in the participatory *missio Dei*. Although Yoder often sounds like some *historical Jesus* proponents, his own historical Jesus is, as Hauerwas and Sider reminds us, the Christ of the Scripture narratives (Yoder 2002). Yoder takes history (especially, biblical) serious, hence, his Christological vision functions as a guarantee that no other claims can be more binding on humankind than those of Jesus. Yoder inquires: 'what becomes the meaning of the incarnation if Jesus is not normatively man? If he is man but not normative, is this not the ancient ebionitic heresy? If he be somehow authoritative but not in his humanness, is this not a new Gnosticism?' (Yoder 1994d: 10) After all, it is in the concrete historical reality of the life and death and rising of Jesus that the otherwise invisible God has been made known normatively. Yoder describes it as 'the historical or the "*Jesulogical*" sense of Incarnation' (Yoder 1997c: 217).

3.2 Yoder's Inducted Christological Convictions

This subsection discusses Yoder's concept of Sin and Salvation; Justification (by grace through faith); Reconciliation; Sanctification; and the Christian life as Witness, among other Yoderian conceptions. We hope it can also provide the SCS with a portal to ease out of its ecclesiological identity crisis. These concepts are central to Yoder's vision for Christology even though Yoder did not write a complete theological treatise (Huebner 2006: 118).

3.2.1 Sin and Salvation

We draw from Yoder's unflinching predilection towards the historic catholicity of the pre-Constantinian Church to appraise his concept of sin and salvation in this section. Yoder adopts the Pauline doctrinal concept of Powers as part of the good but fallen creation of God to discuss sin and salvation from a Christological perspective.

Yoder's Christocentric vision re-reads sin and salvation from their social perspectives. It leans toward Hendrikus Berkhof's interpretation of the Pauline cosmology. Yoder's Christological vision affirms the biblical teaching that on the cross, Jesus disarmed the Powers, made a public example of them and triumphed over them. This view, for instance, is evident in the eighth chapter of *The Politics of Jesus* under the title, *Christ and the Powers* (Yoder 1994d: 134-161). Yoder argues that the Powers also demand unconditional loyalty from human beings and their societies, after they absolutized themselves. To quote Yoder in this regard:

These Powers do not enable humanity to live a genuinely free, loving life.... They harm and enslave us. We cannot live without them. Looking at the human situation from within, it is not possible to conceive how, once unconditionally subjected to these Powers, humankind can ever again become free.... But nevertheless 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

(Yoder 1994d: 143 [Our italics])

Yoder's Christological vision also exposes the effects of the Powers on human beings and their societies. Given such an understanding, this study reasons that Yoder's concept of 'Powers' can provide the SCS with a meaningful and Christologically grounded interpretation and approach towards sin and salvation. Yoder's Christological vision affirm that, by his cross, resurrection,

ascension, and the release of His Spirit, Jesus overcame these Powers. They distress and enslave humanity because of sin.

In Yoder's Christological vision, sin is more of enslavement and subjection of humanity and history to the lordship of the Powers. These Powers constitute an affront to the affirmation of Christ's universal lordship. They also demand worship and loyalty from their subjects. Thus, salvation, *inter alia*, centres more on freedom to serve Jesus Christ without compulsiveness, and manipulation of history by these fallen sovereignties. The triumph of Christ guarantees that the ultimate meaning of history will not be found in earthly empires or the development of proud cultures. The ultimate meaning of history is found in the calling together of the chosen race, royal priesthood, and holy nation, which is the Church (Yoder 1997a: 13).

In his introduction to the book, *Body Politics* (1992a),¹⁹⁵ Yoder argues that the Church exists as a peculiar body. It has a uniquely structured social outlook, which distinguishes it from other communities. According to Yoder, '*The Church* has its own way of making decisions, defining membership, and carrying out common tasks...The people of God is called to be today what the world is called to be ultimately' (Yoder 1992a: viii-ix [Our italics]). Such distinctiveness also marks the otherness of the life and witness of the Church from other human societies. Specifically, the subordinate Church witnesses for Jesus Christ, who, as the Bible teaches us, came that all may have life and enjoy it to the fullest (cf. John 10: 10).

Yoder's reflection on the distinctive otherness of the Church tends to reduce his Christocentric vision for social witness to an alternative society. This can explain the reason his remark in *For the Nations*: 'The Christian concern is not only to identify but to help change unjust social structures. Yet *she/he* is committed to changing them in the way of Christ' (Yoder 1997b:

¹⁹⁵ *Body Politics* is the title of the book in which Yoder states that binding and loosing; Baptism; Eucharist; Multiplicity of gifts; and Open meeting are five distinctive characteristics of the New Testament Church. Yoder regrets that contemporary churches often substituted the full social, ethical and communal meaning of these original practices of the Church with centuries of rituals and interpretation. Yoder developed and presented the original outline of *Body Politics* at Duke University Divinity School. He later developed this piece for presentation as seminar lectures at the Pastors' School of the United Methodist Church, and the Village brand of Lutheranism in the USA, before publishing it in the April 1967 edition of *Concern*, and the April 1991 issue of *Theology Today* (under the caption Sacrament as a Social process). Yoder also treats some of the themes of *Body Politics* in other works before Disciple Resources published the book in 1992. For Yoder, *Body Politics* sets forth the political meaning of the Body of Christ so that the Church may truly be the Church for the world to see. The Church is a *polis*. Herald Press reprinted this book in 2001 because of a high demand.

111[Our italics). His visionary Christology also clarifies that the confession of Jesus Christ is indispensable for Christian proclamation of political witness as a trans-community project. Christ shapes personal characters, and the society. Perhaps a brief review of Fubara-Manuel's (2004) work can assist us to substantiate further the Yoderian vision to the SCS.

Fubara-Manuel is an ordained minister of The PCN who resides within the synod. He holds the view that the church, which understands its invitation to the *missio Dei* is aware that true biblical concept of sin transcends the individual, to the sins of the community. Communal sin includes the ideologies, structures and deeds which banish and restrict the other particularly, the less privileged in the society to the status of sub-humanity. According to him:

[T]he one who must participate in God's mission must not just see her or his sin alone but also the sins of her or his community...

The sins of the community...*inter alia*, includes the communal ways in which the community mutilates truth and enslaves those who are weak and poor...the false and half-baked philosophies of the world that are paraded as the whole truth, which philosophies do not allow the poor to rise out of their poverty and find the life that God offers to God's people....

(Fubara-Manuel 2004: 49-51; cf. 2007: 117-180 [Our italics])

Fubara-Manuel reasons that true mission includes alertness to the sins of the rich, which makes the poor poorer. True mission must also seek to expose the sins of the poor who destroy society for the rich and the poor. The Gospel calls for a holistic awareness of the condition of humankind. Fubara-Manuel seeks to recapture the lost fundamental motive of the *missio Dei*. He does it by calling Christians especially, the Reformed to live for the greater purpose of God. Living for the greater purpose of God can assist the Church to re-appropriate the mystery and mission of God for human history and for the universe. Globally, Reformed churches tend to be ambiguous and ambivalent on the forms of their social witness within contexts. Many contemporary (Reformed) churches seem to substitute the great concern for the glory of God and the will and purpose of God with what, in his words, *cannot but be pagan*. Fubara-Manuel argues that when Christians act for themselves, they act for a pagan reason.

For Fubara-Manuel, such knowledge would turn the life and mission of the Christian community towards life-centeredness and peace making. Subordinate Christian communities would then metamorphose into the Church, which lives like its Master; i.e., a people sent as the Master was, a group living for what deeply concerns God. Despite his unwholesome dismissal of dissenting church traditions as paganistic, idolatrous, disorderly, etc, Fubara-Manuel (like Yoder and other

theologians) also reflects on sin as privation and privatization of the common good. In his perspective, salvation includes the restoration of the Church to the pursuit of *shalom* in the society. Yoder's restorative vision is committed to relay the factuality of the lordship of Jesus Christ, and its social implication on the Church.

Thus, the contemporary Church will seek to proclaim that *the status of Christ's witnesses* is 'their calling to be Christ's witnesses' (Guder 2000: 60), in order to realize Yoder's vision. It thus follows that the claims of such a proclamation are not limited to those who have accepted it; neither is the significance of its judgment limited to those who have decided to listen to it. Such a peculiar proclamation of Christocentric believers is a declaration about the nature of the cosmos and the significance of history. Yoderians acknowledge differences in social witness. Yoder's reflexive vision for middle axiom permits believers to adopt conscientious participation and conscientious objection in their Christocentric social witness. They also seek to realize their authority and purpose in corporate witness of Jesus Christ among the nations (Yoder 1997a: 16-21, 1994d: 157). Yoderian practitioners and admirers envision their social witness from the scandalous Christ-event.

Yoder's vision for Christology also respects the view 'that there will be differences, and it is precisely our differences that provide the justification for both witness and humility' (Nation 2006: 87; cf. Dula 2004: 72). As a nonviolent-resistant pacifism, Yoder's Christological vision counts on the realization of Jesus' political ethics to save the Christian movement from the worst of paternalism. With Yoder's reflexive vision for *moral osmosis*, Christian calling or election¹⁹⁶ becomes and demands an expression of God's gracious act in Christocentric social witness. Christian calling also elicits freely chosen and continuing as well as active and holistic response from Christ's disciples.¹⁹⁷ Communication of grace is an essential aspect of believers' response to God's gracious act of justification, which Christians appropriate through faith in Jesus Christ.

¹⁹⁶ Yoder does not emphasize election. His visionary practice tailors its suggestive concept of the church's election towards peace making in the Yoderian Christology and Free Church concept of ecclesiology. Free Church groups 'hold to the separation of church and state along with a commitment to the singular lordship of Jesus Christ and to the kingdom of God' (Harder 2005). Yoder argues that the confession, *Jesus Christ is Lord*, commits the Church to nonviolent-resistance as well as relative independence to other loyalties as their critic. Yoder seems to stress that the identification of the church with any given society is wrong even when he denounces violent resistance.

¹⁹⁷ To correlate this point, Boersma describes election as a 'preferential hospitality,' that is, an act of (God's) sovereign grace in the history of God's people. Election is not an end in itself. According to him, 'This preferential hospitality is instrumental in character, that is to say, election of God's people leads to a relationship with them: election is the foundation of (the) covenant....God's choice of Israel is a "preferential option for the

3.2.2 Justification by Grace through Faith

In this segment, we sustain Yoder's visionary pursuit of the socio-political relevance and normativeness of the biblical Jesus. The inquiry seeks to re-present the concept of justification within this Diaspora fulfilment of the Barthian Christological vision. Yoder preaches justification *by grace through faith*, rather than by faith through grace.

Yoder's Christological project envisions the term 'justification' as 'setting things right.' For Yoder, it is God's nature and the nature of his covenant that the Sovereign is a 'right-setting' kind of God. Such an understanding of justification is evident in Yoder's review of the Pauline approach to Jewish-Gentile controversy on the issue of righteousness in Jesus Christ, in the eleventh chapter of *The Politics of Jesus* (Yoder 1994d: 212-227). According to Yoder:

The overcoming of this hostility, the making of peace by eliminating the wall that had separated them, namely the Jewish law to which Jews were committed and which Gentiles ignored, is itself the creation of a new humanity. This is why the unique ministry of Paul as "prisoner for Jesus Christ on behalf of you Gentiles" is inseparable from his own unique revealed insight into the "mystery" of God's purpose. The work of Christ is not only that he saves the soul of individuals and henceforth they can love each other better; the work of Christ, the making of peace, the breaking down of the wall, is itself the constituting of a new community made up of two kinds of people, those who lived under the law and those who do not.

(Yoder 1994d: 219)

Yoder argues that to understand Paul's emphasis as justification by faith alone (and through grace alone) demeans the normativeness of Jesus' ethical and social concern. The hostility, which Christ abolished, centred more on that which existed between the Jews and the Gentiles. As Yoder reads it, the hostility seldom exists between a righteous God and the creature, which trespasses God's rules.

Yoder acknowledges the act of justification (or the status of being just or righteous) before God as entirely God's prerogative. He is also conscious that the Apostle's emphasis on faith in God alone is incumbent on believers. It saves humanity from such idolatry as was evident when classical Protestantism defied social witness at the cost of grace. In the process, Protestantism altered its self-understanding from a visible and distinctive bodily (and social) witness to God's grace, to private and subjective convictions (and experiences) of individuals. Protestantism, as

poor". In the end, this preferential hospitality serves a missiological purpose: it is meant to embrace the other nations' (Boersma 2004: 18).

Rasmusson has remarked, compromised its socio-theological witnesses (cf. Rasmusson 2000: 181). Rasmusson also reflects on Yoder's project as a Diaspora fulfilment of the Barthian vision. We hope to discuss Rasmusson's view further in Chapters 4 and 5 of this study.

From the perspective of this Diaspora realization of the Barthian Christological vision, one can accede to the view that the fundamental issue was the social form of the Church. Yoder also argues for an embodied communication of God's grace in Jesus Christ. He expects such a proclamation to demonstrate that the triumph of God's grace in Jesus Christ is manifest in the fact that God blesses the insider and outsider, friend and enemy. God does it in such a manner that the genuineness of love is also made real at the point of its application to the enemy. Through the Christ-event, Jesus inaugurates a distinctive and eschatological community of faith where the brokenness of humankind is set right. Persons who were not born under the law also obey it from the heart. By his rejection of coercion, violence, and taking matters into his hands, Jesus also provides the true spirituality and identity of a believer who truly trusts in the sovereignty of God (Yoder 1994d: 220-225).

In other words, the Yoderian Christology replays its fundamental conviction that once believers see clearly who Jesus is, devotees of Jesus Christ will realize what it means to follow him and, therefore, what it means as ethical action. Yoder's Christological vision is concerned to demonstrate the historical reality of the immediate presence of Jesus Christ in believers' lives. It seeks to substantiate Yoder's position that Christian life can be one of obedient discipleship in the contemporary worlds. Yoder's Diaspora realization of the Barthian Christological vision rejects philosophical hermeneutics. It adopts 'a low-level use of historical criticism as a way' of centralizing, illuminating and nuancing canonical texts in theological enterprises. Yoder also appropriates the Anselmic-Barthian vision towards 'faith seeking understanding' to explore the inner logic of belief (Carter 2001: 98-105). As this study shows, Yoder's vision for Christology is orthodox in its foundation and orientations. Thus, one can reason with Carter that Yoder's reflection on the Anselmic-Barthian approach bespeaks of sustained engagement to gain a breakthrough on difficult or perplexing realities. We reckon that such an understanding will be relevant for this study.

Daniel L. Migliore¹⁹⁸ has also commented on the Anselm-Barthian reflection on ‘faith seeking understanding’ and related it to justification as it affects the Christian life. To the eyes of faith, the world is encompassed by the mystery of God’s grace. Christian theology is also suggestive of faith in the mode of asking questions and striving to find meaningful answers to such perplexing issues of faith. Believers can appropriate such answers in repentance (cf. Migliore 2004: 3).

Authentic Christian faith is no sedative for world-weary souls; neither is it a sachet filled with ready answers to the deepest questions of life. Instead, faith in the God revealed in Jesus Christ sets an inquiry in motion. Authentic faith also struggles with the inclination to accept things as they are, and to call to question continually unexamined assumptions about God, our world, and ourselves. Christian faith does not mean indifference to the search for truth or fear of it. Christian faith is not an arrogant claim to possess it fully. It is faith in the living God whose mystery is beyond human comprehension. To know God as sovereignly revealed in Jesus Christ is to acknowledge the infinite and incomprehensible depth of the mysterious God. In contemporary contexts, the ‘changing, ambiguous and often precarious world poses ever new questions for faith, and many answers that sufficed yesterday are no longer compelling today’. Believers ask questions and seek understanding. The public world where faith inhabits confronts Christian reflection and practices with challenges and contradictions that cannot be ignored. God is always greater than our ideas of God. In other words, Christian faith causes humanity to think (Migliore 2004: 2-4).

For instance, we draw from Migliore’s view on justification in the long extract below:

...justification is God’s gracious forgiveness of sin that is received by faith alone (Rom. 3: 23-28). Accomplished and manifested in Jesus Christ, it is **God’s free, unconditional, and unmerited acceptance of us inspite of our sin and alienation from God, from others, and from ourselves**. “Justification” is a term from the judicial sphere and means “acquitting” or “making right.” That we are justified means that our broken relationship with God has been restored by **an act of free grace and forgiveness**. God’s act of **justification is by grace alone** (*sola gratia*), **in Christ alone** (*sola Christus*), **received by faith alone** (*sola fide*).

....However, **a major distortion of the doctrine occurs if it is taken to mean that faith is the human act by which we merit justification**. God’s act of justification is a free gift and is in no way dependent on us, although it calls our response. Thus a more adequate brief statement of the doctrine is that we are justified by grace through faith. **We cannot merit justification even by our act of faith. Faith is simply the appropriate response of trust and acceptance of God’s unconditional acceptance of us.**

¹⁹⁸ Migliore is an American Reformed theologian and a Professor of Systematic theology at Princeton Theological Seminary.

(Migliore 2004: 236 [Our emphasis])

For Migliore, the act of faith is not mere assent to propositions, which the Church or the Bible presents to us. Christian faith is an act of trust in the God made known in Jesus Christ. The Christ-event is the basis for human dignity, human worth, human rights, and human responsibilities. Human beings are ‘somebodies’ because of Christology.

Humanity is made in the divine image, which the Christ-event seeks to restore. Human beings are children of God, persons for whom Jesus Christ suffered, died, and rose again. Christ-believers are persons in whom the spirit of God is at work (cf. Rom 8: 9). Thus, Migliore remarks that Christology is the basis for welcoming the ‘other’ with such openness, which persuades us to break free from enclosed identity and romanticized otherness. Christ’s restoration of the image of God in humankind provides believers with the ground to welcome and interact with the differently *other*. Justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ has concrete social meaning and implications for contemporary Christians. Migliore’s views coincide with that of Yoder.

For Migliore, as for Yoder, such renewed discoveries of the biblical message of justification by grace through faith have revolutionary potency. Yoder re-reads biblical history to re-present justification as a gracious and social practice in which believers can relate to every person in the light of the new world which begins in Christ: the old has passed away, the new has come. One can then argue that Migliore, as Yoder, re-presents justification by grace through faith as an essential foundation of the Christian life. According to Migliore, ‘We can be certain that the Caesars in history tremble when people discover that their worth is not determined by what we achieve or what state and society bestow or withhold from them. Their identity and value are given to them by God, who loves, affirms, and accepts them, as they are – whoever they may be. Because God in Jesus Christ has said yes to them, they are not “nobodies” but “somebodies.”’ (Migliore 2004: 239). Similarly, Yoder’s Christological vision, as this study shows, re-presents and espouses the gracious Christ-event as a communication of hospitality to all especially, the adversary; it points to a theology of grace.

Given this position, the following questions come to mind: may we not reason that Yoder’s graceful Christology can offer the SCS more insightful persuasions to *re-vision*, and to affirm the

lordship of Jesus Christ over the church's polity and politics?¹⁹⁹ May we not also reason that such a hospitable Christology can provide the SCS with a restorative vision, which can challenge the church to loop back into history and draw resources from its prolific (rich) theology of grace to tame the tides of its perennial magisterial ethics?

Fubara-Manuel's (2007) concluding thoughts on the *missio Dei* can help us to answer the above questions. He opines that a more meaningful understanding of God's mission can reproduce in the Church a spirit of humility or an ethos of humility, which can challenge its view on the others. The truth of the *missio Dei* may not only bequeath the church with more adequate understanding on the multiplicity of religions in the world. *The missio Dei* is also a call to social justice, advocacy in economic and political matters and to ecological integrity. It pulls the church into the life of the marginalized and compels them to participate in the brokenness of the world because the church is already involved in the world (Fubara-Manuel 2007: 230-235).²⁰⁰ Fubara-Manuel's remark suggests that true understanding and pursuit of the *missio Dei* do not deny the crucial role of human responsibility in the process.

The merits of the Christ-event, as Yoder has also reasoned, provides believers with a faith, which also assigns moral responsibility to those who had no moral or legal status in their culture; it makes them decision makers. Christology saddles such believers with the responsibility for viewing their status in society as meaningful witness and ministry. The implication of the jubilee, as Yoder also shows, is that those who reject it may hardly enter the kingdom of God. The proclamation of Christ's lordship over the Powers is also a social, political and structural fact, which constitutes a challenge to the *pseudo-sovereignties*. This claim is not limited to the devotees of Jesus, nor the significance of its judgment restricted to those who have decided to listen (Yoder 1994d: 62-63, 156, 172).

Yoder's Christological project re-interprets and appropriates the Christian doctrine of 'justification by faith' to mean 'being set right' in and for renewed relationships. Yoder reads it as 'justification by grace through faith' in Jesus Christ. This is a renewed understanding of the

¹⁹⁹ As we have noted, the SCS is a Reformed church in Nigeria. Reformed theology is a faith and tradition with enormous potential that yearns for continuing liberation from its past failures and idolatries (Smit 2006b: 38). The Reformed faith is rich in the theology of grace.

²⁰⁰ Fubara-Manuel's (2007) work does not distinguish between church as a Christian body, and Church as an ecumenical body, which transcends Christian denominations.

doctrine; it does not emphasize magisterial identity and spirituality. His vision also seeks to restore and reconcile breaking, broken, or severed relationships.²⁰¹ The vision, as this study reiterates, is a nonviolent-resistant project.

Yoder's vision for Christology seeks to re-invigorate and sustain a covenanted relationship of public accountability in Christocentric social enterprises. The vision of a reconciled community and the need for a higher moral law in society calls for the bringing together of theology and social practices. Implicitly, it also suggests that human response towards God's gracious (forensic) act does not always mean principled and unwholesome exclusion of the other. Yoder understands the individual as a person who is responsibly bound to the community by social obligation. Consequently, his Christocentric hermeneutic on the Christian doctrine of 'justification by faith' suggests a significant instance of Christians' preference of the sociological analysis of Scripture to that of other sources. Reconciliation is central in Yoder's Christocentric message of hope and renewal of society. Boersma (2004: 15) remarks that the heart of hospitality is God's reconciliatory work in Jesus Christ.

3.2.3 Reconciliation

At this point, we shall discuss reconciliation in the light of Yoder's appeal for a true and restorative proclamation of the rule of Christ in the Church. His vision for social witness focuses on the relationship between 'binding and loosing' as well as 'discernment and discipline.'

Yoder's Christological vision re-presents reconciliation as its primal goal. He espouses a sustained appeal to the Church to offer listening ears to his perspectives on the biblical phrase, *binding and loosing*. Yoder draws hermeneutical resources from Matthew 18: 15-18 to underscore that binding and loosing, or 'forgiveness and 'discernment' do not point to two alternative meanings of the same word in the practice of the rule of Christ. This reflection is

²⁰¹ Thus, Kroeker re-echoes Yoder on this matter, in a way that is rather significant for this study. According to Kroeker (2005: 164-165), 'What was at stake in the proclamation of the righteousness of God to both Jew and Gentile' was precisely that it was to be proclaimed to both and that both are to become part of the new believing community, some having to come by way of the law and some not... The primary meaning of Paul's language of justification and reconciliation, then, has to do with the extension of neighbor's love to enemies, breaking down the hostilities that divide through the renunciation of violence and the enactment of a new covenant...'. The Yoderian concept of justification is simply a theology of grace. Yoder re-interprets and espouses the merits of the gracious Christ-event to make it possible for believers to appropriate and communicate it to others through an embodied faith in Jesus Christ.

apparent in Yoder's article, *Practicing the Rule of Christ* (1997d).²⁰² According to Yoder, "Forgiveness" and "discernment" do not point to two alternative meanings of the same words, whereby one would always need to choose which meaning applies. Forgiveness and discernment are not two poles of a tension but two sides of a coin. Each presupposes and includes the other' (Yoder 1997d: 137). Yoder re-interprets the verbs 'to bind, and to loose' from two perspectives; to mean 'forgiveness and discernment.'²⁰³ In Yoder's Christocentric vision, forgiveness includes and presupposes prior discernment as it furthers it. Discernment necessitates forgiveness because forgiving sets the limits of believers' responsibility towards one another. As earlier noted, Yoder's Christocentric social witness is very much concerned with the 'neighbor's welfare.'

With this understanding of the relationship between forgiveness and moral discernment, the Yoderian practice describes a 'misunderstanding of the concept of discipline' as an approach in which chastisement is ministered as punitive rather than restorative and reconciliatory because

- Attention might be shifted from the reconciliation of the offender to his/her punishment
- The attention might also be shifted from the person to the offense
- Concern might move from the offender to the standards
- Responsibility for reconciliation might be move from the stakeholders to a constituted authority of the church
- It could lead to categorization of sin

²⁰² *Practicing the Rule of Christ* is the title which Yoder later adopted to reproduce his rigorous attempt to spell out a crucial practical task in the practice of fraternal admonition within the Believers' Church. Originally, Yoder reflected, developed and referred to this practice as binding and loosing. *Binding and Loosing*, Michael Cartwright (in Yoder 1994e) reminds us, 'was published as a whole for the first time in *Concern* 14 (February 1967): 2-37.' It originated from a study outline, which Yoder 'designed to explicate the practice of church discipline in Matthew 18: 15-20.' According to Cartwright, 'Here we find Yoder working on a very practical task: spelling out the issues surrounding the practice of fraternal admonition, or "the rule of Christ" as it is sometimes known in believers' church circles' (Yoder 1994e: 323-325). Practising the rule of Christ also involves some kind of connectional relationships, which are found in many Christian renewal movements. Binding and loosing is one of the earliest components of Body Politics which Yoder updated in the 1980s before its publication in 1992. Cartwright also re-edited it for publication in *The Royal Priesthood* (cf. Yoder 1994e: 325-358) before Nancy Murphy and her colleagues re-edited it for publication in the book *Virtues and Traditions in Christian Practices*. The practice of binding and loosing is definitive of the subordinate Church of Jesus Christ.

²⁰³ Firstly, in light of *forgiveness* in which *to bind* becomes 'to withhold fellowship', while *to loose* becomes 'to forgive,' Jesus' teaching on forgiveness in Luke 17: 3 (cf. Lev. 19: 17; Luke 17: 14; Matt. 18: 14, 21-22), and Matthew 18: 10-14, 23-25 supports it. Secondly, Yoder also re-interprets the abovementioned verbs in the light of moral discernment: to bind also means 'to enjoin, to forbid, or to make obligatory.' His vision for social witness draws from the New English Bible, which translates the verb *bind* as 'forbid' and 'allow' to plead for a morally discerning and deliberating Church. It is a visionary confession of faith *vis-à-vis* its consistent appeal for Christians to recognize and demonstrate moral discernment and deliberation as indispensable exercises in its (the Church) political witness to Jesus Christ. Such moral decisions constitute 'a fund of precedents and principles called the *halakah*, the moral tradition' by which Jesus 'assigns to his disciples an authority to bind and loose previously claimed only by the teachers in Israel' (Yoder 1997d: 135-136).

Yoder's visionary witness of 'forgiveness and discernment' as authentic biblical meaning of 'binding and losing' does not undermine the Church's received mandate to discipline erring members. However, Yoder's vision for social witness in the Believers' Church does not accept the conception of discipline as a punitive measure. His vision for a Free Church witness suggests discipline as a restorative practice. Above all, Yoder's vision for the Church's practice of discipline does not surrender such responsibility to the leadership. His Christocentric vision for social witness seeks a corporate ministry of the whole people of God. Yoder is also persuasive that such a corporate vision of ministry offers the Church a more fundamental change in its polity and politics (the study will discuss this issue, among others, in the next chapter).

Nevertheless, Yoder also acknowledges that his vision is vulnerable to ecclesiastical repulsiveness especially, towards established church traditions. His visionary project is suspicious that unquestioned interaction with mainstream theologians can lure the Free Church to relapse into established ecclesiology. The Free Church historians, Yoder reasons, are rarely grounded in theological orientations (cf. Yoder 1991a). Yoder's vision for social witness also pleads for continuing Christocentric reformation of believers' identities, and church traditions.

The vulnerability of Yoder's Christological vision to established church traditions can question its validity in the SCS. Consequently, the study considers that Koopman's reflections on *Theological Anthropology* would speak in favour of the Yoderian vision.

Koopman reflects on vulnerable wholeness as an essential and indispensable aspect of a new common story.²⁰⁴ He describes it as 'the discovery of the stories of fellow citizens and a renewed

²⁰⁴ In his varied theological projects, Koopman recalls that the Church is characterized with the highest levels of brokenness, suffering and vulnerability, among other public institutions, bodies, or entities of society (Koopman 2006a; 2006b; 2004; 2002; 1998; etc). Vulnerable identity and the reality of interdependence between Christians and the rest of society substantiate the believers' need to confess and embody catholicity (or wholeness and fullness) in the context of *glocality*. To confess and embody wholeness in contemporary contexts also mean to live in joyous relationships. Such meaningful relationships flow from lives, which recognize vulnerability and dependence as virtues that can serve as pathways to true humanhood. The complexities and correlation of contemporary challenges in the world, particularly, in Africa, is such that no one church or public can claim to have all necessary solutions. As Akper (2006a) notes, neither the academia nor the church can (successfully) grapple with the challenges in the wider (civil) society without the other. Trans-community communication is neither optional nor accessory in the actual, powerful, and transformational proclamation of the Good News (cf. Yoder 1996a).

Thus, one can understand Koopman's reflection to mean confessing and embodying vulnerable wholeness in ethos, in structures, in practices and policies, and in all spheres of life, as the heart of the contribution. For Koopman, Christian theology can make significant difference in contemporary worlds.²⁰⁴ Living unity and real

discovery of the Christian faith that can pave ways for the joint making of a new story' (Koopman 1998: 166). Thus, joint story making is a more significant restorative approach to community building and continuing co-existence. Koopman's reflections echo a Yoderian sound. In a Yoderian vision, the continuity that counts is that the Gospel witness evokes and sustains its community forming responses (cf. Yoder 1997c: 219). Such a position makes it necessary for this study to reason that Yoder's scandalous or vulnerable Christological vision can provide the SCS with a more meaningful framework for social witness. It can assist the church to initiate and lead in reconciliatory moves to broker for peace between the Church and its host cultures. Yoder's Christocentric vision can restore peace between the churches within the *religio*-crisis-ridden environment of the SCS. We raised these issues in the previous chapters of this study.

Yoder articulates his Christocentric vision with preference for the social dimension of the Church's calling to peace making (or 're-webbing' *shalom*). His vision argues that the real test of whether the Church is the Church is measured at the point of its relationship with the world. In Yoder's Christological vision, *shalom* is part of God's rule. Wholeness is a divine attribute or characteristic. Jesus made it clear that God's true purpose was the creation of society, in which the Church has a task in history (cf. John 17). The Church, as this foretaste of the Kingdom, which is also sanctified for the task of the Kingdom, may not only reflect but also incarnate God's *shalom* as intended.

In Yoder's Christological vision, reconciliation obligates the Church to envision and to work toward a healthy moral ecology of church and society. Church is suggestive of a community of God's people who are bound together by the Holy Spirit, in social witness. The Church is no ordinary community; it is a theological body that is constituted and inaugurated by Christology. According to Karl August (1999), the basis of this community is not a common heritage or commitment *per se*; this unique community scarcely thrives on shared culture, or even the quality of the involved faith, so to speak. The Church exists as an embodiment of the holistic biblical message. It seeks to relive the biblical truth that 'salvation is not only spiritual – it not only changes people's lives, it changes people's relationships and living conditions, it alters structures, in fact it changes the world. Theologically, the church is engaged in the struggle

reconciliation involves compassionate and caring justice; they are intimately related and constitutive in the heart of the Reformed faith (cf. Smit 2005a; 2003b).

against sin and evil' (August 1999: 29). For Leith (1993: 234-261), the Church is a means, instrument and sign of grace. It finds its institution as well as its *raison d'être* in Christology.

Yoder claims that the Christ-event is the source and guarantee of the Church's life and witness. For him, a church, which fails to radiate this visible light, has ceased to fulfil its calling. The Church exists as a truer and more ordered community than its surrounding society. This unique community is called to enact within history, a social ethics, which portrays the ultimate shape the world is ultimately called to reflect. Members are responsible for the welfare of the neighbour (cf. Yoder 1997a; 1992a; Acts 2). Scripture is normative in shaping it towards a complete and undivided covenant community.

From the foregoing, this study reasons that Yoder's vision draws strength from his scandalous Christology to sustain its altruistic identity and spirituality in social witness. Yoder's Christocentric visionary reflection restrains itself from rejecting other ethos, which different communities of faith embody, with impunity. Such embodied ethos can include *religio*-cultural resources of African descent. Rasmusson (2005) has remarked that Yoder's social vision shares space with local resources in its host cultures. It seeks to transform and adopt their useful lots into its ecclesial vision for social witness. Yoder also criticizes contemporary proclamation of the biblical faith for tending to ignore or bypass the challenges of indigenous religions. In Yoder's Christocentric vision for social witness, Christian proclamation of Jesus Christ engages these challenges in continuing reconciliatory dialogues (Yoder 1996b: 136). His Christological vision recaptures Calvin's views (through Barth's), that the doctrine on which the Church stands or falls is the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord (cf. Leith 1993). It also seeks to restore a Christocentric ecumenical vision back to the social witness of the subordinate church of Jesus Christ. This study hopes that Yoder's Christocentric vision would not re-present a reflection that is more substantive to the crisis-ridden context of the SCS than the Enlightenment-based visions.

The Enlightenment-based visions, as we pointed out in the previous chapters of this research project, do not show significant respect to concrete local experiences. They often adopt a truistic and *magisterium* (dictatorial) stance in social witness. On the other hand, Yoder's Christocentric vision draws useful resources from history, experience and reason in its quest to re-interpret and communicate the biblical witness in contexts. It adopts an altruistic and *ministerium* (collective) stance in social witness. As we observed earlier, Yoder also contends that if Jesus Christ is

God's word, no other event can be in itself, a firm or final revelation or an achievement on the same level. Yoder's vision for social witness strives 'to make plain the mystery of God's manifold wisdom which for ages past has been hidden in God, to the rulers and authorities [principalities and Powers] according to the eternal purpose which God accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Eph. 3: 9-11 [Our paraphrase]). Yoder's Christological vision would not compromise its Christocentric stance in social witness. He maintains that the figure of Jesus Christ provides his subordinate disciples with a normative ethical vision for progressive growth, and revolutionary engagement in social affairs.

3.2.4 Sanctification

We shall discuss Yoder's concept of sanctification from his view on Christian discipleship as a project. Yoder does not focus on sanctification explicitly.

Yoder's vision for Christology replays Christian discipleship as a project. Its Christocentric political identity and spirituality demand openness and respectfulness from the subordinate believer. It also emphasizes repentance and thankful consciousness of the Christian towards the particular historical identity of her/his faith. As we have already pointed out, in *The Priestly Kingdom* Yoder argues that Christian discipleship is historically oriented to proclaim the 'common Christian calling as a project: i.e., a goal oriented movement through time. It is historical as well as substantive: for it recognizes that faithfulness is always to be realized in particular times and places....and always subject to renewed testing and judgment'(Yoder 1984: 3; cf. 2002: 11). Despite its recognition of contexts and diversity, Yoder's Christological vision also asserts that Christian discipleship is historically oriented in a form, which makes it real and visible. The Church, which the Christ-event enacts, consists of real human beings whose identity reflects their Lord. We reiterate that Yoder's project is Barthian in its foundation and orientation. Yoder's concept of discipleship further stresses the embodiment of the Christ-event as a historical reality.

In Yoder's visionary project, believers can celebrate and contemplate Christology in diverse cultures without altering its historical source and witnesses. 'Salvation-becoming-history' does not mean rigidity. It does not also mean irresponsibility or complacency even in the character

formation of Christ's subordinate believers. The Christ-event, as already stated, enables committed witnesses to focus on Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of their faith as they strive to persevere beyond repressive tolerance (Yoder 1997c). Yoder argues that if the apostles had and at least taught a core memory of their Lord's earthly ministry in its blunt historicity, centering the apostolic witness upon the disciples' cross demands embodied Christocentric ethics from believers. The scandalous cross of Jesus Christ has a substantial, binding and sometimes costly social stance for contemporary discipleship. A rediscovery of this vision of responsibility cannot claim to be Christian if it bypasses the judgment or promises of the 'the Suffering Servant's exemplary' in our age (Yoder 1994d: 127-128).

Consequently, Yoder's call for a Christocentric discipleship stance does not emphasize a strong distinction between justification and sanctification. It focuses on the embodied ethos of the Suffering Servant. His vision for social witness emphasizes the crucial role of the personhood and ministry of the Holy Spirit in empowering the Church for mission especially in relation to 'binding and loosing,' 'forgiveness and discernment' as well as 'discipline and reconciliation' (cf. Yoder 1997d; 1992b). In essence, the church is a community for moral discernment as it is also a body for moral deliberation. Members admonish and edify one another towards maturity especially, as it relates to unity of purpose in Jesus Christ (Verhey 2005, 2001).

Such an understanding makes it more arguable that Yoder's Christological reflection can provide the SCS with more substantive vision for social witness. It can give significant attention to the Church's crisis-ridden socio-cultural context. Yoder's Diaspora pursuit of the Barthian vision can assist the SCS to re-interpret and re-appropriate the benefits of the gracious Christ-event in ways that are more humane. This multifaceted vision can also engage the church's multidimensional crisis in continuing dialogues for creative transformation and development. Yoder's multidimensional vision is often occasional, and *ad hoc* in outlook (Nation 2006: 195; Carter 2001: 209-212). Moreover, Rasmusson (2005: 29-30) reminds us that there is no general answer to the question of how the Church should relate to society and culture in Yoder's practice. The Church also speaks about a community of God's people who focuses on the life and works of Jesus Christ to engage in social witness. Those people would not compromise their commitment to the negation of what is on ground and the transformation of prevailing realities, in the light of the life and work of Jesus Christ. The salvation history is composed of continuing dialogues between the present and the past. They are also influenced by contexts but normative

in biblical Jesus Christ (perhaps what Guder (2000) describes as the *Continuing Conversion of the Church*).²⁰⁵ Yoder's vision is Barthian. Its Christocentric reflections for social witness are rooted in Scripture. John Leith also reflects this Barthian (Calvin's) view on sanctification:

The sanctified life involves the call to discipleship, the awakening to conversion, the praise of good works, and the dignity of the cross, which Barth interprets in very much the same sense as Calvin.... The sanctified life is lived in the fellowship of the people of God. The sanctified life is lived by the Christian who has experienced God's grace as forgiveness by the power of the Holy Spirit in the context of the Christian community. It is informed by the scriptures, in which God has made himself known and in which he calls human beings to be his people. It is in particular, informed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Christian life cannot be lived in terms of precepts or regulations or laws. It grows out of the experience of a community's life that is informed by the scripture, by Jesus Christ, and by the presence of the Holy Spirit.'

(Leith 1993: 195)

In Yoder's vision for Christology, Christian perfection bespeaks of communal (not communist) life of *witness as obedience* (or, subordination) to the lordship of Christ. Yoder tailors his views on Christian perfection toward relational and interdependent *doxological witness*.²⁰⁶ Yoder's perspective on Christian perfection suggests an altruistic spirituality. It is informed by the Church's Christocentric identity as a redeemed and restored humanity. Yoder's vision for the believers' lifestyle is formed and continuously reformed by the Holy Spirit, who uses Scripture and contextual phenomena to transform it into a covenant peoplehood. Yoder's Christological vision can permit believers' historical experiences and reason to play crucial complimentary roles in the process. Within this visionary witness, the continuity that counts is that in which the Gospel witness evokes the same community-forming response repeatedly. The continuing conversion of the Church happens as the congregation hears, responds to, and obeys the Gospel of Jesus Christ in (often) new and more comprehensive ways. In other words, Yoder's Christological vision also pleads for a demonstration of believers' discipleship as a witness to the politics of Jesus in the Church's polity and believers' embodied politics of Jesus.

²⁰⁵ This Reformed theologian is also an ordained minister of the PCUSA. In his view, the implication of the church's calling to evangelistic ministry and its (the church's) need for conversion is simply, a continuing conversion. Translation in mission *inter alia*, means that the witnessing church also appropriates and changes as it encounters Christ in the *missio Dei*. Some challenges of the realities on ground are bound to reduce its (church) witness to indistinct values, which are scarcely retraceable to the life and works of Jesus Christ. Such reductionism of the Gospel constitutes an apparent affront to many contemporary theological mission enterprises of the church. The lordship of Jesus Christ is often compromised in the process. In Guder's (Barthian) view, the crucial challenge as well as the meaningfulness of the Gospel is found in its culture enhancing, and life transforming character.

²⁰⁶ Doxological witness as we learn from Barth (1981: 86), depicts humankind's appreciation and appropriation of God's redemptive-restorative act and calling in Jesus Christ. It is expressed in joyful and active participation in the divine vision. In our time, it can also demonstrate for us what Deuteronomy motivates Israel to do: obedience to the torah in compassionate and good-hearted manner. This joyful and active appreciation and appropriation of the Law was more of a reciprocal to Yahweh's compassion and redemption of Israel. Doxological witness is not based on pawnship either. Doxological witness is a demonstration of ethics as obedience in this study.

Perhaps a consideration of his vision for Christian life as witness (in the next paragraph) will shed more light into our understanding of Yoder's Christological reflections.

3.2.5 Christian Life as Witness

This segment examines Yoder's vision for Christian life as a political witness for Jesus Christ. It focuses more on Yoder's perspective on the subordinate believer as a potential moral agent, who can take society beyond its traditional boundaries.

Yoder's proclamation of Christ's lordship over the Powers bequeaths his Christological vision with a portal into a distinctive reflection on Christian discipleship. His vision saddles the subordinate Church with the responsibility to embody Christian life as political witness of faithful believers. This approach is evident in *The Christian Witness to the State* (1997a). In Yoder's view:

Independently of the general obligation to evangelize individuals....the testimony that the risen Christ is Lord also over the world is to us the reason for *witness*.... Even when we move beyond the implicit witness which is given by the very example of the church, by her own....life and her service to the world....the centrality of the church's own experience in this witness should remain clear....The witness of the church must be consistent with her own behavior

(Yoder 1997a: 21 [Our italics])

Yoder appeals to his suggestion of the concept of *moral osmosis* to argue that the centrality of the believers' experience of the merits of the Christ-event is crucial for the Church's embodied witness of Jesus Christ. For him, believers' witness must be congruent with their Christocentric daily lifestyles, in order to have a significant moral influence on non-believers in Jesus Christ.

With the emphasis on believers' embodied vision for social witness, we turn to his appeal for a Kingdom minded vision for social witness. Yoder is also persuasive in his emphasis on public and ecumenical (or catholic) reflection on Christian life and its proclamations as corporate (Christocentric) Kingdom witness. He claims that:

Since the Christian social critique....finds its standards in the kingdom of God....the logical conclusion of their consistent application would be the Kingdom....the whole reason....is the fact

that the Kingdom is not an available possibility lying beyond both the capacities and intentions of fallen society...

(Yoder 1997a: 39)

Yoder reckons on believers' social critique (or witness) as a social and theological given. He also reasons that embodied Christocentric lives of believers can inspire non-Christians to appropriate the righteousness of Jesus Christ to a more appreciable extent. Believers in Jesus Christ are called to adopt the political ethics of the biblical Jesus to serve God, and to rule the world as a royal priesthood. The study will clarify this reflection in the next chapter.

Yoder's appeal for a return to 'the politics of Jesus' expects subordinate disciples of Christ to 'seek the kingdom of God' in their political witnesses. The heritage of believers in Jesus Christ also empowers and inspires them to witness of the Messiah. They seek to serve God and strive to rule the world. Yoder's vision for social witness reflects on the renewed humanity as a pulpit and paradigm for the believers' (embodied) witness to the merits of the Christ-event. As a pulpit and paradigm, renewed humanity also means that the presence of the believing community is Good News to the world. This is a Christocentric stance, which enables the Yoderian vision to proclaim the embodied cruciform lifestyle of the believer and her/his community as a reflection of the renewed world on the way. The Messiah, rather than the Powers, is proclaimed the Sovereign of the universe. Christ is the head of the Church and *kyrios of the kosmos*. Thus, the believers' presence, which is visible in their active but responsible public engagements, becomes an 'original revolution,' which seeks to transform society with the Kingdom ethos of the biblical Jesus Christ (Yoder 1997b; 1997a). Yoder's vision for social witness adopts a vulnerable identity and spirituality; it seeks to restore Christocentric nonviolent-resistance back to the Church's evangelical witness. His Christological vision is an altruistic-nonviolent-resistant pacifist witness.

Such an epoch-making vision for witness draws from and grounds its identity of vulnerability, relationality and interdependence in eschatology (hope). It embodies Christ's lordship and his servanthood as a challenge to imperialistic complacency and sectarian despondence. Yoder reflects on the subordinate believer as a moral agent in the social order. In his social vision, humanity experiences a faith, which assigns moral responsibility to those who had no legal or moral status in their contexts by transforming them into decision-makers (Yoder 1994d: 171-172). Yoder's vision for Christian life as witness rests on his vision for '*moral osmosis*' to

assume a minority stance in social witness. Yoderians also seek to demonstrate transformational *revolutionary subordination* to the Powers in their public witness to Jesus Christ. Yoder envisions a distinctive revolutionary discipleship for Christians. In his perspective, Christian calling is for public witness within society and for the restoration of wholeness in the society. In Yoder's Christocentric vision, the historical task of the Church centres on its (the church's) embodied proclamation of Christ's universal lordship over its polity and politics. We do hope that Uka's (1998)²⁰⁷ view on Christian political witness can nuance the Yoderian practice to the SCS.

Uka appeals to Barth to argue that a balanced biblical view of Christian witness would emphasize political authority as constitutive in the service of Christ. In his perspective, political communication of authority honors God when it ensures and respects the freedom of the Church. Uka sounds Yoderian at this point. Even if his position tends to re-echo the rhythm of the triumphal ethics of the Enlightenment-based visions, Uka's view, as this study reasons, still makes sense for our discourse. According to him:

...We have to note here that the church meant here is the militant church – an indefatigable group fighting under the banner of Christ against the world, the flesh and the devil, to right the wrongs done the people.

The church militant is expected to stand up and be counted. It is divinely commissioned as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. It can not fulfil such roles by standing aloof. Salt must be added and thoroughly mixed...to permeate political life as to serve as an effective instrument of change for the good. As the light of the world, Christians in politics should so shine before the people that they might see their good works and glorify God in heaven.

(Uka 1998: 170)

Uka is hesitant to permit Christians to withdraw from politics because of fear of pollution in the process. He is of the view that Christians have no moral right to criticize politicians who are not doing well if they are not involved in politics. Uka further argues that Christian virtue is no

²⁰⁷ Emele Mba Uka is an ordained minister of The PCN, and a Professor of Sociology of Religion at the University of Calabar, Cross River State Nigeria. In this project, Uka sought to retrieve and demonstrate Christian political witness as an indispensable aspect of evangelical witness in Africa. Many Christian denominations adopt a *laissez-faire* stance towards politics and political issues in many contemporary African societies. From this backdrop, Uka argues that the denial of Christian witness, even in the face of endemic and widespread, demonized institutions and structures of the society, is a misunderstanding of the theological implications of the incarnation. Christian faith and its witness must no longer be divorced from normal daily activities of life. Christian persuasions ought to define and influence believers' lives and activities within the society. As we earlier pointed out, the Gospel transforms people and their contexts without taking history away from its author, sustainer and consummation. Everything is systematized in Jesus Christ (Yoder 1994d: 141). The theological mandate for political witness as Uka portrays it is also a social given. Uka's other published books include *Missionaries Go Home? A Sociological Interpretation of an African Response to Christian Missions* (1989).

virtue if it is practised in isolation. Existential experience is an important acid test for every virtue. With this position, Uka also opines that Christians' demonization of, and unhealthy withdrawal from public political involvement has compelled some Nigerians²⁰⁸ to turn elsewhere for salvation. Socio-cultural realities in the country make it a necessity for contemporary Christians to revisit the politics of Jesus in Nigeria, and in other African countries. To quote Uka, 'If the Church in Africa is to transform society through the Gospel, it must be an insider, an active participant in politics and not a detached idealist and armchair critic of the social system'. Given such a position, this study argues that Uka's view also re-echoes Yoder's hope that the servant-leadership model of Christ should be one of the ways in which the Church can demonstrate to society how to be involved in theological politics. Yoder's vision for social witness expects Christians to restore and disciple the nations with the theological politics of Jesus; it is also a restorative vision for discipling the nations for Jesus Christ in their various contexts.

Simply put, Yoder's restorative vision for Christian life as witness is about discipleship. Christian discipleship involves public witness in order to persuade humankind to turn to Jesus Christ for guidance on ethical political witness. It can be noted that the Bible also validates the Yoderian claim. For instance, in his Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul asked, 'How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe on the one whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them' (Rom 10: 14 NIV). Similarly, an Abiriba adage can offer a significant credence to the Yoderian stance. It says that *the hen that withdraws from scratching and scrambling the earth would have nothing (as food and nurture) to offer her chicks and the environment.*²⁰⁹ Yoder's vision for the Christian life as witness also portrays an evangelical reflection on the meaning and implication of the Church's social proclamation of the politics of Jesus among the nations (we offer a wider discourse on this reflection in the next chapter).

Yoder's vision for social witness also proclaims the Church as a witnessing body, a serving body and a fellowshipping body that is voluntary and identifies with the surrounding society (Yoder

²⁰⁸ Although it is far from the ideal, the Nigerian situation is improving but not much is happening within the SCS and its environs.

²⁰⁹ Free range poultry farming is practised in this local context. In this practice, the mother-hen provides food for its little ones by scratching the surface of the earth, and scrambles to secure the food from the reach of others especially, the cock.

1971b: 108). In Yoder's vision, every God-given privilege also pleads for believers' corresponding witness within the society. The Church's election mirrors Israel's privilege of being the elect, which also obligated them to live as *a people set apart for God's purpose*. Christianity, as faith in Jesus Christ and in the knowledge of the reconciliation of the world to God, thrives as historical phenomenon as well as *phronesis*, i.e., 'practical reasoning, practical wisdom' (Milbank 2006: 338, 351). The Church as a continuing presence of Jesus Christ exists as the meaning of history, and witnesses to the primacy of its faith. The test of its (the church's) validity tilts toward the church's own obedience to the standards of discipleship. In Yoder's vision for social witness, Christians embody a visible evangelistic ministry. It is an indispensable expression of their Christocentric proclamation of the Kingdom vision as social ethics (cf. Yoder 1984). Yoder's vision for social witness is Barthian, albeit, from a Diaspora perspective.

Consequently, this study considers it meaningful to describe Yoder's vision for Christological witness as a movement from the kinds of political theology espoused by several scholars. These include Moltmann or Kroecker to the theological politics espoused by ecumenical theologians such as Bediako, Tutu, De Gruchy, Smit and Koopman, etc.²¹⁰ Theological political witness is also a social critique, which an embodied Christology initiates, defines and sustains. Yoder's vision for 'Christian life as witness' underscores body politics as the indispensable ethos of the Servant Church in the midst of a disillusioned, hurting, and watching world. Such a minority pursuit of the Barthian vision thrives in concrete community setups. Yoder presents his vision for Christology as a community-based as well as community-forming and sustaining vision. It is grounded in the incarnated life and works of Jesus Christ in concrete communities. Since he is a nonviolent-resistant-pacifist witness, his Christological vision is (often) unassuming; it is publicly embodied within concrete communities. Fundamentally, Yoder's Christological vision is a Diaspora orthodox project.

In summary, one can describe Yoder's Christology as orthodox. It is rooted in the ethical political witness of the biblical Jesus. Yoder re-interprets, re-appropriates and re-presents the Christ-event as a visionary project. His vision emphasizes Christ's universal Lordship and Servanthood as the norm for Christian social witness among the nations. Such a reflection also privileges Yoder's minority project with a more nuanced vision for the restoration of catholicity

²¹⁰ We shall continue to reflect on these works in the course of this study.

in the Church's social witnesses. Yoder's Christological vision pleads for an inclusive but responsible (restorative) Christocentric witness. From its perspective, *the calling of God's people is not different from the calling of all humanity. Believers' responsibility is not different from the responsibility to which all humanity is called. The confession Jesus Christ is Lord bespeaks more about the world* rather than mere individual inner piety, intellect, or ideas. The Yoderian tilt towards contextuality does not resonate with privatization and privation of theologies in our age of shared theological consciousness. It does not also condone complacent imperialism or despondent sectarianism. Yoder's vision for Christology is a community-forming and sustaining project. His project 'loops back' to history in order to retrieve useful resources from the catholicity of the early (pre-Constantinian) Church for its theological enterprises.

Consequently, this research holds that Yoder's vision for Christology will not reject the Reformed persuasion that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. It would not also deny the Reformed stance that *all of life is for God's glory*. His Christological vision is ecumenical in its foundation and orientation. However, it will no doubt, stress that *the reflection and actual practice of God's glory must be envisioned from the nonviolent-resistant and pacifist paradigm of the biblical Jesus*. Yoder's understanding of Jesus recognizes the Holy Spirit as well as the life, integrity and ministry of the other in the pursuit of God's glory. Its Diaspora pursuit of the Barthian vision also takes the ministry of the Holy Spirit serious in Christian witness. Yoder argues that the Holy Spirit gives a distinctive portion of grace, which consists of a role within the community, to every member of the (Christian) community (Yoder 1997a: 45). The embodied proclamation of the universal lordship of Christ identifies the distinctiveness of Yoder's view of discipleship as a political witness of the subordinate (Christocentric) believer.

So far, this section has explored Yoder's vision for Christology. It re-presents his Christological project as a possible and plausible vision for renewing the public witness of the SCS. Yoder's Christological vision re-interprets and summarizes Christian witness as an indispensable political responsibility of subordinate believers in Jesus Christ. In this sense, one can also describe Yoder's Bible-based Christological vision as historic. Yoder envisions it from concrete life and works of Jesus Christ within historical communities. His vision for Christology is orthodox. From the reflections on Yoder's Christology in this chapter, the following questions **inter alia**, comes to mind: what do we learn from Yoder's life and intellectual involvement as a 'progressive' (evolving and altruistic) Mennonite Christian theologian and disciple of Jesus

Christ? Would such instructions contribute in meaningful ways, towards justifying our choice of the Yoderian visionary practice as a plausible and possible restorative practice for the SCS? More importantly, into what induction does this explication on Yoder's Christology usher us?

4 Overview

We have observed that Christology is the touchstone of all theology (Barth 1949: 57) and that Yoder complies with this. Yoder's life and intellectual activities challenge believers in Christ to repent from stereotyping the culturally or differently *other*. Despite her/his otherness, that *other* is a partner-in-progress, in the pursuit of the *missio Dei*. *To be is to belong; and to belong involves active participation in social affairs: life is about influencing, and being influenced*. In addition, we learn that Yoder's legacy particularly, his rhetorical phrase, *But We Do See Jesus*, reminds Christians of the need and incumbency of the ongoing call for believers in Christ to embody the politics of Jesus in a world created by a gracious God. Throughout his lifetime, Yoder did not found any Christian denomination of his own. His project is a visionary practice, which stems from the Yoderian fundamental conviction that Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament is the real and fulfilling paradigm for radical political action of all time and space. In spite of his personal weaknesses, Yoder's altruistic and evolving identity and spirituality are evident in his major theological convictions.

Yoder's major theological convictions lean towards the "*copulative and*" (rather than either/or) theological approach. They do not only seek to correct the subject-object dichotomy of the Enlightenment-based theological visions, they also strive to recapture and transform *abstract, prescriptive* and *descriptive* realities to 'lived, living, and liveable' (i.e., *demonstrative*) realities in Christian witness of the 'divine nature' (cf. 2 Pet 1:4). Yoder's major theological convictions also re-presents human responsibility as an inevitable and active participatory response to God's call for, and continuing activities, in the divine reconciliatory program for society. Yoder considers responsible human responsibility and its communication as a significant meaning of the confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ by the Church. Yoder's theology is committed to the welfare of the society (Yoder 1997a: 18-25; cf. Nation 2006: 151-188). This is a Barthian stance.

Moreover, Yoder's Christocentric vision reminds us that contemporary Christians may no longer hide (or withdraw) from others in society. The God we meet in Jesus Christ is not hidden or withdrawn from humanity. Karl Barth exerted much influence on Yoder's life and intellectual engagements (cf. Nation 2003a, 2003b; Carter 2001). From his historical background, it becomes inevitable for us to ask the crucial question: Will not Yoder's theological convictions and witnesses proffer valuable solutions to the subject-object dichotomy of the Enlightenment, as it is pervasive in the SCS, and in many other contemporary theologies?

Yoder combined his Anabaptist theological heritage with the theological method and major themes of Karl Barth to create a Postliberal alternative to interim theologies. As this study shows, Yoder also emphasizes his unique pacifism and demonstration of an ethical lifestyle. Yoder's Christocentric vision is a nonviolent-resistant project, which sees itself as a sign, means, and instrument to guide society beyond its traditional ways. Such a distinctive otherness also inspires his vision to advocate for *restorative* society. He often advocates for an *alternative society*. Whether this issue marks a significant point of departure between him and Stanley Hauerwas will be explored in subsequent chapters of this study. Yoder is *for the nations; he does not stand against the nations*. However, given the view that Yoder's position on natural theology and systematic theology can challenge his commendation to the SCS, we reason that the Yoderian tilt towards contextuality and continuing conversion of the Church can speak for him more significantly. This persuasion is based on some insights that are gained from the analysis of Yoder's vision for Christology in the current chapter.

Yoder argues that the incarnation is a metaphysical mystery, which believers can celebrate and contemplate in diverse cultures, without altering its historical source and practices. In his reflection:

Salvation becomes history not with the rigidity of the railroad, but with the balance momentum of the bicycle, or the walker. Every step calls for the balance to be restored.... Every structured community whose birth is a matter of conviction must evolve beyond the confidence of its first generation. To do so is not to betray their founders but to follow them faithfully, yet the next generation's leaders are given a different role...The continuity that counts is that the Gospel witness again and again evokes the same community forming response, even without institutional connection.

(Yoder 1997c: 216-218)

Yoder's visionary interpretation and appropriation of the merits of the gracious Christ-event is a Christocentric stance. It represents *inter alia*, an affirmation of the Yoderian fundamental

conviction that the political ethics of the biblical Jesus provides his believers with a normative ethical vision for enduring political witnesses in contexts. Yoder has a phobia for ‘first principles’ i.e., foundational methodologism (cf. Yoder 1994f) and institutionalized church/structures.

Nevertheless, Yoder has a more *esteemed view of the ‘other’ as a partner-in-progress, with freedom and right to choose*. This position can promote his theological views as inevitable, in the contemporary search for responsible ecumenical witness in Nigeria. Yoderian projects do not imitate Barth’s emphatic refusal of Brunner and others. Even when there is a difference of opinion, the Yoderian vision often gives listening ears to the *other* because that *other* may hold the key to an elusive truth (this question of the differentiation between Yoder and Barth’s view on the other will be discussed in the next chapter). The historical cross of Jesus Christ is central to his orthodox Christological reflections and convictions. It can be argued that these issues can combine to promote the Yoderian visionary project as a possible and plausible answer to the perennial question of meaning and implication of the Church in a broken and hurting world as ours. Yoder’s Christological project is an ecumenical vision.

Thus, Yoder’s Christological vision can provide contemporary Christianity with a possible and plausible break from the continuing theological seduction of the Church. That sort of seduction is evident in intellectualism, truistic historical consciousness and the secularization project of the Enlightenment-based ethical vision. Yoder’s Christological vision is altruistic in its foundation and orientation. It permits history, experience and reason to play crucial but complementary roles in its proclamation of the biblical witness. His Christocentric vision also seeks to re-invigorate a coherent identity of both God and the Christian community in a fragmented and hurting world as ours. Yoder’s vision for Christology also persuades contemporary churches to restore the orthodox vision for Christian (social) witness in their evangelical proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ in contexts.

Yoder’s ‘orthodox’ Christology argues that believers in Christ are not called out of, but sent into the real world where sacrifice and sovereignty happen. The incarnation means that the other wise invisible God has been made known normatively, in the concrete historical reality of the life, death, and rising of Jesus. The Lord also engages the *pseudo-sovereignties* in continuing dialogue, with a view to redeem and restore them to serve their originally (created) purpose in

the divine economy. Yoder's Christological vision re-interprets and appropriates the merits of the gracious Christ-event to re-represent it as a redemptive-restorative project of the Godhead. Yoder envisions *the Gospel order as a paradigm* in which the human Jesus, the word made flesh is normative in the Church's embodiment of the *missio Dei* in contexts. As earlier observed, this can account for his uncompromising critique of the ambivalence and ambiguity found in Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*. Yoder has also criticized Niebuhr's vision for tending to defame the biblical human Jesus as well as the orthodox Trinitarian project (cf. Yoder 1996a).

Thus, Yoder's critique of the Niebuhrian vision can also highlight some Christological problems in the SCS. It can affirm the validity of our choice of his visionary project as a plausible, feasible and restorative project. The issue at stake is centres around the lordship of Christ over the Powers. As Nation (2006: 172) re-echoes Yoder (1984: 11) that the lordship of Christ is the central guide for critical decision making of the (Yoderian) subordinate believer so that she/he can even reject values, which contradicts Jesus. Yoder's Christocentric project is a Diaspora fulfilment of the Barthian Christological vision. Substantively, its restorative approach craves for a more meaningful vision for believers' ethical witness of Christ's universal lordship among the nations. Yoder's Christological vision expects its suggestion on *moral osmosis* to inspire contemporary believers to make significant (Christocentric) contributions toward nation building, social transformation and development in concrete social contexts. This insight becomes more real as one reflects on the inductions gained, while appraising Yoder's Christological convictions.

Yoder's Christological convictions expose sin as human deadness without Christ. As a manifestation of the fallen Powers, such *pseudo*-attitude enslaves humankind to the values of this temporal life and the deliberate choice to oppose God by perceiving and often treating God's agenda as outdated truth. Thus, salvation also extends beyond individuals to structures and holistic *shalom*. No department of life should be left untouched by Christ's Lordship; and no department should be left outside this relationship. Such confession of Christ's universal lordship reckons on justification by grace through faith as a theological given, as it is also a social reality. Justification also demonstrates social hospitality as an aspect of the distinctive moreness of the Good News of the Kingdom. As we earlier observed in this chapter, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, Yoder appeals to the Pauline approach to the Jewish-Gentile controversy. He uses the approach to argue that the work of Christ is not limited to the salvation

of the souls of individuals so that they can love each other. The breaking of the walls of partition is itself the constituting of a renewed community that is made up of those who lived under the Law and those who did not (cf. Yoder 1994d: 219). For Yoder, such distinctiveness with Jesus also embodies the political ethics of the nonviolent-resistant Messiah as its message. An implication of the jubilee is that those who seek grace must also embody gracious communication of God's gracious bequests to them, in Jesus Christ (Yoder 1994d: 62-65).

In Yoder's Christological vision, salvation is also synonymous with reconciliation. The Christian life is not just about standing a chance of being saved; it is more about accepting the responsibility to serve God in this life and to promote God's reign in all its forms (as people set apart for a particular purpose). The cross suggests a point of scandal, which questions human sovereignty. It enthrones God's agenda because the best of human self-construction ends up in idolatry.²¹¹ In Yoder's vision, believers are called to embody the merits of the gracious Christ-event as Christocentric political responsibility among the nations (cf. Yoder 2003a, 2003b, 1997a, 1997b). The Christian vision of a reconciled community for healthy moral ecology in Jesus Christ relativizes every other human predilection. Yoder's Christological reflections also call for the continuing conversion of believers and their church traditions. Further, Yoder reinterprets the biblical phrase 'binding and loosing' as the Church's Christocentric mandate to accept or withhold fellowship where necessary. The study also discusses these issues above.

Yoder's vision for Christology does not maintain a strict distinction between justification and sanctification. For instance, in his book, *He Came Preaching Peace*²¹² (1985), Yoder argues that the 'moreness' (or extra demand) of the Gospel (rather than a distinction) represents the second calling in following Jesus:

²¹¹ In the previous chapter, this research claims that the adverse effects of such idolatrous attainment of selfhood include religious, political, economic and ecological degenerations within the socio-cultural context of the SCS.

²¹² This book is a compendium of Yoder's varied attempts to probe the Scripture, his thinking and living passion for justice, freedom, and peace under the kingship of Jesus Christ. Yoder articulates these works for the historic Peace Church traditions. The contents of the book were 'all originally addressed orally by a believer to believers.' He shows 'that the peace of Christ should be a theme of proclamation stands in contradiction to the perennial preoccupation of some strands of Christianity to distinguish between divine and human revelation, between the spiritual and the social gospel, between mind and body, or between inward and outward reconciliation' (Yoder 1985: 11-13). In dialoguing with such prominent theological figures as Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr, Yoder attempts to point out some inconsistencies in their approaches to nonviolence, cross bearing and discipleship. The New Call to Peacemaking, a co-operative program between Brethren, Friends, and Mennonites took the initiative to collate and publish these studies. These Peace churches needed to strengthen peace convictions and actions within their own ranks. They also co-operated with other Christians to seek faithful contemporary responses to Jesus' call for love and nonviolence.

You may have learned to talk about this “next step” as a process of nurture or sanctification that you have to work at...a byproduct of the faith. In any case, we have been taught that this further step or further process, the demands of the gospel, will be more clear (sic) if the two steps are held apart. The moreness of the gospel is the second step, the hard one, the bad news that comes after the Good News. This is not what Jesus says. He says that it is all Good News....

(Yoder 1985: 50)

As far as Yoder is concerned, it is by grace through faith that peacemakers are the children of God. This is also a joyful message because it is part of the Kingdom coming. That people who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled is Good News; the Kingdom is at hand. Thus, Yoder’s position on sanctification is an instance where Kroeker’s critique²¹³ calls for attention especially; from a Reformed perspective - the SCS is a Reformed church. Leith (1993) also reflects on the issue of continuing formation of the Christian life under the power of the Holy Spirit and within the community of faith. Leith acknowledges that the traditional Reformed emphasis on sanctification contributed to some major Reformed virtues as well as some well-known problems. For instance, Reinhold Niebuhr remarks that such emphasis on sanctification easily turned into legalism. The Christian life became a matter of laws and regulations. Leith echoes Niebuhr that such Reformed emphasis led to a situation in which the Christian life and the kingdom of God were prematurely identified with the established patterns of social life. However, Leith also stresses that:

The carefully developed Reformed theology of the seventeenth century made distinctions between justification and sanctification that clarify these two moments of the one experience of salvation. Justification is an act of God that is once and final. Sanctification is a work of the Holy Spirit in and through human life...

Sanctification does not add anything to forgiveness, but forgiveness is the end for which we are forgiven. In justification God turns towards human beings; in sanctification God turns human beings towards himself. Sanctificationis a process that continues throughout human life, and it involves the human person.

(Leith 1993: 191)

Leith (1993: 190-192) argues that in sanctification, character is formed, and the good and virtuous person comes to be. The Christian life is expressed in actions but it is first the freedom, the disposition, the intentions, and the commitment of the self. The human self and its commitments of faith are formed under the power of the Holy Spirit and, often, in the community of faith. Actually, Yoder’s visionary project, as we have shown, craves for the embodied Christian faith of the moral agency. However, it does not emphasize ethics of virtue as

²¹³ This study hopes to reflect on Kroeker’s critique in the fifth chapter. Kroeker assumes that Yoder’s vision seems to take the issue of continuing formation and reformation of the moral agency for granted.

we noted under his major theological convictions. Yoder reflects on the Church as a community of God's people who are bound together by the Spirit in visible social obligations. In this visionary project, Scripture is normative for the continuing conversion of the believing community towards a complete and covenanted peoplehood. Thus, Yoder's concept of salvation acknowledges God's graciously initiated and sustained intervention in history as a completed and continuing epoch-making act. Believers can also contemplate and celebrate the Christ-event in diverse cultures without denying or demeaning its historical origin and practices from the biblical Jesus Christ and his early believing communities. Consequently, one can agree with Kroeker that 'it is not unreasonable to hope for further development of a more ecumenical approach to theological politics *from a Yoderian perspective*' (Kroeker 2004: 58 [Our italics]). The Yoderian visionary project is rhetorical in its plea for the believers' embodied witness of Christ's lordship and servanthood at every time and place and among every people.

Yoder's Diaspora (Barthian) vision will not accept complacent imperialism or despondent sectarianism in its reflections for Christian (ethical) witness. Although Yoder would be hesitant to admit it, his Christology also speaks of public theology. For Smit, public theology connotes the public implication of the calling and being of the Church within a concrete larger society. 'Precisely in its attempts to contribute to public opinion and to respond to the challenges and concerns of the particular moment, public theology is always occasional, contextual and historical' (Smit 2006b: vii). To be the true workmanship of God, believers are enjoined to demonstrate grace as deeply and generously as we have received. Believers are chosen in Christ and given the privilege and responsibility to demonstrate such benefits of received grace as their normal daily lifestyle. Yoder's vision for Christology suggests a Diaspora fulfilment of the Barthian ecclesial project. The vision speaks of a theology of grace.

In conclusion, we can learn from all these that Yoder's vision for Christology is characterized by vulnerability, relationality, and dependence; it is grounded in hope. Yoder's Christological reflections can substantiate and popularize African (pre-Enlightenment) *religio*-cultural identity and spirituality as contemporary (*glocal*) Christianity. It can 'share space with others, use various cultural and social resources, and show a relative and critical loyalty to other local entities....in which it exists' (Rasmusson 2005: 111). Yoder's Christocentric vision for social witness can promote African *religio*-cultural expressions as an indispensable approach to contextuality. African *religio*-cultural expressions are also hospitable and modifiable. In other

words, African *religio*-cultural expressions suggest a beginning process in the quest for a responsible ecumenical theology in contemporary worlds. Consequently, one can argue that African pre-Enlightenment *religio*-cultural expressions and Yoder's Christocentric reflections share common affinities, that is, an altruistic and modifiable identity and spirituality. Their vulnerable identities challenge all creaturely sovereignties to continuing dialogues. Thus, Yoder's Christological project can also persuade the SCS to be public in its witness and to conform to Christ in its vision for ecclesial witnesses. Yoder's vision for Christology also takes the Bible serious because it recognizes historiography as a ministry to renewal. Yoder was a historicist whose claim 'that these practices, in various ways, historically, have influenced general society and still have the potential' (Rasmusson 1999: 247). Within biblical history, election, justification by grace through faith, sanctification, and Christian life as witness among others, serve as the building blocks for the Christian faith to make significant contributions towards community building, social transformation and development. Above all, reconciliation is central to Yoder's nonviolent-resistant-pacifist message of hope for the restoration catholicity (or wholeness) in church and society. Yoder's vision for Christology is also a restorative project for church renewal.

In all, our purpose in this study is to examine whether a unique Christian pacifist position, which is rooted in (Yoder's) Christological convictions cannot be relevant to the crisis-ridden socio-cultural context of the SCS in Nigeria. The result of the various analyses we have carried out in this chapter inspires us to hope that an affirmative response will be evident by the end of this study. Yoder's Christology is simply an implementation of Barth's methodology from a Diaspora and contextual perspective. With Yoder's Christological vision, the question of the social significance of the Church's identity and being is answered: *The Church may no longer be more hidden from society than God in Jesus Christ is hidden from humanity – the Church must be public in its ecclesiology*. Therefore, Yoder's Christology is an incarnated or ecumenical Christology; an ecclesial theology, which focuses its ethical witnesses on the biblical Jesus Christ as a paradigm. It can provide the SCS with a more stable Christological framework to *re-vision* and envision its confusing ecclesiological identity.

Barth (1949: 132-139) shows that ecclesiology speaks of the Church's affirmation of the lordship of Jesus Christ in all its polity and politics. Can Yoder faithfully uphold this standard *vis-à-vis* his Anabaptist background? Will he sustain catholicity in his ecclesiology? The

church's faithfulness to God (in ecclesiology) cannot mean less conformity to the Scripture than Israel's faithfulness to God's instituted covenant must mean conformity to the Torah. We turn to Yoder's *Ecclesiology* to seek answers to these questions, in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

YODER'S ECCLESIOLOGY: '...FOR THE NATIONS'

The Reformed tradition does not have a timeless, a historical ecclesiology. Within a typology of ecclesiologies it is certainly possible to situate it somewhere. This claim... is one of the obvious implications of the Reformed emphasis on and understanding of the *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* conviction... The Reformed tradition is 'a faith and tradition with enormous liberating potentials' which 'must continuously be liberated from its own failures and idolatries.

(Smit 2004d: 72; 2005: 367)

The Free Church is not simply an assembly of individuals with a common spiritual experience of personal forgiveness received directly from God; nor is it directly a kind of working committee, a tool to get certain kinds of work carried out. The church is also a social reality right in the midst of the world, that people through whose relationships God makes forgiveness visible.

(Yoder 1997d: 146)

The Yoderian *jesulological* reconciliation...also mirrors an African approach to truth finding. Yoder's process of human interchange combines a plethora of believers' gifts to project reconciling dialogue as the substance of its moral discernment and the authority of divine empowerment to 'bind and loose.' Within this visionary practice, offence must be named, repented of and where necessary restituted.

(Ndukwe 2008)

1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we learn that with Yoder's historical Christology, the Church's witness becomes public. The Church engages society just as God in Jesus Christ engages humanity. As a Diaspora fulfilment of the Barthian Christological vision, Yoder's vulnerable identity challenges all creaturely sovereignties to continuing dialogues. Yoder's vision for Christology pleads with the Church to be public in its bodily political witness of the lordship and servanthood of Jesus Christ. The Yoderian project privileges (lived) Christology to play a determinative role in its ecclesiology. Characterized with vulnerability, relationality, and dependence, Yoder's historical

Christology is grounded in hope. Reconciliation is central to its message of hope for the restoration of catholicity in society.

We have also shown that Yoder's visionary Christology can project the vision of African hospitable and modifiable *religio*-culture as an indispensable approach in the contemporary quest for responsible ecumenical theology. Yoder's vision takes the Bible serious in its historical-anthropological approach to theological politics. This approach promotes historiography as a ministry to renewal. Yoder's Christology is an ecumenical Christology, whose ecclesial theology is focused on the biblical Jesus Christ as its source and paradigm. In reality, its ecumenical spirituality bequeaths believers with the warrantee to associate Yoder's ecclesial vision with the Barthian view. Barth describes ecclesiology as the Church's affirmation of the lordship of Jesus Christ over all its polity and politics. Consequently, we are committed to investigate Yoder's ecclesiology in this chapter with a view to determine its faithfulness to the catholicity of the pre-Constantinian Church.

In the first section, we shall discuss Yoder's concept of ecclesiology as an ecclesial vision that is centred on the Kingdom of God. This will provide us with a platform to investigate Yoder's ecumenical ministry by considering it as Evangelical, Catholic and Reformed in the next section. The last section will examine the shape of Yoder's ecclesiology from his vision of believers' practice of the rule of Christ in order to re-present unity in diversity as the meaning and implication of the Christian community that was created by the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We hope that such an approach can assist us to substantiate Yoder's vision for social ethics as a plausible and possible restorative approach for the SCS. As we noted in the previous chapter, Yoder simply wants contemporary churches to embody their proclamation of Christ's lordship over against all ecclesial polities and politics. With this observation, we shall consider Yoder's vision for ecclesiology in the next section.

2 Yoder's Vision for Ecclesiology

Yoder's vision for ecclesiology embodies a substantive influence of the Barthian bequest with significant ethics, which can also assist contemporary churches such as the SCS to realize their pursuit of God's mission in substantive ways. Over eighty years ago, Karl Barth challenged Christianity with a thesis, which also called on churches to place the figure of Jesus Christ at the

centre of ecclesiological vision and practices. His project contends that Christology is the touchstone on which all polities and politics of the Church stands or falls. Christian confession is the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord (Barth 1949: 56). With this call, Barth shows that ecclesiology determines the Church's faithfulness to the lordship of Jesus Christ. This is also an ethical stance. The Church is about people who confess and embody Jesus Christ as Lord. In support of this view, Best and Robra (1997)²¹⁴ describe ecclesiology as the heart of the practice of the Christian community. They maintain that true ecclesiology underscores the Church's identity as one Church, confessing, worshipping, witnessing and serving together with one heart (yet respecting diversities) in Jesus Christ. Like Barth, Best and Robra point to Christ as the head of the Church. Interestingly, Yoder's Diaspora fulfilment of the Barthian ecclesial theological vision as demonstrated in his articulation and vision of Free (or Believers) Church ecclesiology, agrees with these views.

Although his visionary project is often contextual, Yoder's vision for a Free Church ecclesiology exists as one whose presence, structural framework and social ethics are distinctively independent from other Powers and structures of society, in a sense. Yoder's vision for a Free Church as we hinted in the previous chapter, strives to uphold the *church-world* distinction without losing its identity or abdicating its role in the larger society. This understanding is implied in Yoder's vision of the Church as *A People in the World*.²¹⁵ Michael Cartwright, the editor of Yoder's work, *The Royal Priesthood* (1994e) reiterates that:

Yoder goes on to articulate the distinction of the believers' church model of the church from both hermeneutical and ecclesiological angles. *He* persuasively calls attention to the ecclesiological

²¹⁴ Thomas F. Best was an executive Secretary for Faith and Order in the WCC's program unit on Unity and Renewal while Martin Robra was an executive Secretary in the WCC's program unity on Justice, Peace and Creation at the time of this publication.

²¹⁵ Yoder prepared this paper for the Conference on the Concept of Believers' Church held at Louisville, Kentucky USA, in 1967. According to Cartwright, it 'was subsequently published under the title of "A People in the World: Theological Interpretation" in the volume *The Concept of the Believers' Church*, ed. James Leo Garret (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1969), 250-83.... Other changes, including supplementary notes and stylistic changes, have been made, but the substance of the argument remains much the same as Yoder delivered it....' (Yoder 1994e: 65). Nevertheless, Carter cautions that, 'when Yoder wrote the Essay "A People in the World" in the 1960's, the then current slogans were "go where the action is" and "the secular city." We can easily update them....and note that the basic approach has not changed.' Stanley Hauerwas also cautioned that Yoder would be hesitant to permit any publication of his works of the 1960s without necessary updates that would reflect contemporary shift in scholarship. Above all, regarding his critics' views on *The Royal Priesthood*, Yoder writes the following comments in *For the Nations*. 'Whereas the corpus of older writings in *The Royal Priesthood* can be seen as fitting within a vision of the mission of the Christian community some call "sectarian" or describe as standing "against the nations," the essays in this collection (For the Nations) are intentionally devoted to demonstrating the wrongness of that characterization of my stance' (Yoder 1997b: 6 [Our emphasis]).

implications of recognizing the distinctiveness of the visible embodiment of God's people in the world.

(Yoder 1994 e [Our italics])

In this article, Yoder calls the attention of the Believers' Church Conference to see its pre-occupation with a distinctive 'fundamental understanding of the mission of the believers' as a basic compromise of the original Anabaptist vision. He regards such a detour as a distortion of history, which 'Anabaptism, as one specimen of the believers' church, has undergone at the hands of the writers of history in the last half century' (Yoder 1994e: 66). Thus, Yoder's preface to his argument contains the following postulations:

Why keep on belaboring an issue everybody has already accepted? Such a way of arguing from the cultural acceptance of certain free church positions might be appropriate for some matters of detail, such as the religious persecution and the Crusade. But as the point of departure for a fundamental understanding of the believers' church, such an understanding would be wrong in more than one way.

(Yoder 1994e: 67)

He argues that such an approach 'fixes upon a negative, corrective formal difference between the sixteenth-century believers' church and the magisterial tradition. For the believers' ecclesial vision arises from their reflection or deduction from the concept of the nature of Christian discipleship and community'. Secondly, to say that the Anabaptist position on church and state has triumphed is to say that it has become a dominant social form of a given society. Yoder claims that such an approach to 'stating the "success" or the "progress" of the Free Church social critique presupposes precisely what the Anabaptists and their spiritual relatives denied namely, that the course of history and the structures of society are the most significant measures of whether people are doing the will of God' (Yoder 1994e: 68). As far as Yoder is concerned, these issues constitute a compromise of the Free Church vision on ecclesial reflection and practices. Carter (2001: 58) notes that Yoder 'contends that sixteenth-century Anabaptism intended to be a corrective measure and never claimed to be more than "the rest of the Reformation"'. Yoder's vision for ecclesiology is ecumenical. According to Yoder:

That in the believers' church heritage there exists "an apprehension of the nature of...the church which is specific" we have sought to demonstrate by contrasting it with those views that locate mission in the heart or in the total course of history. That this apprehension, beyond being specific, is also "coherent, a theologically valid option and a needed contribution to ecumenical debate" we have sought to display by observing how uniformly relevant it is to issues currently being debated less satisfactorily in the terms being dictated by other traditions.

(Yoder 1994e: 101)

Yoder wants members of the Free (Peace) Church to embody their identity as a distinctive people in the world, who also engage in active and responsible participation in ecumenical conversations. He sees a link between the liberty of the Believers' Church and contemporary ecumenical concern of his time. Yoder elaborates his vision for a Believers' or Free Church ecclesiology as one which can assist to re-present the Anabaptist vision as 'a full fledged and coherent perspective on crucial issues of theology.' That perspective, 'in a decent and orderly manner, forces us to retrace our historical and theological steps as we take a fresh look at questions that have long been ignored – yes, even suppressed – by those of us who have found it easy to marginalize the “free church” tradition' (Yoder 1994e: viii-ix).

Carter reasons further that Yoder ecclesiology views individualism as a serious problem and seeks to counter it with one that is 'parallel to the traditional Roman Catholic position that there is no salvation outside the church insofar as he understands the church to be the embodiment of salvation'. In addition, Yoder's ecclesiological vision can 'move beyond individualism and theocracy because of his vision of the church as a covenanted community that bears witness to the triune God, who reveals himself decisively in Jesus Christ, and who is at work to redeem his whole creation' (Carter 2005: 176). Fernando Enns²¹⁶ also notes that Yoder offers the Believers' Church a 'model which favors “the covenanted fellowship enjoyed with others who have pledged themselves to following the same Lord.” The final goal is the restoration of an early Christian model of community....' (Enns 2007a: 113).²¹⁷ For Yoder, ecclesiology is ethics; it is the heart of the practice-based bodily existence of the Christian community, which exists as the renewed world on the way (Yoder 1994e: 102-126; cf. Enns 2007a: 125). Historical Christology determines ethical reflection and practices in Yoder's vision for ecclesiology.

We propose to reflect more on Yoder's concept of ecclesiology, as it seems relevant to us, in the context of the SCS. As we hinted in the previous chapter, it can denote disrespect if one interprets or pigeonholes (restricts) the 'multidimensional'; 'conversational'; and 'occasional'

²¹⁶ Fernando Enns is a former Director of Studies at the Ecumenical Institute of the University of Heidelberg, Germany. He is currently the Director of the Institute for Peace Church Theology at the University of Hamburg, Germany, where he teaches Theology and Ethics. Fernando Enns is a Mennonite pastor and the Vice-chair of the Association of Mennonite Churches in Germany. He has been a Member of the Central working Committee of the World Council of Churches since 1998.

²¹⁷ Some other western scholars such as Mark Thiessen Nation (2006) and Chris Huebner (2006), whose works this study appropriates, have commented on Yoder's ecclesial vision. We will further adopt their comments to appraise Yoder's vision for ecclesiology later in this study.

Yoderian project into a single methodological or hermeneutical framework (cf. Yoder 2002: 9-11, Carter 2001:18-19, Huebner 2006: 118). Despite its logical fluidity and persistence in systemizing all its views in Jesus Christ, Yoder's visionary project does not start from the scratch (Yoder 1997b: 9-10). From its perspective, the Christian life is not so much a matter of rules definable once for all, and for every one, a Christ-believer's life is more of constant obedient-living under God's guidance in Jesus Christ. As an ethical project, Yoder's ecclesiological vision calls on believers to relive the merits of the Christ-event in their embodied witness of Jesus Christ within historical contexts through the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

These issues constitute the background to this chapter, which seeks to substantiate an assumption of this study, that is, that Yoder's ecclesiology can assist the SCS to transform some distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based ethics into theological mission ethics. Yoder's ecclesial (public) visionary practice can provide the SCS with a reliable platform to make meaningful contributions towards the ongoing quest for a sustainable and more responsible Christian approach to nation building, social transformation and development in Nigeria.

Yoder's view of the church as alternative society does not emphasize nation building. However, his restorative approach especially, from the 1980s will not dismiss a renewed understanding of nation building as intrinsically evil. As we discussed in the previous chapter, Yoder's restorative vision does not only share space with the differently *other*, it seeks to influence and welcome meaningful changes from the *other*. Yoder's restorative vision also presents sustained engagement with the differently *other* as an indispensable responsibility of Christocentric believers in social transformation and development. The political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ is central to its ecclesiological reflection and practices in the subordinate church. That centrality of Christ's political ethics in the Yoderian project can commend and justify Yoder's ecclesial vision to the SCS, as we seek to uncover in the next paragraph.

2.1 Yoder's Ecclesiology as May be Relevant to the Context of the SCS

In this segment, we reflect on Yoder's vision for ecclesiology as a Kingdom-oriented project. Yoder's basic conviction provides his ecclesiological vision with a substantive framework, which seems to hold great potential for the contemporary SCS. In spite of its Diaspora Barthian

persuasion, Yoder's visionary ecclesial project pleads that the merits of the gracious Christ-event provide the Christian community with a necessary warrant for a distinctive and inclusive vision for ecclesiology. It is consistent in its proclamation that the (political) ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ is relevant for Christian social witness of his (Christ) lordship over all ecclesial polities and politics. For instance, in *For the Nations*, Yoder contends that it would be a contradiction of its confession of Christ's lordship if the Christian community tries to restrict the merits of the Christ-event to itself, or the ingathering of believers. In his words:

If the faith community were to imagine that the reach of...humanity accomplished in Jesus Christ were restricted to itself and the ingathering of believers...it would be in flat contradiction of its confession of its Lord....

To confess that Jesus is Lord makes it inconceivable that there should be any realm where his writ would not run. That authority however, is not coercive but nonviolent; it cannot be imposed, only offered. It cannot be excluded by being declared to be alien, or "private" or "personal" or "sectarian,"....

(Yoder 1997b: 25)

Yoder reasons that the confession that Jesus is Lord is not so much a statement about personal inner piety, intellect or ideas, the proclamation speaks more of a public confession of the universal lordship of Jesus Christ. The calling of the people of God is not different from the calling of all humanity. Public proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ over the cosmos is a historical public role, which the merits of the gracious Christ-event bequeath on the subordinate Church, in Yoder's visionary project. In Yoder's reflection, to participate in the work of Christ can be described as 'serving God' and 'ruling the world.' Described as 'royal priesthood' and as 'priestly kingdom,' believers are called and sent into the real public world where sacrifice and sovereignty happens (Yoder 1997b: 36). We noted this point in the previous chapter.

Yoder's ecclesiological quest envisions a priestly kingdom whose royal priesthood reflects on the risen Messiah as the head of the Church and the Lord of the universe. The embodied Kingdom witness of that distinctive believing community pre-figures the shape of the renewed world on the way (Yoder 1997b: 50). Yoder's visionary ecclesiology is determined by historical Christology. Given this crucial role which historical Christology plays in Yoder's visionary project, one becomes more convinced that his vision for ecclesiology would substantiate a fundamental conviction of this study. The study holds that Yoder's vision for ecclesiology can pave meaningful ways for the SCS to pursue a Scripture-based vision of the kingdom of God. It will not permit the SCS to compromise Yoder's rhetoric on the need for Christ's figure to play a

crucial role in the church's polity and politics within diverse contexts. This can also mean that the SCS might rather pledge to embody its ministry to be more faithful to Jesus Christ, first. As we observed from the P&P Section G-04.0303, in the second chapter of this work, the embodied witness of The PCN as a whole seems to emphasize the pledge to 'remain faithful to its origins' more than the need to affirm the lordship of Jesus Christ above its polity and politics. Often, the sustained struggles of the church to embody the affirmation of Christ's lordship over its (The PCN's) pledge to be faithful to its origins, especially to the Scottish legacy, result in the said 'distorted ecclesiological identity (the DNA) of the PCN' (Onwunta & Hendriks 2006: 235). Furthermore, Ross (2003: 395) also notes that the Scottish Church 'is a national church, deeply conscious of its responsibility to the Scottish community.' Despite its occasional reflection of Mennonite Anabaptist spirituality, Yoder's ecclesiology retrieves its progressive (altruistic and evolving) identity and spirituality to plead for a visible but diversified (geographical) unity of the subordinate churches of Jesus Christ. Incarnated (historical) Christology is the root of this unique Free Church ecclesiology, which Yoder articulates with *intent* – the (partial) realization of *the kingdom of God* within concrete historical contexts.

However, in this section, we shall discuss Yoder's Kingdom vision from the perspectives of Christocentricity, corporate public witness as well as Christologically determined ecclesial identity and spirituality. Yoder's ecclesiology places much emphasis on Kingdom discernment and realization as an indispensable public witness of the believing community. This approach can assist us to explicate on the Yoderian ecclesiology as a *Christological ecclesiology*. In addition, such a clarification will provide us with a more feasible and necessary lens to appraise its ecumenical ministry in the next section.

2.1.1 Christocentric Vision for Kingdom Witness

In what follows, we shall reflect on the figure of Jesus Christ as the *fulcrum* (pivot) on which Yoder's vision for Kingdom witness revolves.

Yoder's vision for Kingdom witness is Christocentric. He appropriates the general theme of the Third Assembly of the WCC at New Delhi in 1961 to argue that the proclamation, *Christ, the Light of the World*, is 'the most genuine ecumenical posture.' It nuances the confession of Christ's lordship over all church polities and politics as the touchstone on which faithful

ecumenism stands or falls. For instance, in *The Original Revolution* (1971b), and *The Royal Priesthood* (1994e) among other works, Yoder also argues that the figure of Christ is crucial for the kingdom witness of the Christian community. In his reasoning, ‘the figure of Christ is crucial not only in the context of unity.... Beyond this, the appeal to Christ represents a particular type of confession of truth, a criterion whereby (*sic*) to evaluate faithfulness (and unfaithfulness) within the Christian community’ (Yoder 1971b: 126; cf. 1994e: 183).

With that vantage position, Yoder argues further that *Christ, the Hope of the World*, means that, *Constantinianism is heresy* (Carter 2005: 179; 2001: 155-178). Carter (2005: 179) remarks that For Yoder, ‘the term “Constantinianism”...is actually a heresy...Constantinianism is an ecclesiological heresy insofar as it erases the distinction between the church and the world...’ Carter also echoes Yoder that the disavowal of Constantinianism is a prerequisite for overcoming the violence and individualism of the Constantinian legacy in a post-Christendom vision for ecclesiology. For Guder (2005), those legacies, which Constantinianism bequeathed to Christendom include the reductionism of mission to ‘savedness of the soul’ (personal salvation), and the glorification of the institutional church so that it becomes the hope for individual blessedness. Such a church provided the rites which initiated salvation and baptism, and which tended and maintained it from the Eucharist through penance to unction. According to Guder:

As heirs of the Christendom legacy, we inherit these tendencies toward reductionism both of the gospel of salvation (soteriological reductionism) and of the church’s purpose and practices (ecclesiological reductionism). We struggle with the compromises made in the name of the gospel over the centuries that have gradually domesticated the gospel and produced what Dietrich Bonhoeffer so aptly called a gospel of “cheap grace”...

A reductionist soteriology generates a reductionist vision of mission and a highly compromised understanding of the purpose of the church.

(Guder 2005: 119-120)

We hope to offer a detailed discussion on Yoder’s position and plea for the disavowal of Constantinianism later in this study. The study is also concerned about how some distressing legacies of Constantinianism can be transformed and re-appropriated by contemporary churches especially, the SCS of The PCN. However, we should note that Yoder, Carter, and Guder seem to agree that Constantinianism breeds and sustains a fundamental shift in both ecclesiology and the hope of the Christian community. Their visions for ecclesiology are Christocentric.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ However, Guder differs with Yoder and Carter on the fate of Constantinianism in a Christocentric visionary ecclesiology for a substantive pursuit of the *missio Dei* by contemporary churches. Yoder and Carter agree that ‘the renunciation of the theocratic vision is necessary if we are going to develop a noncoercive, disciplined

In the ecclesiological visions of Guder, Yoder and Carter, the merits of the gracious Christ-event (rather than the bequests of Constantinianism) provide the believers' community with a 'living hope' for common witness. Guder points out that unflinching hope for the gracious bequests of the merits of the Christ-event energizes, transforms and informs the common witness of this distinctive community. For these scholars, Christology rather than the Constantinian legacy is the fulcrum on which all the nexus of such a living hope for common witness, connect and revolve. Yoder, as we noted in the previous chapter, argues that if Jesus Christ is Lord, no other event or personality can become in itself, a firm or final revelation or achievement on the same level with his Lordship. The course of events in contemporary societies can only echo and/or image the Good News of the coming Kingdom. Reflections based on such soundings and imageries only point humanity back to Jesus Christ who is the anchor of the soul for the Church's corporate Christocentric witness (cf. Yoder 1997b: 245; 1971: 52-84).

In Yoder's Kingdom vision, Christ's figure reproduces a discernible people who are prepared to order their lives in accordance with their Scripture-based convictions. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. The Church may not exist as the Church without the Christ-event. In other words, Yoder's Christocentric vision also re-echoes the stance of Professor Johannes Verkuyl of the Free University of Amsterdam that 'There is no Kingdom without a King!' For Yoder, the Church consists of God's people who gather in Christ's name to find out what it means to do God's business here and now. Christ is the light, and the hope of the world. Yoder's vision for Kingdom witness strives to realize a Christocentric (rather than ecclesiocentric) ecclesiology; it exists for the nations (Yoder 1997b: 177-179; 1994e: 181-218; 1971b: 30-31).

community, which is ready for mission in the world. In a post-Constantinian ecclesiology, the dignity of the individual will be recognized....by the moral disciple of the freely covenanted community' (Carter 2005: 180). They seek a Believers' Church ecclesiology, which reckons on the violent foundation and orientation of Constantinianism as the *locus standi* for their position. In their opinion, Constantinianism bequeaths the Church with a legacy of Christianity without substantive mission. Guder, on the other hand, seems apprehensive about their position.

Guder (2005) seeks a missionary ecclesiology, which 'makes room for one more sinner' (Van Engen 1996). The issue at stake is God's love for the world and the concrete demonstration of that love as it is evident in the historical Christ-event. Every theme of ecclesiology must therefore 'be drawn into and redefined by the foundational vocation of the church to be Christ's witness, to lead its life worthy of its calling, to be Christ's letter to the world, to be...a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people....' (Guder 2005: 128). For this North American Reformed (missionary) theologian, the penultimate purpose of the believers' participation in the *missio Dei* is to communicate it joyfully as grace, which extends to more and more people, as believers' meaningful pursuit of God's glory.

With the above submissions, we wonder whether Yoder's ecclesial vision cannot inspire us to reflect on the *ekklesia* as a meaningful and feasible restorative approach for the SCS (and The PCN) to re-think its ecclesiology. In other words, 'Can we infer from Yoder's ecclesiology that the figure of Jesus Christ is the substance that can provide the SCS with a stable framework to grapple with the challenges of its confusing ecclesiological identity?'

Within Yoder's vision for ecclesiology, the proclamation of Christ's lordship over the world and his headship of the Church constitute a historical task that is rooted in Christology. Both are 'distinctive' acts of grace. The centrality of Christ's figure makes it clear that what believers celebrate is not their strength; it is that of the Lord of the universe and the head of the Church. Christ-believers celebrate the sameness of their Lord who never changes. The reason for remembrance is that Jesus is the same yesterday, now and tomorrow. As Yoder re-interprets and appropriates it, the ministry of remembrance is essentially a Christological task. The ministry of remembrance traces the sameness of Jesus across generations (Yoder 1997c: 216). With this submission, one wonders if we may not agree with Verhey's (2001) description of Yoder's ethics of remembrance as a meaningful approach in juxtaposing human life with Jesus' story.

Even in his contention that Yoder's critique on Constantinianism is inordinate, Verhey admits that the celebration of Constantine confused his (Constantine's) conversion with the final victory of God in Jesus Christ. This celebration also tends to replace the kingdom of God with the Empire, and the reign of God with the Emperor's authority. As O'Donovan (2005: 16) would later do, Verhey attributes such misconception to Eusebius' inordinate celebration rather than Constantine's conversion and accession. In Verhey's view, Yoder draws a sharp distinction between the pacifism of pre-Constantinian Christians and post-Constantinian Christians. The later Constantinians considered imperial violence to be morally tolerable, as well as a positive good.

In the process, Verhey also vindicates Yoder's criticism on Constantinianism for rightly setting the story of Jesus' obedient powerlessness, on the cross. For him, the memory of Jesus judges and renews humanity because our common life is still possessed by demons, which violence cannot exorcise (Verhey 2001: 460-463). In other words, Verhey praises Yoder's Christocentricity as a more meaningful approach to believers' socio-political witness of the lordship of Jesus Christ over all ecclesial polities and politics. Verhey argues elsewhere that,

remembering Jesus is ‘a call to preserve Christian identity and community and to sustain a common life worthy of the gospel’ (Verhey 2005: 153). Such an appraisal of Yoder’s Christocentricity by a Reformed theologian raises a crucial question for our study namely: Could such Christ-centredness not account for Yoder’s critique of his own tradition? Can it not provide the SCS with a more meaningful approach to self-criticism and self-understanding?

In his article, *The Believers’ Church Conferences in Historical Perspective* (1991a),²¹⁹ Yoder challenges his tradition for compromising the Anabaptist vision.²²⁰ He argues that the loss of Anabaptism in ecumenical meetings especially, in the New Delhi WCC arose from improper organization and articulation of times and places by Free Church representatives themselves. Yoder also reasons that the Free Church’s vulnerability to theoretical ecclesiology exists as fallout of the church’s weakness towards the temptation to emulate mainstream evangelicals in retrieving their respective founder figures. Yoder’s practice-based vision for ecclesiology calls for a more authentic Free Church historiography, which would not find it fitting to anchor on a single founder in an apologetic way. Yoder’s project also argues that a healthy Free Church polity is dependent on the Rule of Christ, rather than the virtues of its office bearers. In its varied struggles to use the Anabaptist vision in attaining a plausible and feasible degree of assimilation to the surrounding culture, Yoder’s vision would not de-emphasize the centrality of Christ’s figure in its ecclesiology (Yoder 2002: 13).

²¹⁹ This article is a keynote address, which Yoder presented at the combined 12th Believers’ Conference with the less Anabaptist Colloquium. Yoder read this address on 31 March 1989. From 30 March through 1 April 1989, Yoder and other scholars met with some Believers’ Church leaders at the Southwestern Theological Seminary, Forth Worth, Texas to reflect on the life and thought of one of their leaders, Balthasar Hubmaier. The scholars celebrated a recently published work of Hubmaier, which Yoder and H. Wayne Pipkin edited. In this address, Yoder weaved together several themes as introductory to the conference origin and to the development of the role of concept or idea within the Believers’ Church conferences. Yoder set the agenda and introduced it as an issue for the future study of Hubmaier. This progressive Mennonite theologian (Yoder) also charged Hubmaier of standing between radicality and moderation in his approach to social strategy; hence, Hubmaier does not fit in as a role model for the church. Yoder retraced historical developments in Believers’ Church conferences, changes in Hubmaier’s studies, and the role of social strategies within the Reformation approach to church renewal. Thus, one asks if this address, which until its publication did not transform into an essay, is not inspirational to Yoder’s argument that historiography is a ministry to church renewal. Yoder introduced his address as follows: ‘As introduction...I propose to consider the interlacing of three trajectories...as my assigned title indicates, I should be reviewing the quarter-century history of the Conferences on the concept of the Believers’ Church. Since however I have been assigned to do that every few years while not much has been added, it is fitting that here I should lift up the review from within our experience the topic to which this week’s encounter with Hubmaier should especially speak’ (Yoder 1991a: 5). For Yoder, Jesus Christ is the only role model for the Church because human leaders are also fallible.

²²⁰ Yoder seems to understand the Free Church communions’ position on, and approach to ecumenical responsibility as respectful dialogical advocacy, rather than compromise. In pursuit of his claim, Yoder acknowledges the Anabaptist’s preference of lived ecclesiology to theoretical ecclesial polity and politics.

Such a Christocentric stance seems to exonerate Yoder's ecclesiology from various forms of Constantinianism. It can further explain the Yoderian varied criticisms on Constantinianism. Yoder's visionary project denounces Constantinianism for tending to substitute the lordship of the servant Jesus Christ with human lordship. Such a theological detour, according to many Yoderians, breeds, enthrones and legitimizes violence in the society. Most Constantinian visions, as we hinted above, point the Church to humanity and institutions for guidance. Constantinianism is also a triumph of *pseudo*-political ideologies, which often adopt Christianity to realize its (usually) selfish quest to outfit history in order to move it in the right direction. By contrast, a significant legacy of Yoder's theology is evident in its constant critique of the Constantinian project for striving to better the course of events in order to redirect history (cf. Huebner 2006: 118). Yoder's visionary ecclesiology points to Jesus Christ as the normative Lord of history.

Christ's figure helps committed witnesses to persevere as they look unto *the anointed one* who never changes. This is an unchangeable truth and all that orthodoxy can do is to deliberate on its shape. Such a historical truth, as Yoder reasons, calls for celebration and contemplation in diverse cultures without altering its historicity. As earlier stated, the continuity that counts in Yoder's visionary project is that which ensures that the Gospel witness evokes the same community-building response repeatedly. A Yoderian vision celebrates the centrality of Christ's figure in its polity and politics (Yoder 1997a: 12; 1997c: 216, 219). Yoder's Diaspora Barthian ecclesiology calls for 'unity in diversity' in the Church's proclamation of the Kingdom in contexts. His Christocentric vision for Kingdom witness seeks to realize the Barthian visionary project from a contextual (Diaspora) perspective. Perhaps Mark Shaw's (1996) book, *The Kingdom of God in Africa: A Short History of African Christianity*,²²¹ can shed more light on our interpretation of Yoder's vision for Free Church ecclesiology.

In his quest to rediscover and re-interpret an ancient (Greek) view that Africa always presents the world with surprises, Shaw laments the absence of integrated witness to the Kingdom against the ancient tension between the lordship of Christ and the lordship of Powers in Africa.²²² According to him:

²²¹ Shaw is a lecturer of Church History and Missions at Nairobi Evangelical School of Theology, Kenya.

²²² Until recently, most of the Kingdom proclamations of churches in many African nations reflected the ecclesio-centric visions of the Enlightenment-based ethics, which we described in the first two chapters of this research.

Whether in its political, prophetic, or Pentecostal expressions the modern African church's central witness to the kingdom emphasized the coming of the kingdom. This....*African approach* struck at the WCC-sponsored Melbourne Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in 1980.... "to ask therefore that the end of the powers which are the ordered structures of society and the spiritual powers which lie behind them and undergird religious structures, intellectual structures, moral structures...." The African church's move towards this *pseudo-vision* of the kingdom....plunged her into a struggle to choose among political idolatry, political activism, and political escapism.

(Shaw 1996: 262 [Our italics])

Shaw has denounced privatized Christianity in a world that is dominated by the public religions of the Enlightenment-based humanism. The *pseudo*-ideologies of the Enlightenment-based humanism include capitalism, communism and messianic nationalism. In Shaw's view, 'every expression of Christianity in Africa has a place in the witness to the Kingdom' (Shaw 1996: 289; 296). Shaw is uncompromising that the Church can reflect the Kingdom if it follows Jesus in steadfastly challenging the Powers of evil within diverse historical contexts. He calls on churches in Africa to re-assert their Kingdom witnesses in visible ways, which can enhance the proclamation of the universal lordship of Jesus Christ in contexts. Many African churches joined the said move without a meaningful appraisal of their contexts. Significantly, the proclamation of Christ's lordship over the Powers, and his headship of the Church, as Yoder reminds believers, constitutes the historical task of the Servant Church within concrete geographical locations.

As a corollary, Shaw also hints that African church history can explain the pattern of 'Good Friday and Easter Sunday' reflections and experiences to the world. In a view that is symbiotic to Bediako (2005; 2004), Shaw reasons that such continuing struggle of African Christianity – to bridge the gap between Kingdom ideals and the challenging contextual realities of the African Church – can re-present the story of the kingdom of God in Africa as a story of the world. The challenge of post-modernism makes pluralism (or tolerance) an emerging mission-paradigm (cf. Nussbaum 2005). In other words, Shaw also reflects a Yoderian view, that is, that the scandalous cross and its corresponding Kingdom justify sinners, empower the weak and reproduce life from death. Yoder's vision is persuasive in its stance that the portrait of Christ reproduces a peculiar

Shaw also argues that no one group or denomination possesses an adequate expression of the vision of the kingdom of God. Thus, the tension, which such a *pseudo*-proclamation of the Kingdom generates, further challenges the Church in Africa to respond with a new understanding of the kingdom of God. To buttress this argument, Shaw also expresses a view, which mirrors the Yoderian perspective: that the state is not the kingdom of God; neither is it run by saints.

brand of believers to whom reconciliation is the central message of the Kingdom witness and discipleship.²²³

Shaw's position tends to support the views of Yoder, Smit and Bediako, among others. These theologians also reason that most historical events have theological implications, which the Church can decipher without the violation of freedom, respect and recognition of diversity in mission.²²⁴ In Yoder's vision for ecclesiology, the Church's proclamation of the Christocentric Kingdom message as a concerted witness is first, a theological assumption as well as a sociological given. Yoder's vision for ecclesiology strives to re-present believers' proclamation of the merits of the Christ-event as a Kingdom witness, which believers can celebrate and reflect upon, in diverse cultures without demeaning its historical origin and practices. To enable us gain more insight into this Christocentric ecclesiology, we shall discuss its Kingdom discernment as a 'corporate' witness in the next segment.

2.1.2 Kingdom Discernment as Corporate Witness

This segment appraises Yoder's approach to Kingdom discernment as believers' Christocentric corporate witness.

Yoder's ecclesiological vision re-presents believers' discernment of the Kingdom as a corporate witness, which issues from a theological (and social) conviction that is rooted in Christology. Yoder's vision for Kingdom witness seeks the realization of Christocentric, rather than ecclesiocentric discipleship as an indispensable responsibility of subordinate believers in Jesus Christ. This induction is also discernible in Yoder's reflection on the shape of his restorative vision as a movement towards a vision of unlimited catholicity,²²⁵ which is addressed to all human beings. For instance, in *The Priestly Kingdom* (1984) Yoder argues that:

²²³ We do note Kalu's (1998) comment that Shaw's work (among other things) lacks comprehensive expertise on sociological interests. However, the present study associates with Shaw's observation that the contextual realities within the continent makes it incumbent on successful evangelization to also strive to recognize the concerted efforts of various strands of Christianity in Africa.

²²⁴ We hope that readers can understand this induction as we continue to appropriate the views of these scholars in this study. Time and space do not permit us to contrast their views here.

²²⁵ Here, we reiterate that in Yoder's visionary reflections and practices, catholicity does not mean a universal church under the leadership of one church father or mother. Yoder accepts catholicity as an identity of the pre-Constantinian Christianity, which stresses *the oneness of the church of God in ethical unity, holiness and apostolicity*. It points to the fact that the church of God is a contextual but universal society, confessing one

Without disavowing my ethnic and denominational origins, I deny that this vision is limited to people of the same culture or derived in its detail from that experience. It is a vision of unlimited catholicity because, in contrast to both sectarian and “established” views, it prescribes no particular institutional requisites for entering the movement whose shape it calls “restoration”...
....the vision of discipleship projected in....these pages....describe a biblically rooted call to faith, addressed to Mennonites or Zwinglians, to Lutherans or Catholics, to unbelievers or other believers.

(Yoder 1984: 4, 8)

Yoder claims that such an unlimited summon to discipleship is founded in Scripture and catholic tradition; it is a call to all believers in Jesus Christ. Yoder reflects on such a corporate discernment of the Kingdom as a ‘hermeneutics of peoplehood.’ The Yoderian rhythm, *But we do see Jesus, revealing the grace of God by tasting death for every one* (cf. Heb. 28-9), distinguishes its vision of a ‘trans-community’ Kingdom witness from others. The Yoderian reflexive vision for *middle axiom* permits its evangel to adopt a *conscientious* objection to evil and conscientious ‘subordination’ to the political ethics of Jesus in its evangelical witness. According to Yoder in his article, *On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation*:

There is nothing embarrassing for the bearer of evangel....about pluralism of styles, modes and grounds for either proclamation or conversation. It is part of the nature of Evangel not only to speak many languages but to enter history and the soul through more than one door.

(Yoder 1992b: 296)

Yoder’s vision for kingdom discernment speaks of a Christocentric corporate evangelical witness as a significant contextual approach, which accommodates necessary pluralism in its ecumenical vision for corporate witness and Christian discipleship. The credibility of the evangel as Good News, is essentially and ‘functionally defined by the fact that when someone speaks it someone else hears it, and assents to it, joining the community which bears it.... Without leaving their own world, the addresses enter the community of the witnesses who had first crossed the border’ to join the Jesus-community (Yoder 1992b: 294).²²⁶ Simply put, Yoder’s vision for

faith, one baptism and engaging in God’s mission in the world (in diverse ways). In other words, Yoder espouses a catholicity that reflects Christ-centredness. In the pre-Constantinian Church, catholicity entails a quality of wholeness in individual congregations of the servant *ekklesia*. For Yoder, catholicity is a contextual practice (Yoder 2000, 1990; cf. Hauerwas 2002).

²²⁶ For Yoder, the biblical witness is also a public document as it is fundamentally, a public *kerygma*, which non-Christians can share. Yoder would not grant Christian denominations the monopoly of the interpretation and communication of the Good News to humanity. Being a nonviolent-resistant Diaspora approach to the Barthian vision for ecclesial realism, Yoder’s vision for corporate Kingdom witness looks up to the Yoderian concept of ‘*moral osmosis*’ as an instrument for social transformation and development; in its restorative visionary approach. Yoder re-interprets the biblical phrase ‘binding and loosing’ to mean a Christocentric imperative which also empowers the church to permit or withhold fellowship from the differently *other*.

Kingdom witness permits believers to embody the politics of Jesus in their respective contexts. However, Yoder's vision for corporate Kingdom discernment will not tolerate *lazy pluralism* in its ecumenical vision for evangelical witness of Jesus Christ among the nations. Yoder's restorative vision speaks of a Diaspora approach that realizes the Barthian vision in contexts. Yoder's restorative vision also welcomes meaningful external influences. As its penultimate goal, it seeks a Christocentric nonviolent-resistant approach towards the restoration of *shalom* in different contexts.

Moreover, Yoder's ecclesiology reflects on the incarnation as the warrantee, which obligates the subordinate (or Servant) Church to embody its witness as joint public participation among the nations. His ecclesial vision is an incarnated (historical) Christological ecclesiology. Consequently, this study reasons that Yoder's Christological-ecclesiological vision makes it obligatory for the Church to comprehend its ecclesial and missional identity as both priestly and kingly functions. Jesus' teachings on 'servanthood', 'enemy love', and 'forgiveness' saddles the Servant Church with a scandalous paradigm for a Christocentric witness whose presence and power demonstrates believers' meaningful appropriation of *revolutionary subordination* to the Powers.²²⁷ Based on these claims, a question comes to mind: would Yoder's ecclesiology not offer the SCS a concrete and feasible lens to *re-vision* its ecclesiology without compromising the normative ethics of Jesus Christ in its vision for corporate Kingdom witness?

Yoder's ecclesiological vision is also constant in its view that part of what it means to be the Believers' Church is to admit that members are called to labour together in hope and solidarity. Yoder's concept of the Free (Believers') Church is about believers in Christ with responsibility for one another. Yoder locates its presence and power for revolution in Christological warrantee. He argues that Christ the hope of the world means that believers' hope for a successful life and ministry lies in their identity as servants of the Lord in whom they rest their hopes. Bearing the

²²⁷ For instance, Yoder in *The Royal Priesthood* also re-presents the Church's proclamation of the lordship of Christ over the universe, and his headship over the Church's existence as Christological given to the Servant *ekklesia*. In his words, 'That Jesus is Lord is not something Christian ethicists have to determine, to validate, or to define. Whether it is true does not depend either on our words or our faith. It is what we celebrate, as we participate in his priestly role and kingly rule by watching our words. This is our share, modest but irreplaceably, in the public....victory that is already assured' (Yoder 1994e: 140).

Yoder's appeal for the subordinate Church to embody its corporate discernment and witness of the Kingdom message flows from his Christological conviction. His visionary ecclesiology recognizes the Church's confession, self-understanding, and missional identity as a call to serving God and ruling the world, albeit, without coercion.

cross signals the ‘conscientious objection’ (or rejection) of violence, and the conscious inclination towards (or conscious subjection to) a pathway of vulnerable faithfulness, which denounces ‘cheap grace’ in its embodied proclamation of Christian discipleship. According to Yoder in *For the Nations*, ‘part of what it means to be the believers’ church is to believe that there are answers that we don’t have yet. And that we get them...by working together at symbols, celebration, studies...even though we know that we don’t yet know it. That stated hope is all I intend to offer’ (Yoder 1997b: 161). We have noted that Yoder’s hope in Christ distinguishes his vision of the Church from various forms of Constantinianism. His vision for ecclesiology rejects Constantinianism and its deification of the State for betraying the Church’s otherness in the society especially, the Constantinian (unwholesome) wedding of the church and the world.

Like Barth, Yoder calls for a Free-Church ecclesiology, which marks a clear distinction in the Church’s relationship with the larger society. Such a plea for otherness also reflects on human freedom as a responsible act, which the Church may not compromise. Yoder’s appeal for a distinctive otherness seeks to recapture and re-formulate the Church’s ecclesiological identity with an altruistic and evolving spirituality, which can also re-present the believing community, and its polity and politics as crucial for social ethics. The Church, as a foretaste of God’s loving triumph on the cross and of His ultimate loving triumph in His Kingdom, has this task within history (Yoder 1997a: 10). Yoder points to this identity of the Church as a priority of that otherness i.e., being a visible people in the world who bear witness to the lordship of Christ to the world. In his perspective, the irreducible historicity of Jesus’ servanthood transforms the subordinate community into a distinctive peoplehood whose living model for transformational visionary expression can always protect believers from misrepresenting their historical responsibility.

Implicitly, it becomes unthinkable for a Yoderian ecclesiology to compromise its calls on believers to disavow the Constantinian structural denial of the cosmic lordship of Jesus Christ. Given this submission, one can also describe Yoder’s ecclesiological vision as a *Barthian (Diaspora) ecclesiology*. Historical (biblical) Christology, as this study shows, plays a determinative role in Yoder’s ecclesiological vision. Sadly, we note that even in its implicit recognition of the ‘sovereignty of God’ and the ecumenical patience towards ‘neo-(and neo-

neo?) Constantinianism' (cf. Yoder 1971b:141-150),²²⁸ Yoder's vision often sounds paranoid in its denunciation of Constantinianism as evil. Consequently, this study reasons that Smit's *Ecumenical theology* can shed more light on our understanding of Yoder's corporate discernment of the Kingdom as corporate witness. It may also substantiate the relevance of Yoder's ecclesial vision to the context of the SCS.

Based on his apartheid experience in South Africa,²²⁹ Smit is reluctant to dismiss Constantinianism and the Enlightenment as summarily evil. In his theological perspective, the ecumenical Church (rather than society) and the other publics particularly the academia, hold the key to hearing, interpreting and understanding the act of our communicative God who speaks. Society and scholarship play crucial roles in Christian identity formation. From his Reformed background, Smit acknowledges the ambiguity and ambivalence in his tradition but stresses Calvin's notion of belonging as calling for qualitative forms of 'community of radical bridge building, visible in actual liberation, living unity, real reconciliation, and compassionate justice' (Smit 2006c: 5). Thus, Smit also affirms the view of Yoder at this point. Yoder describes a similar approach as 'barrier-bridging communication' with a long and venerable history of success, which the church is yet to accord its due weight. For him, believers are not accustomed to looking towards the fields of 'translation and mission' for guidance in addressing moral and philosophical problems (Yoder 1996b: 125).

²²⁸ Yoder describes neo-Constantinianism as a new phase of unity in the church-world relationship. This unity has lost the worldwide character of the Constantinian epoch without getting rid of the unhealthy fusion of the church and society. Consequently, the church becomes the servant of a particular society or a dominant class in a given geographical expression (cf. Enns 2007a: 100).

Neo-neo-Constantinianism represents an embodied sustenance of the identification of the church with the state, even as the latter strives to withdraw from the alliance. For instance, in the USA example, the country still considers herself a Christian nation. In spite of the formal separation, 'majority of her citizens consider themselves as members of some church; the army, the congress, schools and even football games have chaplaincy' (Yoder 1971b: 143). In the Sweden experience, the churches, though unpopular, continue to enjoy the support of government. It (church) supports the national politics while the government continues to pay the clergy despite the limited presence of convinced Christians in the church services. According to Yoder, 'For this stage where the church blesses her society....without a formal identification therewith, or without religious rootage in the common people, we might coin the phrase, "neo-neo-Constantinianism." Unity between the church and world has been doubly weakened, yet...the church keeps on linking herself and her vision to her subservience to the state' (Yoder 1971b: 144 cf. 1994e: 195-200).

Finally, Yoder also describes *neo-neo-neo-Constantinianism* as the preoccupation (especially in the southern hemisphere i.e., the so-called third world nations) of the church to be in alliance even with post-religious secularism in its quest to attain popularity. Such preoccupations include the advance approval of an order (such as the political revolution in Latin America), which people resort to as hope for achieving their political aspirations. Yoder wants the church to maintain its status as history bearer for the nations.

²²⁹ See more of his works in the Bibliography.

From this backdrop, Smit (2004d) argues that contemporary Reformed tradition jettisons and exchanges this commitment²³⁰ for a different kind of spirituality and structure, which is alien to John Calvin's vision of the Church and its ministry. Barrier-bridging or trans-community communication of the Gospel plays a crucial role in Calvin's theological thoughts. Smit's concern seems to centre on how to rediscover, re-interpret and demonstrate that ecumenism lies at the heart of the Reformed tradition. Smit also argues (from the Yoderian perspective) that for ecumenism to be real, it must certainly be local (Smit 2004d: 76, 2003c; cf. Yoder 2000: 180). In his view, 'Contextuality refers to the interpretation and proclamation of the Gospel within the life and culture of a specific people and community....When faith is contextual, there is a recognition that the gospel speaks to Christians in their language, connects with their symbols, addresses their needs and awakens their creative energies' (Smit 2003b: 40).²³¹

As a corollary, Smit further underscores the incumbency of ecumenical witness on Reformed churches. He challenges Reformed churches to rediscover, re-interpret and altogether recover ecumenical commitment to living, real and visibly unity, social concerns and actions in their varied witnesses of Jesus Christ, within diverse cultures and contexts. For Smit, the witness of hope to those who are in need and in despair can also mean a practical demonstration of John Calvin's vision of mission. Smit echoes Heiko Oberman that Calvin's thought and theology arose from the historical context of the Diaspora as well as the material and spiritual conditions of the Genevan congregation of the period. His vision focuses more on the suffering and hardships of strangers, of refugees and exiles (Smit 2006b: 37-38, 2006c: 5; 2005c: 267). Subsequently, a Christian theological understanding of emancipation would also need to construe transformation as an encouragement for Christians to maintain critical distance with modernity by articulating and re-appropriating basic insights of the Christian tradition to engage contextual realities in continuing dialogues.

²³⁰ That is, commitment to living, real and visible unity; social concern and action; and a witness of hope to those in need and despair.

²³¹ Smit reasons that the participation of readers (from different cultures and contexts) in the ecumenical movement constitutes a form of success and continuing intercultural dialogue imperative. The Church does mission in full awareness of being only a voice among many other voices, and without any special claims of its own. Smit (2003c: 159) is emphatic that: 'In continuously searching to remain faithful to this gospel, we are less concerned for 'universality' which reflects typically modernist assumptions, but deeply concerned for catholicity and ecumenicity, referring to the fulness of the truth and of the one church of this Triune God, through all ages and in all possible localities, in all its irreducible richness, creaturely, culturally and historically'. The contemporary Church needs to 'loop back' into history to rediscover and re-interpret catholicity (or ecumenicity) as a spirituality that also bespeaks identity.

Smit also points out that withdrawal from active engagement with the challenges posed by contemporary ethical issues would be less helpful in reforming or restoring the Church to being fully the Church. He further reasons that the future of the ecumenical movement makes it imperative for Reformed churches to ‘interpret signs of the times (Matt 16:3) by looking to the One who is both in and beyond time, to the One ‘who is the same, yesterday, today and forever’ – Heb. 13: 8’ (Smit 2003b: 43). They also need to confess ‘their own faith in the justice of God revealed in Jesus Christ’ (Smit 2005a: 366). Smit is rhetorical in maintaining that active *social (prophetic) witness* (Yoder 1997a: 24) of the ecumenical church arises from Christological convictions. Bediako (2003) seems to express a symbiotic view with Smit on the prophetic witness of the Church in his work, *African Theology: A Challenge to Western Theology*.

Bediako, a Ghanaian-born Reformed theologian draws from the events of 11 September 2001 in America, to argue that believers can also reflect on that kind of disaster from a theological perspective.²³² Bediako reasons that such a theological approach can assist believers in Christ to explain who they are and why they engage in a unique prophetic witness from a theological perspective. Bediako seeks to summon Christian (theologians) to the challenge of embodying their identity, calling and being in visible and appreciable ways, which can substantiate the prophetic witness of the Church in public arenas. According to Bediako, ‘We may be able to organize such common perceptions and affirmations around....the significance of Jesus of Nazareth....’ (Bediako 2003: 53). This is suggestive of the fundamental Yoderian affirmation that the politics of Jesus Christ is relevant for believers’ social witness in all historical contexts and times.

Given this position, the following questions can be posed: may we not read a symbiosis in Bediako, Smit and Yoder’s prophetic soundings? Can such symbiotic reflections not substantiate Yoder’s vision for ecclesiology in the context of the SCS? Is it possible to infer from the foregoing that these three theologians would share related views on the Barthian rhetoric that ecclesiology and ethics are inseparable and that they are in dialogue, ‘honoring and learning from the distinctive language and thought forms of the other’ (Best & Robra 1997: ix; cf.

²³² Bediako laments what seems to be the conspicuous absence of a specific theological reading and interpretation of the situation. Unlike voices from other disciplines, theological voices (if at all theologians spoke) on the issue were merely ephemeral. Bediako reasons that since sovereignty belongs only to God rather than those who affirm their faith in such a Living God, humanity can only live in humility while affirming confidence in the living God. Even in its affirmation of such confidence, humankind is challenged to demonstrate humility at the feet of the sovereign Lord of history.

Rasmusson 2000: 180)? More importantly, does Yoder's Christological ecclesiology not preach corporate participation and accountability as a calling to respectful dialogical advocacy, which can provide the SCS with significant resources to learn and re-interpret the implication of its condition especially, the sordid ecumenical relationship within the synodical area?

Yoder's vision for ecclesiology also appeals to its concept of *original revolution*²³³ to argue that the question for our time is not whether the Kingdom is coming. The question centres more on what believers will do about it. With reconciliation as the hallmark of its Christocentric message of hope, Yoder's vision for corporate Kingdom discernment expects all believers in Jesus Christ to 'repent in our ways of dealing with: one another; ethnic differences; social hierarchy; money; offenses; leadership and power' because the Kingdom is within reach, albeit, in a partial and imperfect form. It entails a restorative Kingdom vision in which *revolution(ary)* becomes an adequate word for believers' repentance from all attempts to control history, to believe and embody the Good News of Jesus Christ in daily life engagements (Yoder 1971b: 32-33).

In Yoder's restorative vision for the Church, ecclesiology is not simply ecclesiocentrism. It speaks more of a Christocentric *trans-community* or *barrier-bridging* vision for social witness as it derives from the ethical approach of the 'nonviolent-resistant' biblical Jesus Christ; its scope extends to 'all who do the will of my Father' (cf. Matt. 7:21; 25; Mark 3:35 cf. Luk. 4: 18-19). Significantly, Yoder's visionary ecclesiology stresses that in discerning the Kingdom in our struggles, we must draw lines between the ultimately meaning of events and the desire to get ethical guides from them. Yoder's vision for ecclesiology challenges believers to accept that in the present age it is the ecumenical *ekklesia* that has been graciously empowered to discern more visibly and more validly *your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven* (Yoder 1997b: 179, 213-245). This challenge summarizes the Yoderian ultimate test of whether Christians truly believe that God's purposes are for the whole world, that God's will is knowable, and that the divine purposes are surely about to be fulfilled through the Servant *ekklesia*.

As we have observed, Yoder describes such corporate discernment as a 'hermeneutics of peoplehood.' Corporate discernment involves visible humankind whose quest for the God

²³³ We shall discuss this later in this chapter.

revealed in Jesus Christ envisions a distinctive peoplehood, which also seeks to underscore and execute a *peaceable difference*²³⁴ as the warrant for its dialectical conversations. Within it, meaningful confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ also entails a calling to disciplined dialogues as well as faithful servanthood of the Christian community. Yoder's ecclesiology envisions the Church as a *witnessing body, a serving body and a body fellowshiping voluntarily and visibly, distinguishable to the surrounding environment by visible unity* (cf. Yoder 1971b: 108).

Here, the real test of whether 'the Church is the Church', is measured by the Church's *witness to its distinctiveness and calling rather than its own self-confidence*. Yoder's ecclesial vision also reminds believers that corporate Christocentric witness and accountability calls for respectful dialogical advocacy.²³⁵ Yoder's vision for ecclesiology is undaunted in its plea for re-interpretation and embodiment of believers' kingly, priestly and prophetic roles. He also intends it to mean a call to Christocentric corporate and public witness in contexts. Perhaps we will learn more on Yoder's Kingdom vision as we reflect on Kingdom discernment as ecclesial identity and spirituality, in the next paragraph.

2.1.3 Kingdom Vision for Discernment as Ecclesial Identity and Spirituality

This segment reads historical Christology as the ground for Yoder's proclamation of Kingdom discernment as a corporate identity and spirituality of the subordinate Church of Jesus Christ.

Yoder's visionary ecclesiology draws resources from a Scripture-based Christology, and pre-Constantinian church traditions to argue that Christian unity is a theological imperative. These resources remind believers that the Free (Believers') Church ecclesiology must seek to retrieve and realize its historic meaning as 'Christian wholeness or ordinariness' (1990). For instance, Yoder **also** pleads for the practice and the realization of Christian unity as a theological

²³⁴ See Verhey (2001: 503)

²³⁵ In the incarnation, the ultimate meaning of events and their contingent meanings received a definition whose onus for proclamation lies on the Church. In other words, Yoder's ecclesiology is also supported by Best and Robra (1997), Arne Rasmusson (2000), and Fernando Enns (2007a), among others; i.e., that ethical reflections and practices are intrinsic to the life and nature of the Church; hence, ecclesiology and Christian ethics must stay in close dialogue.

imperative in this article, *Exploration and Response: Christian Identity in Ecumenical Perspective* (1990).²³⁶ According to him:

There is a Christian imperative to achieve (or realize, or acknowledge) Christian unity.... John's Jesus prays for his followers, in the great high-priestly prayer, "that they all may be one"....and the unity that prayer invokes must consist not merely in common acknowledgement of "one Lord" but also in "one faith, one baptism".... [the] Spirit gives unity, not only of commitment but also of doctrine and of practice....Jn. 17 and Eph. 4, link Christian unity to God's own unity.... We affirm here ... our commitment to that unity which Jesus prayed and which the Spirit....commands....We believe Christians have a fundamental duty to realize [it].
(Yoder 1990: 561-562)

The Christ-event, makes it clear that Christians have a fundamental duty to realize this unity. In his reflection, the Believers' Church witness can assist the Church to realize such a mandate in ways that are more appreciable. From the perspective of Yoder's visionary ecclesiology, this also means that Christian unity is about obedience to the historicity of Jesus Christ. Yoder's visionary project does not emphasize a creation or re-creation of the biblical history by the Church. Within Yoder's vision for restoration of wholeness, the 'barrier bridging' or 'trans-community' Church as well as its ecclesial identity and spirituality are defined and authenticated before the Word of God. Scripture is central in Yoder's concept of catholicity for the believing community. He describes such a distinctive catholic community as:

...an eschatological community rooted in the Scripture, typologically understood, a community conceiving itself to have a martyr mission to the *oikoumene* (the inhabited world), a community determined that it must obey God rather than men and women, a community living a transformed (that is, a supernatural) life by the authority of the risen Christ, a community disciplined for obedient service to Christ in a visible church....

(Yoder 1990: 571)

We have noted that Yoder's restorative vision explains that Scripture comes into the scene as a witness to the historical baseline of the origin of its believing communities. Scripture identifies its believing communities with the historicity of their Lord's presence. In a similar argument on church traditions in *The Authority of Tradition* (1994a) Yoder states that:

Scripture comes on the scene not as a receptacle of all possible inspired-truths, but rather as witness to the historical baseline of the communities' origin and thereby as link to the historicity of their Lord's past presence... This renewed appeal to the origins *makes it clear*....that we are able... to become aware that we do not *often* do what *Scripture* says, and that the dissonance we create thereby enables our renewal.... What we find at the origin is already a process of reaching

²³⁶ This is a paper, which Yoder jointly presented to the Ecumenical church, with the late Baptist theologian (and husband of Nancy Murphy), James W C McClendon. As its title indicates, it is a response to David Wayne Layman's attack on their views of the Believers' Church style of Christian unity.

back again to the origins, to the earliest memories of the event itself, confident that that testimony....will serve to illuminate and sometimes adjudicate our present path.

(Yoder 1994a: 94-95)

In a Yoderian ‘looping back’ to pre-Constantinian catholicity, Scripture-based Christology acts as the anchor of the soul of its trans-community communication. In the pre-Constantinian Church tradition, the constituent churches of the Servant *ekklesia* embody visionary but visible ecclesial ethos. Looping back is a recurrent practice, which enables various Christian communities to appropriate necessary resources, which some forerunners of the faith displayed in diverse socio-cultural times; for contemporary social witness of churches. Some persons in such contexts held particular views about past ecclesial disasters, which ‘impinged on them and about particular divine restorations in remedy of those disasters or falls’ (Yoder 1990: 566).

However, Yoder’s vision would not commit itself to, or adjudge any of these interpretations as infallible. In its perspective, a given church is not only fallible; it is also peccable even in its hermeneutical approach, hence, the need to appropriate resources from such a church with a great sense of self-criticism. According to Enns (2007a: 134), ‘the locally assembled church as Christ’s body is seen....as the hermeneutic community.... Yoder wishes to avoid choosing one particular historical development in church history and ascribing absolute meaning to all further developments on that basis...’ As an emerging project, Yoder’s vision, summons believers in Christ to a committed inclusive peoplehood (as their indispensable identity and spirituality). His ecclesial vision also seeks the emancipation of the Church from its past and present failures (cf. Rasmusson 2005). From its foundation, Yoder’s vision is skeptical of established hierarchies.

Additionally, Yoder suspects the Free Church’s communions of vulnerability to the temptation of subjugation by the ‘high church’ traditions, that would make them relapse into established ecclesiology. Yoder is suspicious that the Free Church’s vision for ecclesial reflections and practice might relapse into established orthodoxy. Yoder’s visionary project is persuasive in canvassing its suspicion on Free Church ecclesiology. It fears that Free Church ecclesiology can degenerate into established orthodoxy through some unquestioned ecumenical engagements. We noted these issues in the previous chapter. Yoder’s Free Church ecclesiology contends for the rule of Christ in contexts.

Yoder's vision for ecclesiology does not emphasize human traditions as fundamental in building believers' covenanted relationship to Christ and to one another. It also pleads for a 'Christian unity from below,' which seeks continuing dialogue with, and reconstruction of established church structures. Despite its varied criticisms on 'high church' ecclesiology, Yoder's visionary project rarely demonizes established church traditions as intrinsically, evil. Yoder expects contemporary churches to draw from the political ethics of Jesus Christ to re-interpret and re-appropriate *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* to mean an embodied, reformable, and practice-based tradition and witness of the Servant *ekklesia* (Yoder 2000, 1984; cf. Nation 2006: 94-98).²³⁷ Yoder's project emphasizes Christocentric wholeness in its community-forming-and-sustaining vision.

This kind of wholeness, Yoder reasons, provides the prerequisites for missionary survival in any setting where believers are not in control of power. Yoder thinks of the Church's unity as, primarily, a unity in ethical commitment (cf. Enns 2007a: 133). In Yoder's view, catholicity is a

²³⁷ Paradoxically, Enns reasons that, 'Yoder's position must tolerate the ongoing charge of fundamentalism and even sectarianism. This is inevitable; given....Yoder's repeated and over-simplified polarizations and schematizations. The strength of his and pay off of his approach lie in his unsparing criticism of traditional assumption about ecclesiology.' Enns claims further that Yoder does not offer a convincing alternative. It is obvious that the complex foundational structures of mainline confessions, as well as the plurality of historical and contemporary situations, defy over-simplification. For Enns, Yoder's 'caricatured presentations rarely do justice to these seriously minded, many-sided theological positions' (Enns 2007a:141).

Obviously, Enns' project, like many others, does not also reflect on the restorative aspect of Yoder's visionary ethics. As a result, one can argue that Enns' view that Yoder's approach does not take seriously the question of the complexity of foundational structures in the other (perhaps, the mainline) traditions; reflects a sustained attempt to pigeonhole Yoder's project as *over-simplified polarizations and schematizations*. Apparently, Enns' project does not also reflect on Yoder's vision for ecclesiology as a Diaspora Christocentric project, which *the high-church* ecclesiology can appropriate. Enns concentrated his critique on Yoder's alternative vision whereas Yoder argues that his vision, which we can describe as 'restoration' is for *other believers and unbelievers* as well (cf. Yoder 1984: 8). Yoder's project, as we have shown in this study, is also restorative; it is a Diaspora fulfilment of the Barthian vision. It proceeds patiently, while entering vulnerably into the world of another (cf. Huebner 2006: 127).

Consequently, Enns' seeming association of Yoder's Christocentricity with universalism and triumphalism becomes questionable. According to Enns, 'Yoder does not even seem to see the problem of triumphalism in a radical christocentricism....when Yoder speaks of christocentricism he associates it with a "*Jesulogical*.'" How should particularistic statements be related to those that point to a universalistic Christology in other contexts? In his doxological view of history, universalism becomes the constitutive element of Yoder's christological outline' (Enns 2007a: 134). Enns' project also tends to reduce Yoder's multifaceted, occasional and often spontaneous Diaspora (Christocentric) project to a triumphal and universal Christocentricism. Yoder's Diaspora fulfilment of the Barthian ecclesial vision, as we have argued, is a nonviolent-resistant-pacifist (Christological) visionary practice.

Above all, it is evident from his bibliography that apart from *For the Nations* (1997b), Enns did not draw resources from works such as *Historiography as Ministry for Renewal* (1997c); *Christian Unity from Below* (2000), which Yoder finally wrote before he died in December 1997. They shed more light on our arguments regarding Yoder's seeming tilt toward a more generous ecclesial vision for the Believers Church, before his death.

lived reality, which has its locus in the Church where all believers participate in the proclamation of Jesus Christ among the nations. Each believer is graciously favoured with the gift or giftings of the Spirit to contribute in the pursuit of the fulness of Christ by the believing community (Yoder 1994e: 320; 2000; 1987; cf. Nation 2006: 96). It suggests a covenanted community.

In Yoder's vision for ecclesiology, historical Christology defines and sustains Christian unity. To covenant is to create a new relationship of reciprocal public accountability in addition to the other relationships in which the covenanting partners previously stood. Such covenanting reproduces committed members of a distinctive peoplehood. It responds to the divine initiative or mandate of love, which authorizes the relationships while sustaining the pledges made. Yoder's visionary ecclesiology also calls for 'covenanting at the base' or *covenanting from below*, as a more purposeful approach to 'covenanting to change'. This vision suggests a more significant approach for transforming and developing interculturality. It is a peacemaking vision. Thus, Yoder's visionary practice can tolerate Enns' view that peace is a promise which Christ makes and gives to believers in often distinctive ways from what the world offers as peace (cf. Enns 2007b: 8-9). *Shalom* is Yoder's approach towards 'authentic values of peoplehood' (cf. Yoder 1986b: 318-321). Yoder's visionary ecclesiology respects ethnicity, context, and concrete forms of identity and spiritualities for community building. It is a restorative visionary practice.

Despite its interpretation of 'binding and loosing' as the Church's divine mandate to 'accept or withhold' fellowship, Yoder's ecclesial vision also calls for hospitality especially, to the adversary. In Yoder's vision, such a relationship speaks of the concreteness of local communities of believers, who in their particular confession of Christ, also relate to the differently *other*. Not all who relate with them share in the believers' confession of faith, or its cross-shaped (cruciform) lifestyle. Yoder's Diaspora pursuit of the Barthian ecclesiological vision recognizes meaningful '*moral osmosis*' as a primordial way in which Christ also transforms humanity and its culture, from within (cf. Yoder 1997a: 21-22; 1994f; 1992b; Nation 2006: 42, 105).

Based on these submissions, we ask, would Yoder's ecclesial vision not provide the SCS with a possible and meaningful ecclesiology that can assist the church to tame the tides of its

magisterial ethics? To put it differently, would Yoder's ecclesiology not offer the SCS a more responsible vision for ecclesiology, which can share space with others?²³⁸

In his article, *The Politics of Diaspora*, Rasmusson (2005) also re-presents Yoder's ecclesiology as a concrete way of living out catholicity in a world of nations. Rasmusson reflect on it as Diaspora fulfilment of Barth's Christological ecclesiology. Yoder's vision for ecclesiology also strives to develop a much more socio-historically rich ecclesiology, which does not lose much of Barth's theological fruits. According to Rasmusson:

From the perspective of a Diaspora theology and ecclesiology, Yoder can affirm Barth's understanding of the church's witness to the world. From such an ecclesiology it clearly follows that there is no general theory or systematic theology of the relationship between the church and the civil community....

Something like the Diaspora ecclesiology of Yoder, though it may take many different forms, seems necessary for a church that wants a measure of freedom from its bondage to...the globalized "Western civilization." Such an ecclesiology will share space with others, use various cultural and social resources....

(Rasmusson 2005: 107, 111)

Rasmusson reasons that the Diaspora identity represents in the time between, concrete ways of living catholicity in a world of nations. Rasmusson's postulation seems to present Yoder's Diaspora ecclesiology as a Kingdom of God oriented peoplehood. Historical Christology defines the unique ecclesial identity and spirituality of its believing community. Yoder's vision for ecclesiology proclaims a Christocentric Kingdom realization as the reason for the Church's existence among the nations.

²³⁸ In what reflects Yoder's perspective, a guest speaker to the fifth Annual Conference of the SCS, Brother Chudi Onuzo (2001) once challenged the church to proclaim the Gospel with 'all who name the Name of Christ'. Onuzo remarked that the hallmark of the Christian identity and spirituality is most commendable in believers' ability and readiness to share the Gospel of Christ with any one who wishes to listen. Onuzo reminded the church that rediscovery of the biblical Jesus and total submission to him favours the believer with visible and distinctive identity and spirituality in daily life engagements. Christian life is a public witness hence, the challenge before the entire fellowship of the Presbyterian Church, is to take concerted and sustained action towards a culture of transparent discipleship. It is in the embodied life of Christ that believers past and present make their mark.

According to Onuzo, 'Presbyterians, young and old, weak and powerful, rich and poor, men and women, must be urged to get out there in the world and live exemplary testimony worthy of your Christian tradition. Whether as politicians, civil servants, business and women, professional, artisans, entrepreneurs or clergymen (sic), let each one bear a witness of good works and open testimony of Christ. How else but in living a life of 'the called of Christ' as did the Saints of the church, past and present, make their mark. Let the word go out then that the Presbyterians have emerged again to show the light and to glow for Christ under the anointing of the Holy Spirit' (Onuzo 2001). The SCS represented by its leaders and, delegates to the Annual Conference praised him for such a Scripture-based challenge. Onuzo challenged the church to embody catholicity in its proclamation of Jesus Christ among the nations. This study understands Onuzo's challenge to the SCS as a Yoderian practice.

Furthermore, Mark Nation speaks on Yoder's vision from a symbiotic perspective. He remarks that Christian unity is just as clearly a biblical imperative as are evangelization, non-resistance, and nonconformity in Yoder's ecclesial vision (cf. Nation 2006: 86). Yoder's Kingdom vision speaks of an embodied servant-oriented ministry of all God's people, within concrete human societies. Yoder's vision for ecclesiology identifies the Church as a visible community for moral deliberation as well as a corporate spirituality for communal moral discernment. As far as Yoder's ecclesiological vision is concerned, the incarnation has made the pursuit and demonstration of the Kingdom a socially realizable project of the Church, as it is a theological mandate to the Servant *ekklesia*.

Thus far, we have tried to discuss Yoder's vision for ecclesiology as a Kingdom-oriented ecclesial reflection, which receives its strength from the Yoderian fundamental conviction that, the life and works of biblical Jesus Christ provides his believers with normative ethics in diverse cultural contexts and ages. We have examined its Christocentricity, corporate discernment and witness as well as its ecclesial identity and spirituality. From this exercise, we discover that historical (biblical) Christology accords the Yoderian ecclesiology its warrant for the pursuit and demonstration of the Kingdom as a socially realizable project of the Church, as it is a theological mandate to the Servant *ekklesia*. In order to sustain our central thesis that Yoder's ecclesiology can provide the SCS with a more responsible strategy to *re-vision* its ecclesiological identity, we shall proceed to discuss his ecumenical vision for church ministry, in the next section.

3 Yoder's Ecumenical Vision for Ministry

In this section, we shall explore and espouse the above-mentioned Christocentric conviction in Yoder's Kingdom project; i.e., that Christian unity is a theological imperative for believers in Jesus Christ. We are predisposed to sustain our thesis that Yoder's 'Kingdom-centered' (Christological) ecclesiology can make meaningful contributions within the context of the SCS.²³⁹

²³⁹ The said distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based visions as well as the challenges of postmodernism make it crucial for believers particularly, the SCS, to interpret its life and commitment in Scripture-based Christocentric Kingdom (or ecumenical) languages in African communities especially, *religio-cultural* Nigeria. We noted this point in the second chapter of this study.

Yoder's vision for ecclesiology often appeals to Scripture-based Christology to demonstrate that 'covenanting at the base' or unity from below is a theological imperative for contemporary believers in Jesus Christ. The 'break-to-be-faithful' principle, which characterized the Enlightenment-based witness and ecumenical ministry of the Church, constitutes a scandal to the Gospel. That principle is evident in the early missionaries' ethics toward culture transfer in Africa. Yoder also seems to reason from (a symbiotic) this perspective in *The Royal Priesthood* (1994e) and in *Christian Unity from Below* (2000). He asserts that:

Until we humbly confess their inadequacy, we will not be ready to understand that the Bible is calling for something we are far from being open to affirm or to pay for. The unity of Christians is a *theological* imperative first of all in the sense that its reasons arise out of the basic truth commitments of the Gospel and the church's intrinsic mission. Speaking even more precisely, as we turn to....the New Testament, it is a christological imperative: it has to do with who Jesus is.
(Yoder 1994e: 291; cf. 2000: 178)

Yoder envisions a faithful ecumenical ministry in which the subordinate Church embodies Christocentric ecclesial (ecumenical) patience as a long-term commitment of believers in Christ, and their communities (cf. Nation 2006: 77-108).

Yoder affirms that these Enlightenment-based visions compromised the particularity of the Christian faith in their quest for unity. They scarcely emphasized the particularity the faith of believers' communities' in the biblical Jesus Christ, the sovereign Lord of history (Yoder 1994e: 290-295; 1992b). Yoder argues²⁴⁰ that the Gospel is 'a genre of communication, which is at once particular and communicable by the virtue of the communicators' uncoerced and uncoercive submission to the host culture.' The Good News is contingent and historical; hence, 'it can be communicated in the language of the addressee' without altering its historical source and practices. Its substance is also 'of ordinary world, not mysterious' (Yoder 1992b). According to Yoder, 'Once come into the world, once enfleshed, "the true light that enlightens every one" was utterly and irrevocably particular.... If the post-enlightenment epistemological grid should continue to refuse to admit this category, that calls into question not the historical reality but the grid' (Yoder 1992b: 294, 297).

Yoder's vision for ecumenical ministry would not tolerate 'lazy pluralism' particularly as it is evident in some distressing legacies of Constantinianism in contemporary Christianities.

²⁴⁰ Yoder expresses this view in his article, *On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation* (1992b). We gave a brief history of it in the previous chapter.

Contemporary witness of the universal lordship of Jesus Christ should seek to proclaim the Messiah as the same yesterday and today, as ever (cf. Yoder 1997c). Leaning towards his (restorative) vision for the Barthian Christological project, Yoder remarks that the Gospel is not true in contexts where Christians are not united. Yoder is of the view that the function and hope of believers' unity lies in their substantive demonstration of ecumenicity as Christological (rather than ideological or nationalistic) imperative. Given this induction, one wonders if Yoder's challenge would not provide the SCS with a stable Christologically grounded framework to envision and *re-vision* its Enlightenment-based ecclesiological identity from the paradigm of the biblical Jesus Christ.

The Methodist Archbishop of Umuahia, the Most Revd R.O. Uwadi threw a seemingly Yoderian challenge to the SCS. Uwadi was the Guest Speaker at the 4th Annual Conference of the SCS on 13 May 2000. In his official address, Uwadi lamented the absence of an embodied confession of who 'Jesus is' as the primal dilemma of contemporary ecumenism in the Nigerian Church. Uwadi drew resources from existential issues to argue that most member churches demonstrate 'denomination arrogance' instead of proclaiming the reality of Jesus Christ, in ecumenical relationships. Such member churches hardly manifest the confession of Christ's lordship over the Powers to reflect emancipation from 'denominational cocoon' (or ecclesiocentric political ideology). His submission is as follows:

This is where the Church of God in Nigeria has failed God. After over 150 years of existence and operation of Christian churches in Nigeria, we are wider apart from each other than ever before.

Our relationship....is as fragile as ever with the professional 'Hide and Seek' game in God's name. No! My Christian friends, this is not the Mind of Christ for His Church; we must have a change for the better. This is why all the meeting of the CCN (Christian Council of Nigeria) and CAN (Christian Association of Nigeria) that we attend are more of political convenience and maneuvering and not based on Christian Fellowship with Jesus Christ at the center.... Let us begin once again and prove to all the JESUS is REAL in all our churches; and let us remember that on that day of reckoning, there will be no DENOMINATIONAL TICKETS FOR GOD'S FLIGHT TO HEAVEN

(Uwadi 2000 [Our emphasis])²⁴¹

For Uwadi, it is time for churches to return from *pseudo*-ecclesiocentric mission ideologies to meaningful Christ-centred theological mission ethics. In his perspective, denominational arrogance culminated in the present state of affairs at the Trinity (Union) Theological College

²⁴¹ The emphasis can also substantiate some of our claims in this study that: (a) that Christian unity is lacking in the geo-political environments of the SCS; (b) that Yoder's vision for social witness can assist the SCS to play a crucial pioneering role in reconciling the churches with themselves, and with the wider society.

Umuahia (TCU). Uwadi read this address to the SCS a few months before the Anglican Communion in Nigeria finally seized this ecumenical property, i.e., the ‘Trinity (Union) Theological College Umuahia, and expelled the other parties. The address also reiterated the pathetic state of affairs in ecumenical relationships within the geo-political vicinity of the SCS. They bedevil the Church with acrimonious co-existence, unhealthy power tussles and similar ecclesiocentric vices. We pointed out some of these issues in the second chapter of this study.

This study reasons that like Yoder, Uwadi has appropriated a Christological warrant to call the Church to repentance from denominational arrogance in ecumenical relationships. Again, like Yoder, Uwadi also drew resources from the life and works of the biblical Jesus Christ to plead for faithful ecumenism. His approach also tends to plead for unity from below. Unity from below, Yoder argues, is a Christological challenge to the Church’s vision for a face-to-face reconciliatory witness. Yoder’s suggestive approach to the concept of ‘epistemological privilege of the underdog’ (or preferential option for the poor) seeks to reach the root of conflicts by localizing it and empowering the whole people of God for corporate discernment and deliberation (Yoder 2000: 175-182). Moreover, Yoder’s ecumenical vision for ministry seeks to restore the centrality of the burning issue of human dignity in the Church’s Christocentric witness. We will offer a detailed discussion on this issue in the next chapter.²⁴²

Yoder’s ecclesiological vision seeks to demonstrate the kingdom of God as theologically and socially (partially) realizable within diverse historical contexts of humankind. Yoderians can accept the view that the cause of Christ is advanced when truth is recognized, affirmed and lived out with wisdom and integrity. Such a conviction does not hinder believers from walking in the full freedom of the Gospel of grace; neither does it hinder unbelievers from appreciating and appropriating the works of Jesus Christ in diverse socio-cultural contexts (cf. Groothuis & Pierce 2005). The post-ascension testimony ‘He’s got the whole world in his hands’ also means that the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ makes more significant differences in contemporary worlds than interim ethics. To follow Jesus does not denote ineffectiveness. Rather, ‘it means that in Jesus we have a clue to....which kinds of community building, which kind of conflict

²⁴² Binding and losing is a definitive identity of the subordinate Church of Jesus Christ before a watching world. Contemporary believers’ judgments demand ideological ecumenical conversation that is founded on the ethical paradigm of the biblical Jesus Christ. The Christ-event supports responsible diversities amidst the varied humanities of humankind. Responsible pluralism necessitates the interpretation of Christian understanding of history in a particular way, i.e., discerning ‘what God is doing in the light of tomorrow’ (Yoder 1997b: 242).

management go with the grain of the cosmos,²⁴³ of which we know, as Ceaser does not, that Jesus is both the Word....and the Lord' (Yoder 1994d: 246). We maintain that Yoder's vision for the ecumenical ministry of the church is Christocentric.

In Yoder's Christocentric vision for ecumenical ministry, the biblical witness is a public document, which outsiders can also witness. Thus, identifying it with violence might not only distort it, but also lead to self-defeat and betrayal of the faith. The irreducible historicity of Jesus' servanthood protects believers from misrepresenting their historical responsibility. As we noted in the previous chapter, one can describe Yoder's ecclesial vision as a movement from *political theology* towards the *theological politics* of the biblical Jesus Christ. Perhaps a review of Charry's (1998)²⁴⁴ work entitled *The Crisis of Modernity and the Christian Self* might throw more light on the Yoderian theological-political approach to a visionary ecumenical ministry of the Church.

Charry reflects on Jurgen Moltmann's influential political theology as a child of the Enlightenment. She acknowledges Moltmann's immense contribution in relocating classical interpretations of the Trinity and Eschatology *inter alia*, into the flow of history.²⁴⁵ Charry

²⁴³ Stanley Hauerwas recaptures Yoder's (1988) view on this issue in a very significant way for our study. For him, '....It is that people who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe. One does not come to that belief by reducing social process to mechanical and statistical models, or by winning one's battles for the control of one's own corner of the fallen world. One comes to it by sharing the life of those who sing about the Resurrection of the Lamb' (Hauerwas 2002: 7).

²⁴⁴ Ellen T. Charry is the Margaret W. Harmon Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary.

²⁴⁵ Moltmann's work also challenges contemporary Christianity to retrieve its proper expression of Jesus Christ as hope in a troubled world. The crisis of modernity is transforming into the crisis of the modern self in many Western and allied contexts. Charry further argues that Moltmann's general theme of emancipation from domination is a child of the Enlightenment, which also sees contradictions within modernity. She points out flaws in the secular self that contributes to the moral and social breakdown of society. For Moltmann, the secular self appears inherently lonely and given to suspicion, having only itself to rely upon. A truistic self plays down on the indispensable roles of 'barrier-bridging' or 'trans-community' communication (whether for comfort and companionship or as a moral proxy against which one can be called to account before others) in the character formation of the self.

The goal of reformulating Christian moral psychology is to correct abusive formulations, which restrain Christians from flourishing as God wills. God calls Christians in order to be of genuine help to the culture at large. In Charry's words, ' Moltmann has suggested that modernity must come to terms with its crisis of value on its own; his responsibility is to hold Christian teachings accountable for their complicity in our present ills...Moltmann sees Christianity as implicated in modern individualism through God's call of Abraham and Moses. He sees the call to step out as an individual relationship with an individual God as the norm of personhood and dignity' (Charry 1998: 90). Charry calls for a reformulation of the Christian self in which believers envision their paradigm from the political ethics of Jesus Christ.

In Charry's view, reformed Christian moral psychology engages the insights of modernity. Such a Christian psychology would not lose its footing in its own understanding of God and God's intention for humanity. Proper emancipation also requires critical distance of oneself. True Christian emancipation comes from God: it

agrees with Moltmann (and Rasmusson 1994) that Christianity is an instrument of hope in a world that is desperately in need of it. However, she distances herself from Moltmann's political-theological blames on the Church. Charry describes her position as 'a post-secular Christian vision of hope' and that it suggests a theological-political stance. Charry's vision also reflects on the restoration of *shalom* as the true pursuit of God's glory by the Church. She further comments on the realization of the promise, which God holds out to humanity as a constant reminder of the abundant future that God promised. Charry is a Reformed theologian yet she remarks elsewhere that:

Church members may have difficulty in understanding this because for them I suspect the church may function like the health club or the state....there is something a bit misleading in Calvin's way of defining the church as two or three functions, for it separates and appears to set the Word and sacrament over against one another. Such a separation, however, is quite unnecessary where the sacraments are duly administered....because the fulness of salvation history is proclaimed at every sacramental celebration....

(Charry 2005: 205-206)

Charry proposes a sacramental ecclesiological vision for ministry. In her reflection:

The church is that community comprised of those who are sanctified into the drama of God by virtue of sacramental grace by the holiness of God himself, rather than anything of their own doing... A sacramental ecclesiology is the idea that the body of Christ is that community of persons whose identity, vision and mission are constituted by being part of the community created by the redeeming and reconciling work of God....in Jesus Christ.

(Charry 2005: 215-216)

In Charry's view, sacramental theology is a theological political vision, which craves for 'reconciliation rather than conquest.' Charry's perspective suggests an inclusive theological approach, which inspite of visible variation from Yoder's approach echoes Yoder: it does not re-echo the rhythm that would *deprive them of their pathos*. Above all, Charry seems to substantiate Rasmusson's view that Moltmann is an important formative figure of political theology, just as Yoder (and Stanley Hauerwas) could be said to demonstrate a contemporary radical reformation, which Charry (or Rasmusson) also refers to as *theological politics* (cf. Rasmusson 1994: 16-17).

Theological politics, as evident in Yoder's vision for the ecumenical ministry of the church, is also suggestive of a Christocentric visionary quest for the restoration of the human dignity of the less privileged members of society. The Yoderian project is a restorative vision which expects

is often cultivated through discipline and new or refined skills of a more noble and renewed life that is required by and for life in Jesus Christ.

the Church's prophetic witness to ensure that all humankind participate actively albeit, responsibly in restoring *shalom* in the society. We will reflect more on this issue in the next chapter. For Yoderians, the Servant Church is a missional Church whose participation in the *missio Dei* speaks of a common witness. God's mission is, to use the words of late David Bosch, 'mission is unity; unity is mission' (Bosch 1991: 389-393, 457-467). However, given Nussbaum's critique of Bosch,²⁴⁶ we return to Fubara-Manuel's (2007; 2004) view on God's mission, hoping that it would broaden our horizon on Yoder's view of the church's ecumenical ministry, and its relevance to the context of the SCS.

Fubara-Manuel adopts an Old Testament prophecy (Habakkuk 2: 14) to argue that God's mission seeks to ensure that the earth is filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. To strengthen his position, Fubara-Manuel describes the Church as a group that is conscious of God's Will to witness God's love in the world. From this background, Fubara-Manuel argues that the Church is called upon to see this privilege as a reflection of God's grace, and not as an evidence of its ability to limit God. In spite of his anti-dissenting stance as well as the ambiguous use of the word *church*,²⁴⁷ Fubara-Manuel seems to accede to Yoder's recognition that God's sovereignty can integrate human works of rebellion without regarding such actions as morally good (cf. Yoder 1997b: 245). Fubara-Manuel, as we noted in the previous chapter, also denounces privatization and privation of the common good as sinful. The goal of the Church's reconciliatory ministry is the restoration of humankind for the pursuit of Christ-centred *shalom* in the society. Thus, it can be said that Fubara-Manuel and Yoder share symbiotic perspectives on unity as an *ethos* of the ecumenical church in the *missio Dei*.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Nussbaum criticized Bosch's (1991) work for excluding the Orthodox and the Pentecostals while focusing on the Roman Catholics, the ecumenical Protestants, and the evangelical Protestants. He opines that these are the very groups that have been most affected by the Enlightenment. Thus, he argues that such an approach constitutes 'an example of the undetected impact of Enlightenment thinking on Bosch himself' (2005: 151). Nussbaum also points out that the Enlightenment least affected the Orthodox and the Pentecostals – in spite of their own excesses. In his view, African Pentecostal religiosity, which had blossomed, and even influenced mainline churches in Nigeria, is also iconoclastic. Nussbaum appeals to the views of the Nigerian-born Sunday Adelaja to lament that Pentecostalism in Nigeria is largely a carbon copy of Western Pentecostalism because it has millions of adherents, yet it has less impact on the wider Nigerian society. Most Pentecostals, as we can also learn from Fubara-Manuel, preach a *gospel of personal salvation* rather than the real New Testament gospel, which is *the gospel of the Kingdom*. Pentecostalism in Nigeria is deep in 'replacement-type of missionary religiosity' (Verstraelen 2003), and very shallow in being transformative. Nussbaum is a staff missiologist at Global Mapping International in Colorado Springs, Colorado. A student of the late David Bosch, Nussbaum is currently involved in training programs for ministry to and with African Indigenous Churches.

²⁴⁷ We have commented on these issues in previous chapters of this research.

²⁴⁸ Similarly, the above-mentioned symbiotic views of Fubara-Manuel and Yoder can also shed more light on similar perspectives by Bediako and Verstraelen. They regard unity as an indispensable identity and spirituality of the Church, in its pursuit of the *missio Dei*. As we have pointed out, in Chapter 2, Bediako and Verstraelen

In Yoder's vision for a faithful ecumenical ministry of the church, the original meaning of the word *ecumenical* has to do with a *geographical wholeness*. Yoder's ecclesiological vision represents the Church's affirmation of the lordship of Jesus Christ as the heart of the politics and politics of Christian communities. Within Yoder's reconciliatory and practice-based *ministerium* vision, embodied confession of Christ's lordship calls for sustained engagement in the forms of continuing disciplined dialogues, and faithful servanthood. A Yoderian (envisioned) Christian community exists as a *witnessing body, a serving body and a body fellowshiping voluntarily and visibly -distinguishable to the surrounding environment by visible unity*. One can describe it as a 'theological-political' embodiment of the politics of Jesus Christ in contexts. These distinctive features constitute the litmus test of whether the Church is the Church in the Believers' Church ecclesiology; it is biblically Christocentric in its foundation and orientations. This can be understood more clearly through a survey of Yoder's vision for Evangelical, Catholic and Reformed (better referred to as Reforming) ministries of the Church below.

3.1 Evangelical Ministry

This segment seeks to show that Yoder's vision for the evangelical ministry of the Church *inter alia*, demonstrates the Good News of grace as functional commitment to the inclusive vision of early catholicity. Yoder's vision for ecumenical witness seeks to restore wholeness in society.

share views that interculturality, as demonstrated by most African Christian religiosities, constitutes an indispensable spirituality and identity in the Church's realization of God's mission. Such interculturality can contribute some renewed understandings of faith in contemporary worlds. Contemporary African Christianity goes beyond a teleguided, intellectualized, overly spiritualized and unappealing type of Christianity, which the West and North often impose on their allies (cf. Verstraelen 2003: 143).

African religiosity promotes hope in God more than human effectiveness as a way forward in this age, which is also guilty of oppression, repression and suppression of persons and property. The contemporary world is often dominated by severe and punitive outlook of the tristic bequests of the Enlightenment-based ethics. As we reasoned in Chapter 2, many distressing and tristic legacies of the Enlightenment-based ethical vision and practices do not cultivate or transmit meaningful *shalom*. Such *pseudo*-ethical practices do not often suggest or express 'the ways and forms in which humans contract among each other (*sic*), within the framework of the *oikos* in the interests of the latter's integrity and the worth of its inhabitants, as well as its sustainability' (Botman 2004: 83). God also works in the systems of society, in the cultures of society, and in revolutionary movements and resistances to realize this vision. God's mission is not restricted to anyone or group for its realization (cf. Fubara-Manuel 2007: 48-50; 2004: 10-11). The continent of African, as Maluleke (2001) notes, 'hosts various Christianities – even Christianities within Christianities' in contexts where visible and dynamic forms of indigenous Christianities exist. In this sense, Fubara-Manuel, Bediako, Maluleke and Verstraelen corroborate Yoder's view that Christian internationalism is the true unity, which the Servant Church must be allowed to restore.

Yoder's vision for Christocentric ecumenical embodiment of Jesus' political witness does not jettison its altruistic ecclesial (Kingdom) identity and spirituality in a Yoderian Free Church ecclesiology. This is evident in Yoder's vision for the evangelical ministry; it re-interprets and appropriates the term *original revolution* to sustain Yoder's argument that the Good News, as Gospel is not just any welcomed piece of information. For instance, Yoder in *For the Nations* (1997b) and *The Original Revolution* (1971b) argues thus:

If we are ever to rescue God's Good News from the justifiable but secondary meanings it has taken on, perhaps the best way to do it is to say that the root meaning of the term *euangelion* would best be translated "revolution". Originally it is not a religious or a personal term, but a secular one: "Good News." But *euangelion* is not just any welcomed piece information; it is news which impinges upon the fate of the community. "Good news" is the report brought by a runner to a Greek city that a distant battle has been won, preserving their freedom; or that a son has been born to the king, assuring a generation of political stability. "Good news" is Good News having seriously to do with the people's welfare....

(Yoder 1997b: 166-167 cf. 1971b: 15)

What God is about to do is often Good News to the poor and bad news to the rich. It witnesses for change, including change in economic and social relations (Yoder 1997b: 165-179; 1971b: 14-33; 1994d: 162-192). We intend to discuss this ethical dimension of Yoder's vision for ecumenical (ecclesial) witness in the next chapter. The study focuses more on Yoder's restorative vision.

In Yoder's restorative vision for the Church, evangelization is at the heart of ecumenical ministry, which of course is a public witness. The biblical Jesus Christ is the model for its proclamation of the 'Good News,' which pleads for the restoration of wholeness in society. Yoder's appropriation of prose respects the view that the prostitution or abuse of a word does not necessarily mean its utter rejection. Yoder is also conscious of various misinterpretations and mis-appropriations of the terms 'evangel,' 'evangelical,' as well as 'evangelism' from their biblical meaning of Good News. Yoder's evangel would not compromise its stance that the Gospel of Jesus Christ must also speak prophetically to structures and situations. These *pseudo-institutionalized* monuments often banish and restrict human beings to sub-humanities. The Yoderian ecclesiology is rhetorical in the affirmation that the Gospel restores wholeness and human active participation in the *missio Dei*. Yoder's vision for evangelical ministry bespeaks a political embodiment of the Gospel in contexts.

From its Diaspora (Barthian) Christological posture, Yoder's theological-political (ecclesial) embodiment of the Gospel demonstrates itself as the *original revolution* in various cultural contexts or ages. Wherever it is faithfully embodied, Jesus' political witness particularly, as it affects the differently *other* can make a theological and social difference. It reproduces a distinctive, visible and covenanting community with a renewed pattern of relationships, which are founded on hope in Jesus Christ, the light of the world. According to Yoder:

This is the original revolution; the creation of a distinct community with its own deviant set of values and its coherent way of incarnating them. Today it might be called underground movement, a political party, an infiltration team, or a cell movement. The sociologists would call it an intentional movement....

Jesus did again what God had done in Abraham or Moses or Gideon or Samuel: He gathered his people around his word and his will. Jesus created around himself a society like no other society mankind had ever seen....

(Yoder 1997b: 175-176)

From a Yoderian perspective, such a distinctive community exists as a voluntary society with a mixed composition of people. Yoder asserts that when he called his society together, Jesus gave them a distinctive way of life.

Thus, one can draw strength from Yoder's perspective on original revolution to argue that his vision on evangelical ministry sustains the Yoderian rhetoric that Christian discipleship is a political responsibility. It underscores *reconciliation* as the goal of its distinctive and visible attitude to possession and power (the implication of justification by grace through faith). Yoder's visionary witness is also persuasive in its emphasis that the nearness of the Kingdom (as Jesus announces) calls for repentance. Kingdom witness demands visible continuing transformation of Christians to reflect the politics of the biblical Jesus in their social witnesses. Yoder's vision for evangelical ministry of the Church embodies vulnerability as a determinative component of the power and practices, which define the shape of restored humanity. Readiness to absorb pain and hostility is a crucial identity and spirituality of the Yoderian evangel (cf. Yoder 1992b: 293).

Consequently, the following questions come to mind: will Yoder's vision for evangelical ministry not provide the SCS with a Bible-based Christological warrant to engage the (negative) legacies of its 'Constantinian' and 'Docetic' faced Christian witnesses in continuing transformative dialogues? Would such a nonviolent-resistant evangel not inspire the SCS to

repent from *magisterial* to *ministerium* witness of Jesus Christ in the church's public ministry as we wondered in the second chapter of this work?

Yoder's interpretation of original revolution can also mean that Christian withdrawal from active and responsible social (prophetic) witness denies the incarnation. A Yoderian prophetic witness also seeks to recover and reconstitute the human dignity of all humankind for corporate social witness. Yoder retrieves the Jewish root of his conception of the Church to reflect on the Christian community as a scattered body of Christ. His Diaspora notion of a scattered body 'rejects the idea of a closed and bounded space within a series of outwardly expanding circles....it renounces the temptation to understand its identity as a stable entity to be protected and preserved....' (Huebner 2006: 126). Yoder argues that Christian discipleship is a project, which embodies the ethical political witness of Jesus in ways that are more appreciable. It seeks a continuing transformation and development of society.

In Yoder's evangelical vision for ecumenical ministry, repentance (*metanoia*) is an indispensable spirituality of Christocentric believers. It helps to restore committed witnesses of Christ to a biblically Christocentric vision of 'the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1: 4). Yoder's restorative vision represents *metanoia* to mean thinking differently and acting differently under the embodied presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Thus, liberation from anxiety and guilt becomes constitutive in the 'everything' that will be added when human beings seek first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness in Jesus Christ. Yoder does not place emphasis on sanctification. In his opinion, the Good News of God's original revolution begins with people's ways of dealing with one another, with ethnic differences, with social hierarchy, with money, with leadership, and with power. Kingdom witness is not an available possibility lying beyond the capacities and intentions of fallen humanity. In Yoder's vision for ecumenical ministry, a great deal of such responsibility rests on the identity and spirituality of the subordinate believer in Jesus Christ. She or he is also the moral agent who displays the resources of love, repentance, the willingness to sacrifice, and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit in social witness (Yoder 1997b: 175-179; 1997a: 16-59). Yoder's evangelical ministry reflects an inclusive Christocentric ministry of the whole people of God. Its ecumenical reflection also seeks to place Christocentric restoration of the centrality of human dignity in the Church's vision for evangelization.

Moreover, Yoder's inclusive vision for evangelical ministry views non-Christians as the object of the community's mission, that is, people afar off who are now brought near by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Senior & Stuhlmüller 1983: 345). The adjective 'evangelical' represents the *euangelion* as the Good News of grace to all humankind. Its embodied witness provides a significant framework for flexible creativity of the Good News, which also enables personal faith in its proclamation of communal spirituality as indispensable ethos of Yoder's evangelical ministry (cf. Yoder 2000: 166). Yoder's vision for evangelical witness focuses more on believers' conduct in their calling to witness the merits of the Christ-event to *the other*. Perhaps, a return to our earlier discourse on Yoder's evangelical approach and Barth's emphatic 'No' to dissenting voices would assist us to understand the Yoderian perspective on Christian calling to witness to *the other*.

Additionally, Yoder's evangelical witness seeks to re-invigorate the creativity and dynamism with which the pre-Constantinian catholicity engages persons and contexts in sustained conversations. Yoder reflects on the calling to witness to the *other* as a constitutive element of the self-definition of Christianity (cf. Yoder 1996b). Thus, his perspective on social witness as original revolution engages the differently *other* in sustained interactive dialogues by appropriating the Christian *euangelion* in the process. Yoder's vision for evangelical witness recognizes the '*other*' as a potential partner-in-progress in the pursuit of the *missio Dei*. It is a Christocentric Diaspora vision, which also draws from his ecumenical patience to share space with that *other*. Yoder's visionary evangel also seeks to transform human beings and their contexts to transcend traditional meanings and implications without compromising its Christocentric stance. The Yoderian evangel is altruistic in its foundation and orientations.

Given such an induction on Yoder's evangel, it sounds plausible and feasible for us to reiterate that such altruistic identity and spirituality endeared the Yoderian theological witness to the hearts of some contemporary theologians such as Mouw and Hauerwas (perhaps) more than Barth's universalism. Some of Yoder's theological admirers have commented on this viewpoint albeit, from various perspectives. Cartwright (1998), for instance, seems to locate this affection in Yoder's emphasis: '[B]ut we do see Jesus revealing the grace of God by tasting death for everyone (Heb. 2: 8-9)'. Cartwright argues that Yoder's vision for evangelization engages all conversation partners with respect and gentility. Yoder's ecumenical patience, evangelical witness, and catholic convictions seek a concerted proclamation of the Gospel as social ethics.

Such an approach can move the Servant Church beyond the traditional boundaries of (post)modernity. Cartwright also seems to represent Yoder's political decisions as inductions from the Man Jesus who is the revelation of God's will for humanity. Indeed, Yoder's visionary project speaks of a restorative vision.

Yoder's vision for restoration re-invigorates the political ethics of Jesus in a peculiar evangelistic manner, which has won the theological interests of the above-mentioned scholars. On this, Cartwright writes; 'Richard Mouw....became persuaded that the denunciation of the Anabaptist in his own Dutch Calvinist heritage was wrong. Others such as Stanley Hauerwas would claim to have been "converted" from Niebuhrian realism by Yoder's argument' (Cartwright 1998: 2; cf. Nation 2006: xvii-xviii, 199). In a related observation, Hauerwas remarks that Yoder made him a pacifist and taught him that nonviolent-resistance is not just another moral issue. Nonviolent resistance is constitutive in the heart of the crucified Messiah's life (cf. Hauerwas 1998).²⁴⁹

From these observations, this study 'loops back' to retrieve Hauerwas and Sider's (2002) position that Yoder does not advocate for a liberal (or modern) understanding of Jesus. It can assist us to resume the discussion on Yoder and Barth's Christocentric evangelical vision for ministry. As we noted in the previous chapter, Yoder rather asks that the implications of what the Church has always said about Jesus be taken more seriously and as relevant to our social problems more than ever. Looping back to Scripture and pre-Constantinian church traditions is indispensable in Yoder's (Diaspora) Barthian project. Barth's influence is evident in most of Yoder's works. However, the precise nature of Barth's influence on Yoder is, and may always be an open question because the latter was not concerned about being faithful to Barth's theology (Nation 2003a).

²⁴⁹ In addition, Cartwright and Hauerwas' positions tend to support Rasmusson's (1994: 25) view that Yoder helped Hauerwas to develop his ethics of character and virtue in a manner, which can help to restrain his (Hauerwas) approach from abstraction. Mouw reminds us that Yoder offers his perspective in a decent and orderly manner, which can persuade believers to retrace their historical and theological steps as they take an honest look at questions that have long been ignored by those who marginalize the Free Church tradition (cf. Yoder 1994: ix). Yoder's ecclesial theological approach provides a viable option for those who wish to engage in serious Christian social-ethical discourse (Carter 2001: 20). Of course, Cartwright's personal experience as a Methodist minister can speak for Yoder. Yoder, as a peculiar Mennonite also demonstrated his unique evangelical approach by allowing Cartwright to revise and edit *The Royal Priesthood* for publication. Cartwright remarks that Yoder's lifework tilts towards a unique evangelical witness, which anchored on the ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ.

As Rasmusson (2005) and Carter (2001) among others, have pointed out, Yoder claims in some of his works that a trajectory is evident in the Barthian theology particularly, as it moved from a Christendom mode to a more apparent Free Church style. This study reiterates that the seeming inconsistency (or trajectory) points towards Barth's contention that ethics as obedience means, in Yoder's words, 'conscious subjection' or 'vulnerable subordination' etc, to the universal lordship of Jesus Christ and his headship over the Church. Barth's view on Christian discipleship craves for believers' doxological witness to Jesus Christ among *the nations*. Although he did not 'accord the church substantial role in moral formation,' Barth remarks on the lordship of Jesus Christ:

It is in fact the strong motive for collecting man [sic] and binding them together. And what binds is quite simply and challengingly, at the same time the commission which the community has to deliver its message. If we consider this matter once more from the standpoint of the community, that is, from the standpoint of those who seriously wish to be Christians....we must remember that everything will depend upon the Christian not painting for the non-Christian in word and in deed a *picture* of the Lord or an *idea* of Christ, but on their succeeding their human words and ideas in pointing to Christ Himself....

(Barth 1949: 84-85)

For Barth, it is not the conception of Him, not the dogma of Christ that is the real Lord, but He who is attested in the word of the Apostles'. Barth's proclamation of Christ's lordship does not permit believers to create or recreate another image of Jesus Christ in their witnesses. Barth also prays: 'May it be given us not to set up an image, when we speak of Christ, a Christian idol, but in all our weakness to point to Him who is the Lord and so, in the power of His Godhead, the sovereign decision upon the head of every man'.

One can argue that Barth and Yoder appeal to a Scripture-based Christology to point humanity back to Jesus Christ as its Lord and Savior. Both theologians privilege the figure of Christ to serve as the criterion for evaluating all proclamations of the Church. Yoder and Barth reflect on Christian discipleship as a project which seeks the continuing conversion of the Church from its past failures and idolatries especially, the substitution of Christ's lordship over the Church with human heads, and church traditions. However, unlike Barth, Yoder emphasizes the proclamation of the lordship of Christ and his headship over the Church as the political responsibility of the subordinate (or Servant) Church. Given this submission, we return to the above-mentioned intuition that a chasm seems evident between Yoder's evangelical witness and Barth's.

Yoder's vision for evangelical ministry seems to espouse and express a persuasive approach. It is based on his positive view of human history and minority stance in Christian witness. Yoder's project is a Diaspora vision. In contrast, Barth's evangelical reflection seems to witness Jesus Christ with a triumphal visionary ethic. Barth's witness often portrays itself as a truistic, universalistic and positivistic stance, which pays less attention to the subjectivity and cultural influence of the *other*. Barth's evangelical reflection also tends to sustain the rhythm 'deprive them of their pathos', i.e., the subjugation of the *other's right and freedom to be different* in its ethical witness of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Yoder seems to celebrate the humanity of the *other*. Such *another* is a potential partner-in-progress. Yoder's evangel recognizes and respects the right of the *other* to be different.

The Yoderian Good News in particular, would not compromise its fundamental conviction that the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ provides the norm for believers' ethical witness of all times and in all places. The post-ascension believers' testimony of Jesus, 'he holds the whole world in his hands,' makes more meaningful and sustainable difference in his followers' political ethics than other approaches (Yoder 1994d: 245-246). Unlike Barth's, Yoder's Christocentric vision for evangelical ministry is more altruistic.

Rasmusson, among other admirers of Yoder, reminds us that Yoder strives to insert much of Barth's approach into the Diaspora (or minority stance) and develop it in a more fruitful way. Yoder's evangelical vision places weightier emphasis on human agency and the historical response to God's actions more than Barth's reflection. Despite its evolving nature, Barth's Christological universalism often tends to echo the rhythm; *deprive them of their pathos* (cf. Rasmusson 2005: 28; 2007: 385). Given these observations, we pose the following questions: Can we not agree with Carter that Yoder went further than Barth in unpacking the implications of the church-world distinction for social witness? Can we not also share Cartwright's view that Yoder's evangelical stance (which is mostly expressed in *But We Do See Jesus*) presents a more mature way of Christian evangelization, which can engage contexts in more informed transformational and developmental dialogues? Yoder's vision for evangelical ministry offers hospitality even to the adversary in its inclusive approach. Perhaps Tutu's *Theology of Reconciliation and Hope* can broaden our perspective on Yoder's evangelical position.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Like Smit, Tutu also draws from the apartheid experience in South Africa to present a symbiotic reflection of the Yoderian perspective. Tutu argues that for believers, to know God can also mean that humankind should learn to

This unique South African theologian articulates and demonstrates his functional theology in forgiveness and reconciliation. Rooted in his conviction that there is no future without forgiveness, Tutu's evangelical witness also embodies reconciliatory theology, which reflects in his life and ethical engagements. One can glean this from the story of the struggles against apartheid and his contributions as the Chairperson of the TRC. Tutu's public witness seems to express his confidence that in spite of much evil in the world, human beings have a wonderful capacity for good (cf. Tutu 1999). He maintains that with the loving God who is revealed in Jesus Christ, all suffering is transformable and redeemable. The God who encounters humanity in Jesus Christ is expert in dealing with chaos, with brokenness, and with all the worst things, we can imagine.

In Tutu's vision of hope, humanity is called to 'share God's love with our brothers and sisters, God's other children.' Concerning this love, 'there is no tyrant who can resist us, no oppression that cannot be ended, no hunger that cannot be fed, no wound that cannot be healed, no hatred that cannot be turned to love, no dream that cannot be fulfilled' (Tutu 2004: 128). Tutu also appeals to his inclusive evangelistic vision to interpret the South African understanding of its multi-racial citizenry as *The Rainbow People of God*. Tutu witnesses to humanity in his call that all persons in all human races must remember that, 'the rainbow in the Bible is the sign of peace. The rainbow is the sign of prosperity. We want peace, prosperity and justice and we can have it when all the people of God, the rainbow people of God, work together' (Tutu 2006). Tutu is also described as an 'icon of reconciliation' (Nuttal 2003).

With this submission, one wonders whether Tutu's vision for evangelical theology of ministry cannot provide us with a Christological warrant to read from Yoder's 'sustained engagement

live together as God's people. Despite their varied gifts and locations, humanity is called to serve God and one another in one cosmos. In his evangelical witness, Tutu is conscious of God's concern for the integrity of human beings, their delicate dependence on God, one another, and with the rest of God's creation. Tutu calls attention to human vulnerability to the temptation of individualism and idolatry. He is an elderly statesman, who also reasons that Christians should not take the incarnation for granted. In his view, believers in Jesus Christ are called to express God's graciousness in visible ways that can re-invigorate the merits of the salvific and restorative Christ-event in contemporary societies. Tutu even prays to God to deliver him and others people from all that can hinder their access to God (cf. Tutu 1996). Tutu acknowledges the evils of apartheid and stresses that God has a dream in which humankind, as God's partner, matters. These are the titles of his works from which this segment draws resources: *The Rainbow People of God: A Spiritual Journey from Apartheid to Freedom* (2006); *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for our Time* (2004); *No Future Without Forgiveness* (1999); *An African Prayer Book* (1996).

with the differently *other*’ some reflections on African (particularly the Algerian) experience in Yoder’s Diaspora ecclesial vision of hope. Again, given Oduyoye’s (2004) statement that hope is the fire, which refines the African continent, is there any more nuanced way to sum up this discussion on the evangelical theologies of Yoder, Barth, and Tutu for Africans in general and Nigerians in particular than to re-echo Bediako (2005)? He inquires, ‘Could it *not* be around our common Ancestor that the scattered fragments of the African experience of Christ, as a unique human experience in its well-known vicissitudes are pulled together again?’ (Bediako 2005 [Our italics]) We are inclined to agree with Bediako’s submission that going back to Africa now facilitates our going forward with the Gospel, as a message of reconciliation and hope.

Many indigenous African societies are identifiable as communities for corporate moral deliberations and discernments. A majority of African communities envision and witness to conflict resolution (or truth finding) through ‘face-to-face’ interactive dialogues or ‘*palaver*’ (Bujo 2003).²⁵¹ Inter-personal or communal witness hardly gives room for the distortion of truth. Offences are named and where necessary, repented of and atoned for. This identity and spirituality of most indigenous African witness to truth finding is also reflexive in Yoder’s vision. Thus, one wonders if this is not one aspect where Yoder’s social (prophetic) witness can assist the SCS to engage some distressing bequests of its Enlightenment-based legacies in transformational and developmental dialogues, which are more meaningful. As we pointed out in Chapter 2, the truistic visions and dispositions of the *pseudo*-ethical visions of the Enlightenment-based paradigms are rooted in the violent theological reflections of the war and Reformation eras.²⁵²

²⁵¹ We shall discuss the concept of *palaver* in the next chapter. It represents an ethical approach to dialogues, which many African communities adopt to seek catharsis in various crisis-ridden contexts.

²⁵² Paradoxically, Yoder’s visionary evangel also pleads that subordinate believers of Jesus Christ should learn to engage truth finding from a similar approach as the traditional Africans. Yoder re-reads the differentiations between various communities as intra-family misunderstanding. He also argues that differences are hardly resolvable through continuing propagation of distorted accounts of the differences. When properly discerned and addressed, ‘differences can be an invitation and a starting point for the common search of the truth in the spirit of *koinonia*’ (Smit 2003b: 39). Chris Huebner re-echoes Yoder (1999), noting that Yoder’s work practices patience as a method in moral reasoning. ‘Yoder’s theology proceeds patiently, entering vulnerably into the world of another, rather than employ an accelerated and possessive or logistical hermeneutics of mastery and control’ (Huebner 2006: 127). Yoder, as we have noted, reflects on the coming Kingdom as a reality, which further calls on believers to discern what to do about it in the here and now. Recognizing realities as they are can promote a more meaningful evangelical understanding of the full scope of Christian discipleship (cf. Yoder 1997b: 179; 1989a).

Yoder's inclusive vision for evangelical witness lays more emphasis on forgiveness in its message of reconciliation and hope. Within this vision, the Church's witness to the world takes shape as evangelical nonconformity or 'sustained engagement.' Yoder envisions his paradigm from the *jesulological* (nonviolent-resistant) prophetic proclamations of the biblical Jesus. His vision suggests a distinctive *jesulological* summon, which also initiates active missionary presence within society. Yoder's vision for evangelical ministry re-interprets and appropriates the distinctive and visible pattern of Jesus' political witness as its source of healing, creativity and dynamism. For this visionary evangel, theology fails when it tries to escape vulnerability because the Gospel message of peace is also a gift from Jesus Christ (Huebner 2006: 128). Human beings can only interpret and demonstrate their theologies in 'bold humility or humble boldness', or 'humble confidence coupled with patience' (Bosch 1991: 489; cf. Walls 2002: 277; Nation 2006: xxii). Yoder's inclusive vision for ministry rejects the violence of Constantinianism: Constantinian vision often enthrones and espouses creaturely sovereignty. Only the God who encounters humanity in Jesus Christ is sovereign.

Yoder's vision for evangelical ministry is Christocentric. In its embodiment of the politics of Jesus Christ, the crucified but risen Lord is both the message and the messenger. Such Christocentric-*jesulological* embodiment of the politics of Jesus is 'the Good News itself,' which helps, delivers and ministers *shalom* to its recipients (Guder 2000: 48). Within Yoder's vision for evangelical ministry, obedience to the ecumenical standards of Christocentric discipleship becomes a criterion for measuring the Church's faithfulness. Doxological subordination to the political ethics of the biblical Jesus constitutes a litmus test of all that the Church can further say or do. This distinctiveness in Yoder's reflection on evangelical ministry *inter alia*, demonstrates the Good News of grace as a functional commitment to the inclusive vision of early catholicity. Generally, Yoder's visionary projects seek to restore Christocentric wholeness in society. This study hopes that these submissions will become more comprehensible as the next paragraph investigates the catholicity of Yoder's vision for ecumenical ministry, with a view to win the attention of the SCS.

3.2 Catholic Ministry

Below, we reason that evangelization is at the heart of Yoder's catholic vision. Yoder places much emphasis on human agency and the historical response of the Church to God's actions within history.

Yoder's vision for catholic ministry of the Church embodies altruistic Christocentric reflection of the politics of Jesus Christ. Yoder retrieves his Christocentric evangelical warrant to plead for a vision of an unlimited catholicity of the people of God. As we earlier observed, Yoder is of the view that ecclesiology is ethics because sacrament bespeaks a social witness in which Christ transforms cultures from within. Such an understanding is evident in his article entitled *Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture*, in *The Royal Priesthood*.²⁵³

Yoder presents a restorative evangel, which seeks to correct various positions of ethicists on the burning issue of 'the interrelationship of worship and morality.' It seems that the substantive cause of disagreement is the meaning and implication of the Good News in the ecumenical ministry of the church among the nations. He notes:

I propose to set beside them a simpler account, one that at least complements them.... What they have in common is that each of them concerns both the internal activities of the gathered Christian congregation and the ways the church interfaces with the world.

(Yoder 1994e: 361)

Yoder goes on to unpack what he describes as the five distinctive characteristics of the (Bible-based) church in mission. To use his words, 'each of the five practices described and mandated in the New Testament exemplifies a link between ecclesiastical practices and social ethics that is usually undervalued or ignored.'²⁵⁴ Yoder also argues that in its functional public sense, the term 'evangelical' also helps, saves, and ministers *shalom* to the recipients of the Good News: the Good News is a public witness. For it to retain its public identity, the embodied witness of the church must reflect *euangelion* as 'an a posteriori political practice that tells the world something

²⁵³ This title originated in a lecture Yoder gave at The Divinity School of Duke University in February 1986. According to Cartwright, 'It was subsequently given as Yoder's Presidential Address delivered to the Western Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics meeting at Loma Linda, California, on February 20, 1987, and presented as a lecture at Boston University (Apr. 1987), Eden Theological Seminary (Oct. 1987), and Bangor Theological Seminary (Feb. 1988). It was first published....in *Theology Today* 48/3 (April 1991): 33-44. It is reprinted here without substantial change, with only a few typographical changes having been made to the text' (Yoder 1994e: 359).

²⁵⁴ For Yoder, the issue at stake speaks more on Christocentric 'body politics' of the church as it is envisioned from the embodied political witness of the biblical Jesus Christ. Yoder's reflection on the catholic ministry of the Church also bespeaks a restorative visionary project. We shall reflect on these issues in the next chapter.

it did not know and could not believe before.’ Further, ‘It tells the world what is in the world’s own calling and destiny...by pioneering a paradigmatic demonstration of both the power and the practices that define the shape of a restored humanity. The confessing people of God is the new world on its way’ (Yoder 1994e: 373). Yoder’s catholic ministry emphasizes a ministry of the whole people of God particularly, from the way this study re-presents Yoder’s project as restorative vision.

Yoder’s restorative vision for catholic ministry re-presents Kingdom proclamation as a feasible historical reality begun in Jesus Christ. It is a robust Christocentric social witness. Yoder roots it in his vision of the Church as the scattered people of God who gather in Christ’s name to edify and admonish one another in the light of the *missio Dei*. Yoder’s argument that sacrament is a social process through which Christ’s vulnerable, provocative and creative presence transforms culture from within, is a case in point. In his perspective, believers’ fraternal admonition, the universality of charisma, Spirit-filled open meeting, corporate breaking of bread and, baptism are concrete, correlated, and bodily witness, which distinguish the Church from other publics. This study will outline these five practices of the subordinate Church when it examines Yoder’s perspective on body politics in the next chapter.

Yoder’s vision for catholic ministry also re-presents ‘binding and loosing’ as a collective witness of the (visible) local *ekklesia*. The congregation is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus, it appeals to the Bible for understanding as well as insights to interpret God’s will within its context. According to Yoder:

If we understand deeply the way in which **the promise of the Holy Spirit is linked to the church’s gathering to bind and loose** (Matt. 18: 19)... To speak of the Bible apart from people reading it and apart from specific questions that those people reading needs to answer is to do violence to the very purpose for which we have been given the Holy Scriptures.... It has meaning only when it is read by someone and then only when that reader and the society in which he or she lives can understand the issue to which it speaks. Thus **the most complete framework in which to affirm the authority of Scripture is the context of it being read and applied by a believing people that use guidance to respond to concrete issues.**

(Yoder 1994e: 353 [Our emphasis])

Yoder reasons that the most complete framework to affirm the authority of Scripture is the context where it is read and applied by a believing people, in order to respond to concrete issues. Thus, one can describe Yoder’s catholic vision for ministry as a ‘hermeneutic of peoplehood,’

which also seeks a heartfelt religion and transforming hope in the person and works of Jesus Christ.

Yoder's collegiate vision re-presents the universality of the Good News in creative and dynamic ways, which expose some vulnerability of traditions. Its biblical Christological vision for ecclesiology challenges its practitioners to demonstrate their corporate witness of the Kingdom as a visible and feasible social (public) reality. It is a *ministerium* vision, which would not permit Christianity to compromise the particularity of the incarnation. Yoder's catholic vision seeks to re-present authentic portrayal of the peace-church's vision as worship and servanthood, reconciliation and creativity. His visionary project suggests a necessary framework for the ecumenical church to reflect anew on its pursuit of the *missio Dei*. Helmut Harder re-echoes Enns that many contemporary devotees of the historic peace-church engage in ecumenical conversations by placing their ecclesiology on the table. Like Yoder, they also regard ecclesiology as ethics. In Harder's view:

Yoder offers to the ecumenical community a fresh way of thinking biblically about the relationship between the universal church and the local community, between the essence of the church and its practices, between ecclesiology and ethics. He challenges the church to incorporate nonviolence as an identity-forming axiom of ecclesiology'

(Harder 2005)²⁵⁵

Ecclesiology is basic for meaningful Christian discussion on peace.

For Yoder, ecclesiology is ethics: believers' embodiment of the sacrament involves a social process, which Christ often adopts to transform cultures from within. Sacramental ecclesiology 'sends the message "come as you are," but it does not invite any one to stay as they are *because character formation is transformational*, even if incrementally so....This is a vision of the church in which God often works with us slowly and gently....' (Charry 2005: 215 [Our italics]).

Charry's vision for sacramental ecclesiology is more theocratic than Christocentric (she is a Reformed theologian). However, Yoder's vision for Christological ecclesiology can accept its view as continuing transformation (reformation) of the Church. Rasmusson (2005) remarks that

²⁵⁵ Enns reasons that Yoder's position holds sway in ecumenical discourse because it issues a radical critique on the inculturation of the Gospel, and re-presents a more appreciable model for contextualization. Yoder's re-presents *glocalized* approach to catholicity in significant ways, which also succeed in integrating ecclesiology and ethics. Consequently, Yoder's radical critique, along with his ecclesiological and ecumenical visions remain a thorn-in-the-flesh of every tradition 'that is at risk of relegating visible church (*sic*) discipleship to the second or third question to consider in systematic theology' (Enns 2007a: 144). Yoder emphasizes Christocentric, rather than church discipleship.

the Yoderian Christological ecclesiology shares space with others. Guder (2005: 127) also argues that, for contemporary churches to realize an authentic *missio Dei*, ‘mission in Jesus’ way’ must shape our missional ecclesiology. Above all, Yoder’s catholic vision accepts a common commitment of the whole community to Christian unity in mission. Like Yoder (1994e), Carter (2005; 2001) and Van Engen (1996) also note that the church is composed of the confessing people of God whose life and mission are on the way. Certainly, Yoder’s vision for the catholic ministry is also a restorative vision.

Given these submissions, some questions concerning the relationship and relevance of Yoder’s (vision for) catholic ministry to the context of the SCS arise: Can Okure’s (1993) opinion that transformation must begin with individuals and their communities shed more light on our understanding of Yoder’s catholic ministry for the Church? Would such a transformational vision not commend Yoder’s catholic ministry to the SCS?

Okure’s article, *Conversion, Commitment: An African Perspective*, presents the Bible as a meaningful and sustainable background for evaluating the African experience of conversion and commitment. She draws from the Bible as well as the history of the Early Christians to contrast them with her Nigerian experience. Okure argues that the community provides necessary and indispensable context for living out the new life in Jesus Christ.²⁵⁶ This Nigerian-born Roman Catholic Professor of Biblical Studies agrees with Nigerian scholars such as Turaki (2006a, 1999), Falola (2004), and Isichei (1983) that the failure of western packaged theologies to address the needs of African spirituality motivated the emergence of the AICs in Nigeria. Christian commitment must also strive to meet the challenges of African religion and religiosities in its contemporary understanding of conversion to Jesus Christ. This is an issue, which Yoder, Okorochoa, Bediako etc., seek to remind believers in Jesus Christ. The nascent

²⁵⁶ True Christian Conversion as an event and process does not reject the previous stage and context of the believer as intrinsically bad in itself. The basic goodness of the previous social, cultural and religious values of such believers do not often conflict with the values of the new system. Nigerians as most Africans live out *religiosity* rather than religion as a system in their religio-culture. From this backdrop, Okure joined other African theologians to lament the perplexing *anti-social* initiation of Africans into the Christian faith. These acculturating practices of the Enlightenment-based ethical visions tend to banish Christian communion to the eschatological communion of saints, which most believers hope to enjoy in heaven. These *pseudo*-ethics as we discussed in the second chapter of this study proclaim ‘a secessionist Jesus’ who demonizes and dehumanizes indigenous familial/community relationships and cultural practices as evil in themselves. Okure also argues for the formation of a closely-knit community. Okure’s project as Yoder’s, is transformational and developmental.

transformational and developmental African Christianity, as we have noted, is a history in the making. Similarly, Okure submits that such a missional spirit and faith can penetrate, transform, and develop the earth, beginning with individuals and their communities for participation in social transformation and development in Africa. From a *glocal* perspective, Okure also notes elsewhere, under the topic, *In Him All Things Hold Together: A Missiological Reading of Colossians 1: 15-20*:

Viewed thus, the issue shifts from the traditional “outside the church there is no salvation” to “outside Christ, there is no salvation”....

After about 2000 years of Christian evangelism, with its cumulative and contextual traditions, the time has perhaps come to clear up some of the accreditations built up around Jesus so that the real Jesus may stand up...

God is fully at work in Christ for human salvation and for the transformation of the world. No human argumentation or rejection can alter that divine plan fulfilled in Christ...

Otherwise the Christian betrays his or her own identity...

(Okure 2002: 63, 68, 71-72)

For Okure, awareness that the redemption in Christ is God’s purpose for the entire humanity is crucial for understanding the divine vision in trans-community communication of the faith. When people see Christ’s uniqueness and universal lordship as intrinsically beneficial to them, they may respond differently to the Christian proclamation of Christ’s lordship. If all things hold together in Christ, they should also hold together in the Christian who has been incorporated into Christ. Okure emphasizes the cosmic scope of Christ’s lordship and salvation as well as the Church’s inclusive and holistic ministry. Although Yoder would prefer Christian theological politicking to a politicized Christian (or church, or Roman Catholic) theology, he may not reject Okure’s plea for a more altruistic Christian political life. In Yoder’s catholic vision, the biblical witness is a public ministry and outsiders can equally participate in its proclamation (cf. Yoder 1997b: 93). Yoder’s vision for catholicity also speaks of Christian discipleship as one that is founded in Scripture and catholic tradition. In *The Priestly Kingdom*, Yoder re-presents his vision for catholicity as restorative project; it adopts a robust (historical) Christological social stance. Yoder’s vision for catholic ministry is reflexive of a public witness of the whole people of God *with others*. Evangelization is central to this Christocentric vision for an unlimited catholic ministry of the subordinate Church.

From the foregoing, this study asks if one may not express agreement with Carter that Yoder’s biblical realism differs with Hauerwas’. Although this differentiation will be investigated later, the study notes that Yoder’s vision for an unlimited catholicity is a lived reality. It is always at

home, wherever all comers participate in proclaiming all that Jesus teaches among the nations. Yoder's resounding stories about Jesus challenge human perception, human reasoning, interactions, guidance, and beliefs with sustained dialogues. As we can learn from Nation (2006), Hauerwas and Sider (2002), and Carter (2001), Yoder inspires humanity especially, believers to ask the same questions they have always asked about God and the Church with fresh understanding. Such a unique proclamation of Jesus' stories distinguishes Yoder's Free Church ecclesiology from others. Yoder's restorative vision speaks about the Church's engagement in peacemaking from a learner's perspective.

Yoder's visionary project is consciously developed from his Christocentric vision as well as its social demands on the subordinate disciple (cf. Carter 2001: 242). According to Huebner:

Yoder never assumed that he finally knew what peace was.... His profoundly critical theology functions as an ongoing critique of the will to seize power....*Yoder's* work is thus fragmentary and ad hoc. It is episodic, exploratory, and experimental. He *did not offer*....a final or total perspective on the very nature of peace at all.

(Huebner 2006: 118 [Our italics])

Yoder's visionary project, as this study argues, also seeks the restoration of wholeness (*shalom*) in the society.

We have noted that evangelization is at the heart of Yoder's catholic vision, as its *force motrice* (French word meaning *driving force*). Yoder places a weightier emphasis on human agency and the historical response of the Church to God's actions (Coles 2002: 328; Kroeker 2005: 171; Rasmusson 2005: 28)). Yoder's vision for catholicity also appeals to the Reformed slogan, *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*, to argue that its ministry of the whole people of God with others is based on catholic Christian convictions: the pre-Constantinian catholic practices are reformable when properly understood.

Perhaps a survey of his vision for the reforming ministry of the Church in the next section will broaden our horizon on Yoder's Christocentric ecclesiology.

3.3 Reforming Ministry

We discuss this section by analyzing Yoder's (re)interpretation of *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* as a continuing process of reconstructing ecclesiastical traditions from past 'failures

and idolatries' especially, 'false ecclesiological visions of the past' (Smit 2005a: 367; 2004b: 72).

In this study, we have repeatedly remarked that Yoder's project pleads for a continuing process of re-appraising the Church and church traditions in the light of the life and works of the biblical Jesus Christ. Yoder also re-interprets and appropriates the Reformed slogan *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* to argue that it speaks of a continuing communication process. The slogan seeks to denounce present, past and future unfaithfulness of the Church. For instance, in *The Authority of Tradition* (1994a), Yoder also argues:

Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda is....a statement about earlier Church tradition's permanent accessibility, as witnessed to and normed by Scripture at its nucleus, and always including more dimensions than the Bible itself contains, functioning as an instance of appeal as we call for renewed faithfulness and denounce renewed apostasy. The most important operational meaning of the Bible for ethics is....that we are able....to become aware that we do not do what it says, and that the dissonance we create enables our renewal....the need for continuing historical correction is blameless, intrinsic to the quality of historically rooted community. We should feel guilty....when we claim to bypass that need as if our link to our origins were already in our hands.

(Yoder 1994a: 94-95)

In Yoder's vision for ecclesiology, this slogan speaks of earlier traditions that were permanently accessible and to which they were witnessed. In other words, *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* is about a reforming witness of the Church in Yoder's ecclesial vision. Yoder argues that authority of tradition should be located in the Word of God. The Word also renews persons and shapes the otherness of the believers' communities. Consequently, the reformers trusted collective dialogue at the bar of the Word of God as the instrument for renewing the pastoral ministry of persons as well as the shape and spiritualities of their communities. Yoder's visionary project does not emphasize scholars' or church founder's view on Jesus Christ as the primal source of church traditions (Yoder 1991: 19; cf. 1996a: 40-67).²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Within Yoder's reforming vision for ecclesial ministry, the adjective *reformed* signals the need for the Church's openness to renewal from its past unfaithfulness. It engages believers with the challenge of functional commitment to an inclusive vision of ministry in order to clarify the *eunagelion* as Good News of grace, which also enables personal faith (cf. Yoder 2000: 166). Yoder's vision for reforming the ministry of the Church also seeks to recover and restore those who were nobodies in various cultural contexts to appropriate their faith and status as Christ's moral agents for social transformation and development. We hope to offer more details on this point, in the next chapter. Yoder's vision for ecumenical ministry seeks to restore *semper reformanda* (continuing reformation) as a true Scripture-based Christocentric witness of the rule of Christ: it can re-present a true proclamation of faithful Reformed ministry in the Servant Church. Such proclamation would rather welcome and recognize meaningful contributions of the minorities without subjugating them to established

Yoder reflects on Christocentric hermeneutics of peoplehood as a true proclamation of the rule of Christ by the subordinate Church. Such perspective tends to support his persuasion that the 1963 (Montreal) Faith and Order Assembly²⁵⁸ failed to resolve the tension, which arises from unquestioned uniformity and centralization of local traditions. Yoder accepts the term ‘tradition’ to mean continuing bequest of the substance of the faith and its interpretations to generations. However, Yoder will not accept such practices without a locus and focus. Yoder also argues that only a ‘renewed appeal to the New Testament or Christology’ can assist the Church to resolve such tensions in significant ways, which the Faith and Order could not. Yoder reasons that the Church can ‘reconstruct by critiquing and remembering’ biblical Christology (Yoder 1994a: 97;

reflections and practices, in ecumenical relationships. Yoder’s vision is not only skeptical towards established hierarchies; it is also suspicious that the Free Church ecclesiology might degenerate into established orthodoxy through *unquestioned* ecumenical ministry of the Church.

Reading Yoder from this perspective, one becomes more suspicious that Yoder’s varied criticisms on Free Church communions (for vulnerability towards relapsing into established ecclesiology) are more rooted in his appeal to biblical Christology. This issue is, for instance, evident in Yoder’s critique of *The Believers’ Church Conference in Historical Perspective* (1991a). Yoder faults the Believers’ Church for its sustained quest to ‘pigeonhole’ the church’s ecclesiology into a central human founder. Yoder reads it as a trajectory, which is attributable to the Free Church’s unquestioned imitation of the high church theological historians. According to Yoder, ‘Free-church historians naturally joined the club by retrieving their respective founding figures.... A more authentically free-church historiography might not have found it so fitting to look for a single father in that apologetic way... Part of the case for the free-church polity...is that its health is not dependent on the virtues of its office holders, since the polity provides for what the Reformers called “the Rule of Christ” as a remedy for fallibility.... It is precisely the boast of free-church polity....that its trueness to type is served by no central prelate, no written creed, no stated charter’ (Yoder 1991a:10-12).

Yoder reasons that the Free Church historians should not be looking for founders to glorify, in the first place. In his perspective, what the theologically concerned historian should wish to discover is the shape and the force of some useful concepts, and the way others lead more easily to degeneration, breakdown or apostasy; in the study of ecclesiological types and renewals. Yoder reviews some historical developments within the Believers’ Church to reject the bequests of Hubmaier and other church leaders as normative traditions for the church. The biblical Jesus Christ and his early believing communities rather than human leaders are normative for the articulation and practice of traditions in the Believers’ Church. Yoder’s *ministerium* practice subjects reformation and renewal of church traditions to continuing scrutiny and collective interpretation of Scripture. Yoder, as we have noted, would not want to subordinate developments in church history to a particular historical phenomenon. More significantly, as Enns has also pointed out, Yoder tries to avoid a Biblicist (unquestioning fundamentalist) approach to Biblical Realism (cf. Enns 2007a: 134).

²⁵⁸ Yoder acknowledges the Montreal formulation of the term *Tradition* with a capital ‘T’. He accepts it as referring to all that each Christian community and all the Christian communities together recognize and describe as a stream of handing down processes. It is prior to and wider than the tradition of any one denominational communion. One wonders if this is not what Smit (2003b) describes as ecumenical hermeneutics; i.e., a hermeneutics that serves the unity of the Church. Smit recognizes *traditions* with a small ‘t’ as various sets of sectarian understandings, which by their nature do not justify divisions when properly articulated. And Yoder accepts *tradition* with singular *t* to mean the event or process of handing down the substance of a community’s faith. According to him, ‘since it is fitting that local “traditions” (lower case, plural) should differ, we can recognize one another without demanding uniformity and centralization’ (Yoder 1994a: 92). These two theologians emphasize unity in diversity and contextuality of traditions as the beginning process towards ecumenical hermeneutics and; the above-mentioned differentiation in the interpretation of the word *tradition*.

101). Yoder's vision for a reforming ministry of the Church craves for a (Christocentric) continuing reconstruction and restoration of church traditions from false ecclesiological visions of the past.

In addition, Yoder argues that tradition only plays a complementary role to Scriptures in the Free Church ecclesiology. Within this visionary ecclesiology, inclusive pluralism is a valid and abiding challenge for the believing communities. As a nascent approach to ministry, Yoder's vision for reforming witness is also in sympathy with the Montreal notion of infidelity as a real possibility. The reformation of the Church as well as church traditions must continue to be operational if the notion of fidelity would not be reduced to abstractions or theories. Yoder's vision for reforming ministry is a collegiate witness. It seeks to restore biblical Christology as the pivot on which varied attempts of the Church to reconstruct its traditions connect and revolve. As far as Yoder is concerned, the Church is only the Church because of the merits of the gracious Christ-event; as the Bible records it. The subordinate Church must not neglect or claim naivety to the crucial role of Scripture-based Christology in its varied attempts to reform ecclesial traditions.

With such a perspective on church traditions, one becomes more convinced that Yoder's Christocentric vision can assist the SCS to engage some distressing legacies of its *received Calvinism in semper reformanda*²⁵⁹ dialogues. The church can also draw meaningful resources from Yoder's vision for a reforming ministry of the Church in the process. As we noted in Chapter 2, these *pseudo*-political ideological bequests thrive more on abstract philosophies. In the same chapter, we also re-echoed Smit's view that Calvin often articulated his theological thoughts and witnesses (especially, as it affected the Genevan church) by reflecting on *sola scriptural civitate interpretata*, rather than simply, *sola scriptura*. For the Reformed vision, the context provides the occasion albeit, not the content of interpretation. The Reformed vision takes historical contexts and realities serious. Thus, most contemporary interpretations and appropriations of Reformed witnesses practices beg for continuing transformational critiques (cf. Smit 2006b: 38-39; 2005c: 366-367; 2003b: 147). In its essence, believers' social (prophetic) witness has a present meaning in Jesus Christ: the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ is normative for believers' prophetic witness in diverse cultural contexts (cf. Yoder 1994a: 96).

²⁵⁹ This is not Yoder's term. It is used because the student researcher and his supervisors are heirs of the Reformed tradition.

Believers' social witness, which is at heart, a Christological task, has by its nature, a present meaning. It suggests a subordinate lifestyle or vocation, which seeks to trace the sameness of Jesus Christ across the generations. In Yoder's reforming (Reformed) ministry for the Church, what we find at the origin serves to illuminate and at times adjudicate new receptivities (cf. Yoder 1997c: 216; 1994a: 93-96). Yoder's vision for reforming ministry also pleads for necessary tools, which can assist believers to identify and denounce error while welcoming and celebrating complementarity of traditions. For Yoderians, the Gospel presents Jesus as the paradigm for reconstructing all traditions by redirecting believers to the Bible-based proclamation of the rule of Christ within contexts. Yoder's reforming ministry also craves for a Christocentric hermeneutics of peoplehood. Perhaps Smit's (2003b) article, *Ecumenical Hermeneutics? Historical Benchmarks and Current Challenges of a Concept*, can assist us to understand Yoder's reforming ministry better.

In this project, Smit retells the story of the ecumenical movement with a symbiotic critique, which is reminiscent of Yoder's perspective on the works of the Montreal (WCC) Faith and Order. Smit agrees that (perhaps communal) interpretation of Scripture is at the heart of ecumenical dialogue since the modern search for Christian unity began. Like Yoder, Smit observes that the ongoing work of Faith and Order (on the issue of the interpretation of Scripture in ecumenical dialogues) espouses ecumenical loss of memory as an unresolved challenge to contemporary ecumenism. Changed contexts demand new expressions of the revealed truth of the Gospel. Smit also accepts the view that a shared understanding of the Gospel can unite Christian believers and churches. Again, like Yoder, Smit is concerned about guidelines 'for right interpretation' of Scripture. Unlike Yoder, Smit reasons with other ecumenical theologians that a meaningful thematic unity of the Old and New Testaments can lead to a right interpretation if it is combined with a confessing or creedal theology. Smit further points out that a shift from right interpretation to *Tradition and traditions*²⁶⁰ in his narration means:

...rethinking the process of indigenization; resisting the temptation of overemphasizing those elements in the Gospel especially congenial to a particular culture; the importance to understand

²⁶⁰ We explained these terms from the perspectives of Yoder and Smit. In the Montreal formulation of the term, *Tradition* with a capital 'T', refers to all that each Christian community and all the various Christian communities recognize and accept as a continuing process of handing down believers reflections and practices. It is prior to and wider than the tradition of any one denominational communion. *Traditions* i.e., plural, with a small 't' represents various sets of sectarian understandings, which by their nature do not justify divisions when properly articulated.

catholicity as the task to which we are called; taking new churches fully serious as integral part of...being faithful to the whole *koinonia*, even when engaged with the problems of particularity; the vital need to rewrite and study the history of the Church's life and mission from ecumenical perspective; the difficulty of communicating the fulness of truth throughout the world "as a result of the emergence in our time of a global civilization, shaped by rapid technological advances and grounded in a scientific outlook that transforms our concept of the universe, leading to "a new cosmology" and "radical changes in social changes in every part of the world.

(Smit 2003b:30)

Although variation is evident in their approaches, one can reason that like Yoder, Smit is sad that Montreal did not give some other traditions adequate attention. Smit further outlines other unresolved issues of Montreal to include: movement from traditions to hermeneutical questions; hermeneutical questions to issues of authority; issues of authority to concerns about unity; concern about unity to a hermeneutics of ecclesiastical tradition; and the challenges of practical hermeneutic of ecclesiastical tradition as necessitated. Smit and Yoder seek to re-present unity in diversity and contextuality (or rather in uniformity and centrality) as necessary perspectives toward a more meaningful realization of ecumenical dialogues. When lived out as a gift of the Holy Spirit and as the living presence of Christ in the world, unity in diversity can reveal the many ecclesiastical traditions as one Tradition, and as a living reality. Within unity amidst diversity, interaction of contextuality and catholicity can also bind local communities and the wider communion together in a more appreciable hope of responsible unity.

In Smit's view:

The heart of the hermeneutical question – at least in its ecumenical form – is found in our calling of "interpreting together". The emphasis is no longer only on the documents or even the tradition, which we read and interpret, and certainly not on the methodology of scholarly exegesis only to solve the problem of diversity and plurality. The emphasis is also on our interpreting together – and both terms are important. The ecumenical movement has become much more sensitive to the nature of the interpretive process and to the reality of being, of living with others, concrete others.

(Smit 2003b: 42)

Smit also argues that the art of understanding a communicative God is the task of the functional ecumenical church. Spontaneously, it becomes necessary for one to ask this question, that is, would Smit's view not promote and substantiate the Yoderian call for continuing reformation of church traditions in the context of the SCS? Will such a Yoderian perspective on the reforming ministry of the Church not assist the SCS to retrieve resources from its rich theology of grace in order to liberate its polity and politics from 'false ecclesiological visions of the past' by drawing from biblical (historical) Christology?

Smit (2004d) also appeals to *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* to argue that the Reformed tradition does not have a timeless, but a historical ecclesiology. The vision of the church and of its calling determines the polity and the form of the church in a true Reformed vision. Reformed churches, being a part of the ecumenical movement, are there with others who are also inspired to participate actively in the *oikos*-based move of God to give human beings a ‘voice in their destiny’ (Ukaga & Maser 2004). According to Smit:

The church itself, including its order, its structures and life, should be examined in the light of the Word of God, with a view to its obedience and usefulness in the service of God’s Word in ever-changing circumstances....For ecumenism to be real, it must certainly also be local. For the Reformed mindset, this speaks for itself. In many recent initiatives towards inter-church cooperation at local levels, at least in southern Africa (*and within the geo-political milieu of the SCS*), the classical ecumenical commitment to living, real, and visible unity, to social concerns and action and to witness of hope to those in need and despair has been exchanged for a different kind of spirituality and structure.

(Smit 2004d: 72, 76[Our italics])

These reflections on the ‘false ecclesiological visions of the past’ seem constitutive of the failures and idolatries from which the Reformed tradition must be (continuously) liberated. Smit also concludes concerning the Reformed tradition: ‘It is a faith and tradition that must continuously be liberated from its own failures and idolatries, but also a faith and tradition with an enormous liberating potential...’ (Smit 2005c: 367). Smit and Yoder, among other ecumenical theologians, remind believers that the Church’s evangelization must also be reforming.

Nevertheless, unlike Yoder, Smit dismisses clericalism as ‘heresy’ even though Yoder also argues for the feasibility of church hierarchy in his last published essay before his death, i.e. *Christian Unity from Below* (2000). According to Yoder:

In the early church every local church had its own bishop, elected by its own people, on the basis of local discernment process like that indicated in (for example) 1 Tim 3. There is no theological mandate for having a church without its own resident bishop...

(Yoder 2000: 173)

Thus, one can also reason that for Yoder in his later years, church hierarchy is feasible in Believers’ Church ecclesiology. Yoder expects such grading of church leadership to respect local contexts and the need for continuing reformation of the Church and its inherited traditions. In Yoder’s restorative vision for ministry, Christian calling is also a project in which faithfulness is always subject to renewed testing and judgment.

In other words, Yoder's position on reforming ministry also agrees with Guder (2000: 27) that the only way that evangelization can truly be the heart of ministry will be through the 'continuing conversion of the church.' Like Yoder, Guder also considers that the implication of the Church's calling to evangelistic ministry and the Church's need for conversion to holistic ecumenical ministry is continuing conversion. Yoder's vision for ecumenical ministry rejects unquestioned consensus from the past, which claims catholicity simply because such a claim is always believed everywhere by everyone. It is a restorative project, which is also constant in its stance that the fallible nature of the Church calls for a constant potential for *semper reformanda*. In Yoder's restorative vision for reforming ministry, Christian discipleship is a matter of 'trial and error,' 'discernment and forgiveness,' 'reconciliation and restoration' (cf. Yoder 1992a; 1994d; 1997b; 2000).

Yoder's vision for reforming ministry would not compromise its emphasis that the life and works of the biblical Jesus Christ provides the source and paradigm for Christian ministry in a Free Church ecclesiology. Yoder's visionary evangel lays great emphasis on voluntary membership; catholic proclamation of covenanting at the base; and reforming emphasis, that *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* is a continuing and concerted task in the ministry of the whole people of God. Yoder's restorative vision for ministry anchors the soul of its ethical witness on historical (biblical) Christology. Biblical Christology is the source and paradigm of Yoder's congregational approach to conversational-reconciliatory *ministerium kerygma* (corporate proclamation) in the Servant *ekklesia*.

So far, we have tried to survey Yoder's concept of ecumenical ministry for the Servant Church. Such an exercise can assist us to recognize that Yoder's vision for the (partial) realization of the Kingdom of God is a socially feasible project of the empirical Church. It suggests a Christocentric Diaspora vision for an ecumenical ministry of the Church. It also recognizes Christ-centred evangelization as an indispensable identity and spirituality of the Church. The biblical Jesus Christ is its paradigm. The *other* is a partner in progress in the *missio Dei*, with right/freedom of choice and conscience. Yoder's Diaspora project is a Christocentric restorative vision for a distinctive evangelical ministry. It further pleads that Christ-believing-communities should come to appreciate and trust the other's sincerity in ecumenism because differences can be an invitation and a starting point for the common search of the truth in the spirit of *koinonia*.

In other words, one can describe Yoder's ecumenical (evangelical) ministry as a ministry of the whole people of God. Yoder's restorative vision for ministry re-presents catholic ministry as a commitment to an inclusive ministry *with others*. It bespeaks of an orthodox concept of catholicity, which can inspire the Church's ministry to be bipolar in its evangelization (or mission). Yoder's *ministerium reformata* (reforming ministry) is undaunted in its Christocentric prophetic witness. It is also persuasive in its view that the Church's (ecumenical) evangelization and traditions must as well be reforming. Within this vision, the ecumenical ministry of the church provides the paradigm for the renewed awareness of the uniqueness of the Church. Yoder's view on a distinctive corporate and Christocentric ecumenism constitutes a renewed kind of social witness. Its subordinate Church cannot express its authority to bind and loose without forgiveness and discernment. Yoder's vision for a reforming ecumenical ministry has a peculiar shape, which promotes *the Practice of the Rule of Christ* in the subordinate Church. We shall consider such a peculiarity as the shape of his ecclesiology in the next section.

4 The Shape of Yoder's Ecclesiology

Given its sustained efforts to promote and commend Yoder's vision for ecclesiology to the sordid context of the SCS, this study proposes to survey the Yoderian visionary witness of the *practice of the Rule of Christ* in this section. The section focuses more on the terms 'binding and loosing' as well as 'forgiveness and discernment.' These biblical terms are constitutive in the indispensable corporate tasks of Believers' Church ecclesiology of Yoder.

The confession of *Jesus Christ as Messiah* is the source and result of Yoder's vision for Free Church authority to embody binding and loosing as a Christocentric biblical witness. Yoder re-reads Mathew 18: 15-20 as the key text rather than an abstract theological stance for his vision. He claims that:

[I]t is no accident that...the power to bind and loose follows directly upon Peter's first confession of Christ as Messiah. The confession is the basis of the authority; the authorization given is the seal upon the confession. The church is where Jesus is confessed as Christ, men and women are empowered to speak to one another in God's name.

(Yoder 1997d: 139)

Yoder's vision for Free Church ecclesiology re-interprets and proclaims the 'practice of the Rule of Christ' as a simple, generally accessible, and apparently, dogmatic and naïve form of

discussion-starting ministry. It seeks to realize Christocentric peoplehood as an indispensable ethos of its ecclesial witness. Yoder's Christocentric reflection on this biblical story provides him with a distinctive framework to argue that forgiveness and discernment are two sides of the same coin where each presupposes and includes the other. The Yoderian vision, as this study shows, is also a restorative project, which reflects on the Church as the people of God who embody their confession of Christ's lordship over all ecclesial polities and politics.

In Yoder's perspective on Believers' Church ecclesiology, Jesus Christ presents forgiveness and discernment as two sides of the same coin where each presupposes and includes the other. Such a vision for Free Church ecclesiology can provide humanity with an impetus for rethinking forgiveness as an essential identity of a faithful believer in Jesus Christ. This view is explained in *The Royal Priesthood*, where Yoder reasons that, 'Jesus and the free church are concerned to see the fellow believer grow freely in the integrity with which he or she lives out the meaning of a freely made commitment to Christ' (Yoder 1994e: 344). Yoder's vision for Free Church ecclesiology canvasses for a *jesulological* (nonviolent-resistant) reconciliation, which seeks to restore broken relationship; as in the case of Jesus' political witness in the story of the (adulterous) woman in John 8: 1-12.²⁶¹

Consequently, discernment becomes re-conceivable as believers' ethical response to Jesus' nonviolent-resistant political judgment. *Jesulological* political judgment does not leave the forgiven offender without the responsibility of righting the wrong. To be human in the light of the Gospel includes the need to face conflict, and its resolutions in redemptive and restorative dialogues. When we as believers do that, we demonstrate that processing conflicts can become a

²⁶¹ In this passage, Jesus did not simply forgive and discharge the adulterous woman without giving her a responsibility. Rather, he forgave her sin and saddled her with a responsibility, i.e., to 'go and sin no more' (verse 11). Christian responsibility is a cross-shaped doxological appropriation and demonstration of the believers' justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Christian responsibility also bespeaks of believers' enduring proclamation of the embodied lordship of Jesus Christ over the Powers as well as his Headship of the Church as grace. One can then reason that in Yoder's restorative vision, Christocentric political judgment constitutes the source and paradigm for 'binding and loosing' in the Servant *ekklesia*. The Yoderian vision insists that Christians' responsible and active witness to the social order is an identity and spirituality of the believers' community (Yoder 1997a).

The *Jesulological* proclamation of 'go and sin no more' demands from the graced, and subordinate church to, ('be my witness' Guder (1985); and, 'go and do likewise' Verhey (2001) in the society. Such an interpretation of Jesus' demonstration of political judgment (in the above Johannine text) gives more meaning to the Yoderian perspective on the seeming 'Siamese twin' (conjoined)) status of forgiveness and discernment (it is often life threatening to separate Siamese twins who share a common heart).

meaningful and more responsible approach towards truth finding as well as creating, strengthening, and recreating barrier-bridging communities. Yoder's vision, as we earlier noted, mirrors (indigenous) African approaches to truth finding. In this visionary witness, moral discernment and forgiveness condition and enable one another in complex ways. Believers embody their endowed authority to bind and loose in bodily politicking for Jesus Christ (cf. Yoder 1992a: 6-13).

Yoder's vision for ecclesiology also seeks to witness and restore active and responsible (ethical) participation in Christocentric political judgment as a crucial aspect of believers' responsibility in social witness. He regards the Church as a community for corporate moral deliberation and discernment. Thus, responsible political judgment is incumbent on Christ's subordinate believers and their communities (cf. O'Donovan 2005).²⁶² Yoder remarks that ultimate validation is a matter of reasoning together, under the embodied presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit. His vision for believers' corporate witness counts on the multidimensional functions 'fittingly discharged by different members' in their quest to realize the biblical injunction 'test the spirit to see whether they are of God' in social witness (Yoder 1994f: 83). Yoder's vision for ecclesial witness also re-interprets and re-presents believers' multiplicity and distribution of functions as a Christocentric work of grace, which identifies the presence and mission of the Free Church ecclesiology in ecumenical confession of faith in Jesus Christ. This study hopes to offer a detailed reflection on this issue when it discusses Yoder's perspective on the Pauline phrase, *the fulness of Christ*, in the next chapter.

In Yoder's vision for corporate witness, reconciliation and restoration are the weighty shared motives for the proclamation of the rule of Christ in the Free Church ecclesiology. To quote Yoder in this regard:

The free church is not simply an assembly of individuals with a common experience of spiritual experience of personal forgiveness received directly from God; nor is it merely a kind of working committee, a tool to get certain kinds of work carried out. The church is also a social reality right in the midst of the world, that people through whose relationships God makes forgiveness visible.
(Yoder 1997d: 146)

At a glance, Yoder's robust identification with the offensive and vulnerable cross of Jesus Christ tends to relay his enduring vision for believers' social witness as 'irresponsibility' or

²⁶² In this book, *The Ways of Judgment*, Oliver O'Donovan considers how a theological analysis can offer a renewed and illuminating perspective on the socio-political life of post-Christendom societies. O'Donovan develops a theological assessment of socio-political activities from a Christian perspective.

‘ineffectiveness. The Yoderian *jesuslogical* proclamation of Christ’s lordship sounds scandalous in the ears of a rationalist yet it reflects a more meaningful and feasible approach to the believers’ active and responsible participation in social affairs (cf. Nation 2006: 145-188). *Jesulogical* forgiveness speaks of God’s grace in Jesus Christ, which yearns for a cruciform subordination and doxological witness to the *received* grace in Jesus Christ when properly discerned (cf. Gal. 2: 20). Therefore, one can argue that such insights can help to promote and commend Yoder’s vision for ecclesiology as a more substantive reflection for the SCS to consider in its intercultural (social) witness.

Yoder’s vision for interculturality (social interchange) combines the plethora of believers’ gifts to promote reconciling dialogue as the substance of its moral discernment and the authority of divine empowerment to ‘bind and loose’. Yoder’s (envisioned) believing community is also endowed with the wherewithal for continuing moral discernment: it lays more emphasis on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit rather than law in decision-making. As we have stated, Yoder reasons that every believer in Jesus Christ is graced with (at least) one spiritual gift to contribute to the witness of the Church. In Yoder’s vision for the Free Church proclamation of the rule of Christ, corporate discernment and forgiveness are indispensable spiritualities in the believers’ reconciliatory admonition to one another. As a convergence of other issues, Yoder’s vision for ecclesial witness calls for a responsible peoplehood, where reconciliation and restoration are the shared motives for believers’ (Christocentric) social witness. Given this submission, this question comes to our mind: are these shared motives not inspirational to Murphy’s (1999) view that social practice plays a determinative role in Yoder’s defense of his pacifism as a reflection of the very nature of the cosmos?²⁶³

²⁶³ Murphy regards history as the hard core of Yoder’s ethical witness. Yoder recognizes the existence of principalities and Powers, and their subjection to the Rule of Christ in his vision for the social witness of Jesus Christ among the nations. Thus, Murphy reads it as constitutive of Yoder’s most important contributions to ethical political witness (analysis or judgment). Yoder’s Christology serves as a guarantee that no claims can be more binding on humankind than those of the biblical Jesus Christ. Murphy re-reads the Church as a laboratory for imagining and practising new forms of social life. The Church seeks *inter alia*, to overcome dichotomies in communal *ethos*. Murphy also acknowledges that Matthew 18: 15-18 describes ‘binding and loosing’ as a unique practice, which can ensure the moral rectitude of Yoderian believers. Yoder’s social practice for the Church promotes a celebration of the Spirit leadership in the Servant *ekklesia*. Thus, Murphy contrasts Yoder’s hope for Kingdom realization in history with Niebuhr’s hope of the Kingdom in the *Parousia*. Yoder’s hope for partial realization of God’s will for humankind in history sets him in opposition to Niebuhr’s Christian realism.

Murphy points out that Christian pacifists find the systematical theological justification for their stance in Yoder's work. Murphy reads Yoder's visionary project as a reflection of the very nature of the cosmos. According to Murphy:

Yoder claims that the New Testament sees our present age.... as a period of the overlapping two *aeons*. These are not distinct periods of time, they exist simultaneously....the meaning of history is found in the work of the church; the church by its obedience is used by God to bring about the fulness of the Kingdom, of which the church is the foretaste.

Yoder [also] claims that the ministry of Jesus has not only socio-ethical and historical significance....So here we see the metaphysical claim standing behind Yoder's nonviolent ethic, but also unifying and making sense of the whole of Christian teaching....

(Murphy 1999: 62, 68)

Murphy tends to re-present Yoder's multidimensional, occasional, contextual, practice-based vision as a biblical realism. Its vision for the realization of the Barthian ecclesial project in contexts, takes the Bible serious (cf. Yoder 1996a: 83). Yoder's *jesulogical* vision for ecclesiology holds great potential for recognition as a bearer of necessary portrait for a renewed world on the way. Yoder calls on the Church to understand itself as a restorative community as it is also an alternative society. From this observation, we are persuaded to ask the following questions: is there no wisdom in retrieving and responding to Carter's view that Yoder's biblical realism differs from Hauerwas' at this point of our discussion? Is Murphy's position not also inspirational to Carter's (2001: 65-70) opinion that Hauerwas' work, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, tends to misrepresent Yoder? Given that Yoder's emphasis on peoplehood is indispensable to his practice, can we not agree with Carter's position particularly, concerning Yoder's work from the 1990s? If these works also highlight Yoder's vision of a restored society through the Church, can we still associate with the critiques, which proclaim that in his works, Yoder simply reduced the Christ-event to the redemption of believers into an alternative society? What about his emphasis on restoration; will it not also substantiate the Yoderian vision for ecclesiology and commend it to the context of the SCS?

In his pursuit of Yoder's orthodoxy, Carter (2001: 23-27) disassociated Yoder from the 'Yale school' of theological thought with which he associated Hauerwas' ethical approach. Carter opined that Yoder's 'rejection of theological liberalism' and his inclination towards the (Diaspora) Barthian realism constitute a fundamental watershed between the postliberal witness of the Yoderian theological-political realism and Hauerwas'. According to Carter:

Stanley Hauerwas is the only other major ethicist thus far to have written extensively from a postliberal perspective, and he claims to have been greatly influenced by Yoder's thought. Thus, it is natural that many commentators tend to assume that both Hauerwas and Yoder can be interpreted together as narrative ethicists." Of course there are many significant points of similarity. However there are some important differences between Hauerwas and Yoder as well that need to be taken into account in any discussion of the relationship of their respective positions....²⁶⁴

(Carter 2001: 26)

For Carter, it is a mistake to interpret Yoder through the grid of Hauerwas; it is also wrong to lump them together. To address these questions meaningfully, we return to Carter's view that Hauerwas projects what is reminiscent of classical liberalism in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, as Yoder's position. Carter argues that (in this particular work) Hauerwas contrasts Yoder's Christological witness with a concern for the ethical implication which, to use Hauerwas' words, 'tend to make Jesus' life almost accidental to what is assumed to be a more profound theological point' (Hauerwas 1983: 73). Carter explains that Yoder actually believes that in Jesus Christ, God is more real than anything else.

Yoder's narrative realism does not portray the Christ-event as accidental. His restorative vision will not also reduce the merits of Christology to mere redemption of believers into an alternative society. As Carter points out, Yoder believes that the narrative of God's action in Scripture is authoritative because it describes the real world in terms of which we must understand ourselves. Yoder is vocal on his call for the restoration of wholeness in the society. Yoder's Christocentric biblical realism, as Hauerwas and Sider, among others also remark, does not claim originality in its visionary witness. Yoder's biblical realism envisions an embodied presence and witness of the Church as a 'restorative' community as well as an alternative society. This study reiterates that such a restorative vision for embodied witness of the Church is most evident in the book, *For the Nations*. Regrettably, Yoder did not live long after its publication to offer elaborate explications on it as he did with most of his previous works.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Carter outlines some differences as follows: First, Yoder engages the text of Scripture in a much greater degree than Hauerwas. Second, Yoder takes history much more serious than Hauerwas does in his theology. Third, Yoder does not share Hauerwas' interest in character: his doctrine of the imitation of Jesus is sharply focused on the cross. Fourth, it is questionable as to whether or not Hauerwas shares Yoder's Biblical Realism.

²⁶⁵ However, this study also notes that some of Yoder's later works (articles, or chapters in books) – such as *Historiography - a Ministry for Renewal* (1997c), and *Christian Unity from Below* (2000) among others – can attest to this claim.

In *For the Nations*, Yoder even criticizes *The Peaceable Kingdom* for claiming originality. Yoder seems to reason that this work did not and does not even have the ground to claim originality. Hauerwas has also drawn resources from other works to compose it. Yoder further describes *The Peaceable Kingdom* ‘as selective and as idiosyncratic as Hauerwas’ earlier writings, even though it differed from them in having been written all in one place (cf. Yoder 1997b: 9, note 24). Thus, Yoder’s hesitance to accept Hauerwas’ claim of writing a primer can be likened to Barton’s (1996: 140-246) critique of the ‘Yale originated’ canonical approach to biblical criticism.

Among other things, Barton faults the Yale approach towards ‘the pursuit of correct methodology’ for claiming a radical break from prevailing methods in order to present its perspective as entirely new or primer. Its ethics does not often admit that it appropriates resources from other methods, even when reflections of borrowed materials are apparent within its acclaimed status of ‘new criticism.’ Barton also describes this universalistic, authority and norm assuming method as one whose theological arguments often reside outside the vicinity of the biblical critic. To quote Barton:

The works of Childs and others has a lot to tell us about what it is for a text to be ‘canonical’, and how those who accept its canonicity tend to be constrained to read it; it is a pity if they waste their time in trying us that we should read *all biblical texts* in such a way, for that can never be shown by biblical criticism of any kind, but only by theological arguments lying outside the biblical critic’s province.

(Barton 1996 [Our italics])

Even if Barton’s inclination towards ‘the-reader-in-the-text’ approach reechoes the truistic soundings of the Enlightenment-based methodologies, his witness at least, vindicates Yoder’s criticism on Hauerwas’ claim of writing a primer. Thus, Barton’s criticism can substantiate our position on the need for a differentiation between the critical approach of Yoder and Hauerwas.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ One can even dare to say that Yoder’s approach is more rooted in *the-reader-after-the-text* approach to text criticism, which of course stresses responsible response as incumbent on the reader. Taking up the challenge to read as real readers, and to listen to the readings of real readers requires a different epistemology. Such a challenge calls for the development of a broader repertoire (repository, or reservoir) of skills. From the perspective of Punt (2004:288), this can mean that with the focus on readers, issues of power and relationships will receive a preferential privilege over ideology, politics and social locations, in bodily and contextual reading processes. Yoder’s non-methodological approach to biblical realism as this study sustains, is very much concerned with Scripture-based Christology. Scripture-based Christology determines ethical responses of Christ believers’ towards contextual issues and, within concrete human societies in more significant ways (cf. Yoder 1994f). The witness of Yoder’s biblical realism does not stand *against the nations* but *for the nations*. Yoder’s progressive identity, spirituality and ethics also shape his biblical

The aforementioned point is crucial. Of a truth, Carter remarks that the overall trajectory of Hauerwas thoughts may not mean a 'reductive, functional, and anti-ontological stance'. At the same time, Carter also argues that as far as Yoder's interpretation is concerned, it is crucial that an anti-realist reading of Hauerwas should not be imposed on Yoder's project. Yoder's biblical realism strives to engage contextual realities in continuing transformative and developmental dialogues. To use Smit's phrase, *sola scriptura civitate interpretata* (Scripture alone interpreted in view of the city or local contexts) is also normative in Yoder's biblical realism. As Carter (2001: 68-70) further argues, Barth would have found Yoder's biblical realism to be quite compatible to his own approach. According to Rasmusson (2005: 103), 'one can read Yoder's work as an attempt to develop an ecclesiology with much more socio-historical thickness, while still keeping much of Barth's theological basis'.

In other words, neglecting the difference can reduce Yoderian realism to a mere advocacy for an *alternative society* only. Some people can reason, of course, that this differentiation is negligible. It is not very simple to decipher. This contention notwithstanding, Carter's observation heightens our suspicion that a chasm is implicit in their varied perspectives towards Christian theological political ethics. As Long (2001: 104) shows, Yoder seems to be more sympathetic with the nations than Hauerwas.²⁶⁷ Consequently, despite the notion of insignificance, this differentiation is very crucial for the Nigerian context. Such differentiation can help to clarify the error of incessant breakaways and establishment of alternative churches in Nigeria. This notion of differentiation can also assist us to make Yoder's restorative vision relevant in checking the resultant proliferation of churches, which bedevils the Church in Nigeria particularly, within the geo-political vicinity of the SCS.

realism. Yoder seems to concur with this perspective in *Walk and Word: The Alternative to Methodologism* as he argues that, 'I do not grant that mine is a single-issue stance, its application....would cover an analogous range....' (Yoder 1994f: 84)

²⁶⁷ Yoder also seems to remark that the content of *For the Nations*, 'should then represent better what I stand for....if assigned to start over....without knowing to whom I should address it.' Whereas 'the corpus of older writings in *The Royal Priesthood* can be seen as fitting within a vision of the mission of the Christian community some call "sectarian" or describe as standing "against the nations," the essays in this collection are intentionally devoted to demonstrate the wrongness of their characterization of my stance' (Yoder 1997b: 5-11). Yoder's realism is for the nations.

These proliferations often arise as fallout of theological and missional misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and appropriation of cultures, theories, and practices. This study noted these issues in the second chapter. Their influence in the apparent power tussle, competitive and acrimonious co-existence of churches/ministries, etc., exists as a cancer, which riddles and cripples such Christian bodies as the CAN, CCN as well as the PFN within the environment of the SCS. As we also observed, this sordid state of affairs tends to support our appropriation of Achebe's (1960: 27) idiomatic lamentation, 'water, water, everywhere but not a drop to drink' to describe the *status quo*. Many churches and ministries, whose ecclesiological identities and witnesses can constitute an affront to the identity and message of Jesus' embodied politics of reconciliation, exist within this geo-political zone in Nigeria. Their *pseudo*-Christian ethics strengthen our contention that if the Gospel is the hope for liveable and sustainable Nigerian societies, (biblical) Christology ought to place on believers the responsibility to seek first to restore broken relationships. For Holland (2004: 135), Christian ethical witness is grounded in incarnational (lived) theology, as it is envisioned from the nonviolent-resistant Jesus Christ.

Consequently, offended believers of Christ must not always engage in establishing alternative churches at the least provocation. Even in our generation, the sovereignty of God can also appropriate perplexing situations and human agencies to restore wholeness or provide relief to those who have been hurt in this transient life. The Christ-event is a redemptive-restorative project of the Godhead. With the merits of Christology, humanity is invited to witness its social dimension within history through the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Based on the merits of the gracious Christ-event, God also uses some distressing situations to intervene and recast human affairs and social institutions in order to give God's covenant people a renewed beginning.

Significantly, it can be said that Hauerwas realized the seriousness of this issue particularly, as it affects Carter's observation, and expresses regret in his *Foreword* to Carter's book in the following fashion:

Carter observes that one of the biggest problems in Yoder interpretation is me...some only read Yoder through the grid of my work. I...credit Yoder's influence on my works *though*, some only read Yoder through the grid of my work. If it is true...I certainly regret that state of affairs. Even more I regret that some may come to have misunderstood Yoder because of my work.

So let me say as clearly as I can that if there is in fact a difference – which may even amount to disagreement – between Yoder and me, no one should be tempted to side

with me.... As far as I am concerned it is never a question if God exists. The question is whether and how he exists.
Of course I wish I could be as competent a scriptural reasoner as Yoder was. I simply lack the formation....

(Hauerwas, cited in Carter 2001: 10-11[Our italics])

This study reasons that there is a significant difference between these two theologians, and that such divide tilts more to methodology, as Hauerwas admits. Hauerwas' acknowledgement of Carter's indictment clarifies the chasm between his theological political ethics and Yoder's Christocentric vision for believers' practice of the rule of Christ. Both theologians hold distinct perspectives on 'postliberal' approach towards contemporary Christian realization of theological political vision.²⁶⁸

In view of these perspectives, this study also wonders if the SCS cannot learn some lessons from Hauerwas public apology in order to draw resources from Yoder's restorative vision and engage in a more adequate social witness in Nigeria. Hauerwas' regret also points to the influence of the Yoderian contention that Christian discipleship is a Christocentric project, which demands a continuing conversion of the Church in the light of its historical origin and practices. Yoder warns that offences must be named, repented of, and where necessary atoned for, in moral discernment and deliberation or truth finding in the subordinate Church of Christ. Naming the wrong, Yoder remarks, is constitutive in the reconciliatory witness of the Church (Yoder 2000: 178).

Consequently, one may find it difficult to deny that these issues can promote and substantiate Yoder's ethical witness as a more meaningful and feasible biblical vision which can assist the SCS to realize the rule of Christ in its embodied public *kerygma*. After all, the divine sovereignty also responds to human errors by drawing in people as transformed and empowered instruments

²⁶⁸ Hauerwas builds on his ethics of character to proclaim the '*otherness*' of the Christian community as an alternative society. In contrast, Yoder, as we hinted in the previous chapter, places a weightier emphasis on the actual practice of believers in their quest to realize the biblical narrations on the meaning and implication of the Christ-event within historical contexts. The believer is, for Yoder, the sign, the instrument, and the message of redeemed-restored humanity as Christ's moral agency for (Bible-based) social transformation and development. Yoder's biblical realism preaches the *otherness* of the Church in the ability of the *ekklesia* to draw from Christology and the giftings of the Spirit to maintain a balanced *momentum* in believers' quest to appropriate and maintain the distinctive merits of the gracious Christ-event. Yoder's biblical realism strives to maintain such *otherness* of the Church without falling into the reductionism of its embodied witness to alternative society or the Constantinian church. Yoder's biblical realism craves for corporate bodily witness of Jesus Christ as a 'hermeneutics of peoplehood.' The Yoderian project, as we have noted, is shaped and sustained by Yoder's peculiar (progressive) identity, spirituality and ethics: it is also a restorative vision.

in setting aright the ruins of human affairs (Barrera 2005: 172-175). In view of these inductions, can we not also reason that Yoder's embodied vision for corporate discernment and witness of the subordinate Church does not deny the recognition of God's sovereignty as indispensable spirituality in the practice of the rule of Christ by the Servant Church?

Yoder's (restorative) vision for the ecumenical ministry of the church acknowledges the difficulties and various positions on the interpretation of the phrase, *has already been bound in heaven* (Matt. 18:18). As a vision for faithful ecumenical witness, it can even respect and extend, to use the Hauerwas' phrase, its *suffering presence*²⁶⁹ by recognizing the right of even non-Christians to interpret also the biblical witness. For instance, in *For the Nations*, Yoder claims that:

This hermeneutic role of the community is...by no means an exclusive possession, especially not in the post-Christian global culture. The question, "Is this something only Christians can say?" is pointless in this setting. When the empirical community becomes disobedient, other people can hear the Bible's witness too. It is after all, a public document. Loners and outsiders can hear it speaking, especially if the insiders have ceased to listen. It was thanks to the lone Tolstoy and the outsider Gandhi that the churchman Martin Luther King Jr....was able to bring Jesus' word on violence back to the churches....

(Yoder 1997b: 93)

In Yoder's restorative vision, the ecumenical movement also persuades Christians to think of the Church in other places. Yoder's ecumenical ministry obligates the Church to initiate and responsibly co-operate with various movements for the restoration of *shalom* within contexts. We maintain that Yoder's vision for ecumenical ministry is also a restorative visionary project. Perhaps Van Engen's (1996: 186-187) view that this world-encountering Church reflects Christ's cosmic lordship by incorporating and gathering disciples for Jesus Christ, can assist us to recapture and substantiate our reflection and promotion of Yoder's vision for ecclesial witness to the context of the SCS.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Hauerwas has used this phrase to describe the sustained physical presence and care which a healthy person offers to the sick. Such an altruistic witness of grace arises from the theological convictions. *Suffering Presence* is the title of the work in which Hauerwas argues that medical ethics 'does not so much solve our difficulties as it reflects the moral anarchy of our times, because it is ambivalent on 'how the practice of medicine can be sustained in a morally fragmented' world (Hauerwas 1986: 1-5).

²⁷⁰ This tenth chapter of Van Engen's book, *Mission on the Way* (1996), is titled, *The Uniqueness of Christ in Mission Theology*. In this chapter, Van Engen comments on the need for Christian mission theories and practices to explore the confession, *Jesus Christ is Lord* (as God's eternal purpose in Christ), from a broader perspective, which can transcend unhealthy exclusivistic ecclesiologies of many contemporary churches. Van Engen reflects on such an approach as an essential and biblical confession of faith that questions the traditional pluralistic, inclusivistic, and exclusivistic positions, which various Christians uphold. The project of this Dutch-Latin American theologian seeks to challenge God's missionary people to participate actively and

Van Engen also surveys the missiological implications of his evangelist paradigm. For him, the paradigm suggests an essential and biblical confession of faith that questions traditional pluralistic, inclusivistic, and exclusivistic positions, which various Christians uphold. The study indicates this thought in its introductory chapter. Van Engen asserts that Jesus' disciples did not relent in confessing him as the Lord even in the midst of persecution and scandal, etc. In his perspective, the believers' embodied confession of Christ's lordship makes room for one more sinner. In his words:

[This] also signifies (contra the pluralists) that the church of which Christ is the head is called to proclaim that Jesus is the Lord of all humanity, not just "a Christ" for the Christians... This world-encountering Church is as broad as all humanity (pluralist), as accepting as Christ's cosmic lordship (inclusivistic), and as incorporating and gathering as Christ's disciples (exclusivistic).

(Van Engen 1996: 186-187)

Van Engen's position makes it more convincing for us to support Coles' suggestion that in Yoder's vision for ecumenical witness, 'binding and loosing alters the shape and direction of the believing community as it binds here and unbinds there; thereby participating in ensuring temporal continuities and unanticipated discontinuities of traditions (cf. Coles 2002: 312).

Van Engen remarks that the uniqueness of Christ in (mission) theology means that ultimately, Christian convictions, reflections and proclamations are simply, a restatement of the mystery of the Gospel, i.e., that mystery which for all ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things (Eph 3: 9-12). If the apostle Paul and the early Church could emphatically state such a conviction in the midst of their amazing cultural and religious diversities; Van Engen submits that contemporary believers have less excuse to compromise it. This submission can inspire the confidence of the SCS to *re-vision* and witness its ecclesiological identity by mirroring some perspectives of the Yoderian vision especially now that the centre of gravity of Christianity has shifted to the South and contemporary African Christianity is a history in the making. Like

responsibly in Christ's mission, which is pluralistic and inclusive yet faith-particularistic. Van Engen, a Reformed missionary theologian, espouses the evangelist's paradigm to theological mission ethics and reflects on incarnated (lived or historical) Christology as the source of Christian's varied approaches to the *other* (especially religions) and the result of such ethical positions. Van Engen laments the failure of 'logos Christology' to offer humanity a God who alone can relieve the oppressions of the downtrodden in a hurting world. Logo Christology, as we noted in the previous chapter, does not focus much on the humanity of Jesus thereby reducing salvation to abstractions, and in most cases, to the bare notion of escape from final judgment (cf. Van Engen 1996: 181).

Akper (2006b) and Jonker (2006),²⁷¹ August (2006a) seems to regard such a shift as a movement from multiculturalism to interculturalism. Although we hope to discuss this movement later, we note here that most indigenous Africans celebrate covenanted relationship as an indispensable ethos for continuing peaceful co-existence and practice of unity in the diversity of social relationships and religiosities (cf. Onwu 1987: 147).

To summarize, in this section, we have struggled to show that Yoder's vision for the proclamation of the Christ-event does not simply emphasize redemption to the detriment of restoration, or vice versa. Reducing the goal of the Christ-event to the inauguration of the Church as an alternative society may constitute an affront to the sovereignty of God in the process. Such reductionism of the merits of the gracious Christ-event can result in another revised form of liberal ethics. It often permits the believers' community to engage in self-understanding and the articulation of ecclesiology from a de-contextualized universalistic perspective. This is a problem, which can also explain why Yoder's restorative approach to the Barthian vision sustains the 'alternative-restorative vision' as seamless tension in order to substantiate the distinctive *otherness* of the Church as indispensable for a true Christocentric social witness. Yoder's reflections on *otherness* can saddle the Servant Church with the responsibility to initiate some creative and responsible ways to grapple with this tension without falling into the error of Constantinianism or sectarianism. The strength of Yoder's Believers' Church vision for ecclesiology is also visible in its ability to oppose individualism through its non-coercive evangelical ministry. Yoder's incarnated (or ecumenical, or *jesulogical*) Christology is the source and result of his ecclesiology (Carter 2001), which is expressed in his vision for practising the rule of Christ as *Peoplehood*. The Yoderian Christology is historical. Given this summary, we inquire: what other inferences can we make from this chapter?

5 Overview

We can learn that Yoder's Christological ecclesiology sustains its vision of early catholicity in its constant affirmation that ecclesiology expresses the Church's faithful witness to the lordship of Jesus Christ. It is an embodied ecclesial vision, which Yoder articulates for the (partial) realization of the kingdom of God within historical contexts. Yoder's vision for ecclesiology

²⁷¹ Louis Jonker is a Reformed theologian. He teaches Old Testament in Stellenbosch University. This study earlier introduced Karl August and Godwin I. Akper.

does not jettison its pursuit of the eschatological Kingdom in the process. In *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder (1994d: 105 [Our italics]) states that, ‘The kingdom of God is a social order....yet it does not assume that time will end tomorrow; it reveals why it is meaningful that history should go on....’ Everything (history inclusive), systematizes in Jesus Christ. Historical Christology accords him the warrant for the pursuit and witness of the Kingdom vision as a socially realizable project of the Church, as well as a theological hope of the Servant *ekklesia*. Yoder’s unique vision for Kingdom witness constitutes the heart of his model for the Free Church community. Thus, this study favours the peculiarity of the Yoderian vision to offer the SCS a substantive hope for the realization of a peaceful and liveable society. *Christ’s* figure is central within Yoder’s *no Kingdom without a King theology for ecclesial vision*. Its hermeneutic of God’s gracious act in Jesus Christ recognizes the divine plan for the salvation of the world as a corporate program of the Godhead. Yoder’s ecclesiology bespeaks of Christocentric ecclesial witness.

Furthermore, his ecclesiological vision draws its strength from the Yoderian fundamental conviction; i.e., that the life and works of the biblical Jesus Christ provides his believers with normative vision for ethical witness in diverse cultural contexts and ages. Yoder’s ecclesiology also proclaims partial realization of the Kingdom as the reason for the Church’s existence within the nations. Thus, Yoder’s Kingdom vision preaches Christocentricity, corporate discernment and witness as well as ecclesial identity and spirituality as distinctive marks of a faithfully subordinate ecumenical Church of Jesus Christ. These issues can provide a necessary framework to sustain the central thesis of the research: that Yoder’s ecclesiological vision can offer the SCS a more responsible strategy to *re-vision* its distorted ecclesiological identity particularly, as one investigates Yoder’s ecumenical ministry for the Church.

With historical Christology as its origin and goal, Yoder’s vision for ecclesiology re-presents the ecumenical ministry of the Church as primarily, a Christological imperative. This ecclesial vision, as we demonstrated above, also appeals to Scripture-based Christology to demonstrate that ‘covenanting at the base’ or ‘unity from below’ is both a theological and social imperative for contemporary believers in Jesus Christ. The figure of Christ constitutes the fulcrum on which all the nexus of believers’ vision and missionary engagements unite and revolve. Subsequently, such a lazy pluralism or ‘break-to-be-faithful’ principle, which characterized the Enlightenment-based witness and ecumenical ministry of the Church within the geo-political vicinity of the SCS

in particular, constitute unhealthy scandals to the Gospel. From Yoder's ecclesial point of view, God's judgment is on the Church's past and present unfaithfulness. The sovereign God wants to restore the Church to its created purpose, i.e., to exist as the proclaimer of God's righteousness. Yoder's vision for ecclesiology also seeks to restore the Christocentric vision of unity amidst diversity as a more significant proclamation of ecumenical witness of contemporary churches.

Contemporary believers' judgments demand such renewed ecumenical conversations. They are founded on the missional paradigm of the biblical Jesus Christ who celebrates diversity amidst the varied humanities of humankind. Jesus' message inaugurates that inbreaking which takes place within the community in the reality of continuing conversion and healing. It also empowers the community to live publicly in ways that point to God's rule (Guder 2005: 118-119). Believers' political judgment also necessitates the interpretation of Christian understanding of history in a particular way, i.e., discerning 'what God is doing in the light of tomorrow' (Yoder 1997b: 242). Yoder's unique Mennonite identity, spirituality and ethical vision define and sustain the Yoderian visionary project for envisioned restoration of faithful ecumenical churches. Yoder's vision for faithful ecumenism is fundamentally contextual in its *glocalized* foundation and orientations.

Consequently, Yoder's ecclesiological vision discusses the ecumenical ministry of the Servant *ekklesia* from 'evangelical', 'catholic' and, 'reforming' perspectives. It also bespeaks of a restorative vision, which further re-interprets the Reformed slogan *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* as a continuing process of reconstructing ecclesiastical traditions from past 'failures and idolatries' especially, 'false ecclesiological visions of the past'. Such an exercise tends to heighten our suspicion that Yoder's restorative vision can offer the SCS a more feasible and plausible device to re-vision its dangling and confusing ecclesiological identity. This *pseudo*-ecclesiological identity of the SCS arises and thrives in the Constantinian-Docetic faced ecclesial visions of the Enlightenment-based ethical witnesses in Nigeria.

As a way forward, this study re-echoed Smit that the Reformed tradition does not have a timeless, a-historical ecclesiology. Within a typology of ecclesiologies, it is certainly possible to situate the Reformed tradition somewhere. This claim can be argued both historically and systematically. It is one of the obvious implications of the Reformed emphasis on and understanding of the *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* conviction (Smit 2004d: 72). As we

earlier observed, Smit also re-presents the Reformed tradition as a faith and tradition with enormous liberating potentials, which must continuously be liberated from its own failures and idolatries. Smit's recognition of the need to continuously liberate the Reformed tradition from its 'false ecclesiological visions of the past' can further assist us to reflect on Yoder's vision for the (partial) realization of the Kingdom of God as a socially realizable project of the empirical Church. Yoder expects believers to engage in the Kingdom witness with minority, rather than the Constantinian (often) majority vision:

There are things which we cannot control, which nonetheless are going to happen, which are going to impinge upon the situations where we ourselves are trying to do something else. This means that it will be an expression of wisdom, and not of self-righteousness or unconcern or isolation, if we accept the fact that those deeds are going to be done and that we cannot stop them, and concentrate ourselves on doing other things which no one will do.... It is; one of the differences *which* being powerful and powerless *can make*....in a situation where one disposes of no capacity to impose one's preference. One....does the best one can to serve as can be served and save what can be saved in a bad situation.

(Yoder 1984: 101[Our italics])

Yoder's visionary witness of ecumenical ministry is a minority stance, which also celebrates evangelization as an indispensable identity and spirituality of the Church. The biblical Jesus Christ is its paradigm, while the *other* is a partner in progress in the *missio Dei*, with right/freedom of choice and conscience. With its embodied witness as a Diaspora visionary proclamation, Yoder's minority vision pleads that Christian (or believing) communities should come to appreciate and trust one another's sincerity in ecumenism. Differences Smit has remarked can become an invitation and a starting point for the common search of the truth in a spirit of *koinonia* (cf. Smit 2003b: 39). Differences remind believers of the need to rediscover the Church's ministry as a ministry of the whole people of God. Yoder's restorative vision for ministry re-presents catholic ministry as a commitment to a Christocentric inclusive ministry *with others*. This is an orthodox vision for catholicity, which also persuades the Church's ministry to be bipolar in its evangelization (or mission). Yoder's *ministerium reformata* is undaunted in its appeal that the Church's ecumenical evangelization and traditions must as well be reforming. As a renewed and emerging kind of social witness, Yoder's ecumenical ministry argues that the authority of the Church to bind and loose should not be compromised; neither should the Church practice binding and loosing without forgiveness and discernment. Yoder's progressive identity, spirituality and ethical witness would not permit the Church to adopt the unhealthy separatists' practice of Docetism. Scripture based Christology and the pre-

Constantinian Church tradition provides the Yoderian vision with the framework for its believers' proclamation of *the Rule of Christ* as the shape of Free Church ecclesiology.

Yoder's vision for ecclesiology reinterprets the 'practice of the Rule of Christ' as a simple, generally accessible, and apparently dogmatic naïve form of discussion-starting witness (Yoder 1997d cf. Enns 2007a: 116). Yoder's emphasis on peoplehood as an indispensable ethos of the Servant Church tends to explain and espouse the biblical terms 'binding and loosing' as well as 'forgiveness and discernment' as indispensable corporate tasks in the Free Church ecclesiology. Yoder re-reads Matthew 18: 15-20 to serve as the key text of his theological-social stance for the Church's visionary practice. Yoder's vision is firm that the confession of *Jesus Christ as Messiah* is the source and result of its envisioned Free Church authority for binding and loosing. *Jesulogical* (or nonviolent-resistant) reconciliation is central to Yoder's message of hope which also seeks to restore broken relationship without exonerating the offender from the responsibility of righting the wrong. Yoder's vision for restorative witness as this work reiterates mirrors (indigenous) African vision for truth finding.

Most (indigenous) African societies as we have observed, are identifiable as communities for corporate moral deliberations and discernments. Africans approach conflict resolution, or *palaver*, through 'face-to-face' interactive dialogues. Such inter-personal or communal approach hardly gives room for the distortion of truth. Offences are named and where necessary, repented and atoned for. In the same spirit, a Yoderian restorative vision for the practice of the rule of Christ calls for sustained engagement with the differently *other*. Reconciling dialogue Yoder also argued in *For the Nations*, 'is the way for people of God to define the....meaning of their peoplehood, it is also the model for the way a wider society should make decisions and resolve conflicts....the rules are the same' (Yoder 1997b: 44). Yoder's process of human interchange combines the plethora of believers' gifts to project reconciling dialogue as the substance of its moral discernment and the authority of divine empowerment to 'bind and loose'. It seeks to recover, empower, and restore excluded persons to participate in Christocentric corporate proclamation of moral deliberation and discernment. Within this visionary practice, offence must be named, repented of and where necessary restituted. Yoder's vision for ecclesiology seeks the restoration of *shalom* (wholeness or catholicity) in the society.

Yoder's (envisioned) believing community is also endowed with the wherewithal for continuing moral discernment, which lays more emphasis on the 'promised guidance of the Holy Spirit'. Moral discernment and forgiveness condition and enable one another in complex ways. Yoderian devotees witness their endowed authority to bind and loose in the embodied politics of Jesus (cf. Yoder 1992a: 6-13). Yoder's vision for social witness is also a restorative visionary project, which engages realities in responsible transformational and developmental dialogues. Yoder's restorative vision for ecclesiology also respects *glocality*. Thus, we wondered if such a (*glocalized*) world-engaging vision for ecclesial witness would not strengthen our commendation and relation of the Yoderian vision to the context of the SCS. Yoder's vision for the proclamation of the rule of Christ bespeaks of a shift from political theology to theological politics: it posits a distinctive approach to 'Biblical Realism' whose methodology we differentiated from Hauerwas. This study also reflected on the need to distinguish Yoder's vision for a Free Church ecclesiology as a more authentic Believers' Church proclamation of peacemaking.

Yoder, Chris Huebner remarked, never assumed that he knew what peace was. A key aspect of the Yoderian project is Yoder's critique on the Constantinian attempt to outfit history in order to move it in the right direction. Yoder's work as Huebner reasoned, 'consists in a series of exercises dedicated to unthinking violence.' Yoder did not write or claimed to write a systematic treatise on the nature of Christian pacifism, which all pacifists can accept. Yoder engaged in ongoing 'series of experiments to understanding the peace of Christ.' His project is 'necessarily fragmental and ad hoc. It is episodic, exploratory, and experimental.' Yoder offered a series of sketches, which he designed to reveal the very nature of peace albeit, not from a finality or totalitarian perspective (cf. Huebner 2006: 118). Yoder's vision for Diaspora witness is defined and sustained by his (Yoder's) altruistic and evolving (Mennonite) identity, spirituality, and ethical witnesses. Yoder's vision for a Christological ecclesiology is a minority prophetic witness, which seeks to restore *shalom* in the society: it is a transformational and developmental project. The study will offer a detailed discussion on this transformational-development perspective in the next chapter.

Yoder's visionary proclamation of the rule of Christ reflects the 'evangelist's' social (prophetic) witness which celebrates what some African theologians have described as 'movement from multiculturalism to interculturality' as viable option for a truly theological transformative witness

of the *missio Dei* (particularly, in contexts where believers are not in a majority). The Yoderian prophetic witness as we re-present it is a Kingdom oriented proclamation of the *euangelion*. It sustains the vision of early catholicity in its constant affirmation that ecclesiology expresses the Church's faithful confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ over its polity and politics. As a progressive Christocentric (corporate) witness of the Kingdom, Yoder's vision for a restorative ecclesiology reinterprets the ecumenical ministry of the Church as 'evangelical', 'catholic', and, 'reforming'. Yoder reflects on the Reformed slogan, *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* as a continuing process of reconstructing ecclesiastical traditions from past 'failures and idolatries' especially, 'false ecclesiological visions of the past'. To conclude, the shape of Yoder's Christological ecclesiology is identifiable with its embodied vision for biblical realism of 'the practice of the rule of Christ' by the Servant *ekklesia*. Yoder's incarnated (or lived) Christology is the *locus standi* of the Yoderian expression and affirmation 'ecclesiology is ethics' because believers' practice of the Eucharist Yoder argues, also bespeaks of a Christocentric social witness. Thus, ecclesiology should be witnessed as a form of social ethics.

In our rigorous attempt to examine Yoder visionary ecclesiology, we learn that biblical (historical) Christology provides the warrantee of the Yoderian affirmation that ecclesiology is ethics. We will therefore proceed to analyze Yoder's Social Ethics in order to appraise the feasibility and plausibility of this affirmation especially, as it relates to the context of the SCS; in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

YODER'S SOCIAL ETHICS: 'AS GOSPEL'

We know more fully from Jesus Christ and in the context of the confessed faith than we know in other ways....in that the lordship of Christ is the centre which must guide *ethical* value choices so that *believers* may be called to subordinate or even to reject other values which contradict Jesus.... It is therefore not a compromise or a dilution of the fidelity of the radical commitment when the obedient Christian community becomes at the same time an instrument for serving and saving the larger culture. The distinctive faithfulness of the church to her first calling....is exemplified....in "The Kingdom as Social ethics"....
(Yoder 1984: 11[Our italics])

Yoder was a pacifist, but he represents a special type of pacifism which he once called "the pacifism of the messianic community... *Its embodied social ethics* are dependent on the truth of the reality that is disclosed and inaugurated by Jesus Christ, that we meet God in the history of Jesus Christ and thus the nature of reality.... It is communal in that it is lived by a group of covenanting human beings who instruct one another, forgive one another, bear one another's burden, reinforce one another's witness....
(Rasmusson 2002[our italics])

One can describe Yoder's multifaceted ethical vision for believers as a bible-based-Christocentric approach to ecclesial realism....it calls on believers to engage in active but responsible participation in nation building, social transformation and development. Rooted in the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ, the evangelist's social ethics is inherently, faith-particularistic, culturally pluralistic, and ecclesialogically inclusivistic.
(Ndukwe 2008)

1 Introduction

Reflections from the preceding chapter reveal Scripture based Christology as the warrant for the Yoderian affirmation that ecclesiology is ethics. Yoder's incarnated (or historical) Christology determines his vision for ecclesial reflections and practices. Yoder's Christocentric vision of a Kingdom oriented practice reinterprets and preaches Christian witness as believers' corporate identity and spirituality. God's gracious act in Jesus Christ clarifies the divine plan for the salvation of the world as a corporate program of the Godhead. Yoder's ecclesiology envisions the kingdom of God as a historically realizable task of the empirical Church, as it is also an 'eschatological hope' of the Servant *ekklesia*. Its origin and goal are firmly rooted in Yoder's historical (or biblical) Christology. Yoder's vision for ecclesiology also re-assesses the ecumenical ministry of the Church as a fundamental Christological imperative.

Consequently, Yoder also reinterprets the Reformed slogan *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* as a continuing process of recovering ecclesiastical traditions from past ‘failures and idolatries’ especially, ‘false ecclesiological visions of the past’. The biblical Jesus Christ is the paradigm of this Diaspora visionary practice. The *other* is a partner in progress with right/freedom of choice and conscience, in its pursuit of the *missio Dei*. The Yoderian *jesulological* (or nonviolent) reconciliatory message of hope also seeks to restore broken relationship without exonerating the offender from the responsibility of righting the wrong. This approach mirrors (indigenous) African approaches to truth finding.

Yoder’s approach to (human) social interchange or interculturality is challenging. Yoder’s Diaspora visionary practice does not reduce or proclaim his approach to biblical realism as an abstract and decontextual universal practice of the rule of Christ in the Servant *ekklesia*. This shift marks a distinctive watershed between his approach to Biblical Realism as a movement from political theology to theological politics, and Stanley Hauerwas’ methodology. Yoder’s ecclesiology retrieves ecclesial resources from early catholicity to affirm that ecclesiology expresses the Church’s faithful witness to the lordship of Jesus Christ. These among other issues, heighten our fundamental conviction that his social ethics can offer the SCS a more feasible and plausible device to re-vision its unstable and confusing ecclesiological identity. Smit also remind us that ‘the Reformed tradition does not have a timeless, a-historical ecclesiology’. Within a typology of ecclesiologies, it is certainly possible to situate it somewhere. The Reformed tradition is ‘a faith and tradition with enormous liberating potentials’ which ‘must continuously be liberated from its own failures and idolatries’ (Smit 2004d: 72; 2005c: 367; 2006b: 38).

Significantly, Smit’s submission offers us a summary on the fundamental conviction of this project. Our present chapter sustains this conviction in its examination of the Yoderian social ethics. In the next section, we analyze Yoder’s vision for social ethics. We reflect on Yoder’s vision for social ethics as *body politics*. The section also appraises Yoder’s reflection on the phrases *meaning after Babel*, *the fulness of Christ* and, his rhetoric that *social ethics is Gospel*. Such an approach will provide us with a necessary platform to investigate the contours of this social ethics in the proceeding section. As an overview, we will review, summarize and conclude the chapter in the last section.

2 Yoder's Vision for Social Ethics

In this section, we discuss Yoder's progressive vision of social ethics for the subordinate Church of Jesus Christ, as we deem it relevant to the context of the SCS. As a prologue, we appeal to Yoder's visionary discussion of Christian ethics as *body politics*. Body politics as Yoder represents it suggests a corporate and embodied social witness (or politicking, or proclamation, or campaigning) of Jesus' political ethics among the nations. Yoder's vision for social ethics is a Christocentric quest to realize the practice of the rule of Christ within historical contexts. This understanding is evident in Yoder's book *Body Politics: Five Characteristics of the Christian Community before a Watching World* (1992b).

Yoder reinterprets and argues for an embodied social practice of the politics of Jesus. It represents the true description of the social ethics of the early Church, which the New Testament suggests. As a result, he appropriated the phrase 'body politics' to underscore that the difference between Church and State or between faithful and unfaithful Church lies in the political ethics each reflects. According to Yoder, 'To be political is to make decisions, to assign roles, and to distribute powers, and the Christian community cannot do otherwise than exercise these same functions, going about its business as a body.... "Body" is an ancient image for the human community. When I use it as a modifier, it pins down the awareness that each member needs and serves each of the others, that the whole is more than all the parts, and that the interdependence of all is structured according to an already given plan, flexible and visible to grow, but neither chaotic nor infinitely negotiable' (Yoder 1992a: ix). Yoder rereads Scripture and the pre-Constantinian Church tradition to envision or *re-vision* Christian social ethics. His ethical reflection differs from the social vision of the state as well as other Enlightenment-based social visions. It is suggestive of a Christocentric trans-community vision for embodying the Gospel as social ethics among the nations. Yoder as we noted in the previous chapter envisions an unlimited catholic witness of the whole people of God. His project for social ethics is also a restorative vision.

From Yoder's perspective, both the Church and the wider society are the locus for an embodied proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ over the Powers. His social vision seeks to represent the Christocentric ethics of the subordinate Church as the ultimate shape of the social ethics, which the larger society is called to reflect. Yoder's vision for social ethics also envisions

an embodied (Christocentric) realization of the practice of the rule of Christ within historical contexts. This chapter hopes to reflect on some of these issues in subsequent paragraphs.

Yoder also argues that the Church's calling to be faithful is visible and definable in bodily political terms. God's will for human social life as a whole is what the 'Body of Christ' is called to prefigure for humanity. The Church is a visible and distinctive polis with a unique calling and witness. It envisions and reflects a structured social body with *jesulological* approach towards decision-making, membership definition and, its pursuit of common tasks. Described as 'royal priesthood' and as 'priestly kingdom,' believers, Yoder also tells us, are called into the real (public) world where sacrifice and sovereignty happen. A Christocentric, trans-community people of God is called to be today, what the larger world is called to become ultimately. Faithful (Christ) believers' social ethics reflect their presence as a people serving God and ruling the word. A Christocentric *jesulological* social ethics as we note it is the Good News itself (Yoder 1997b: 36, 1992b: vi-xi).²⁷²

²⁷² Perhaps the Bonhoeffer-Barthian John De Gruchy's theological political ethics can shed more lights into our understanding of the Yoderian bodily politicking and its relevance in African societies.

De Gruchy, like his South African contemporaries (such as Smit, Tutu, etc), also draws extensively from the apartheid experience to articulate Christian political ethics as *Being Human* (2006). De Gruchy calls for believers' devotional reflections, as they are also relevant to the (South) African context. Believers' ethics can provide humanity with a better platform to appreciate local struggles, fears and hopes. Contemporary human struggles for justice, liberation and peace; against racism, oppression and violence are worldwide phenomena. De Gruchy also espouses the conviction that reflecting on the status quo of the *other* can enable present day Christians to discern issues within their own contexts, from a new perspective. Such issues as De Gruchy reasoned would otherwise remain hidden. From this background, De Gruchy also cautioned contemporary Christians not to reduce their faith in Jesus Christ to cultural captivity. Practically, true Christian politicking is not without meaningful relationship with culture. Christian faith and spirituality also reflect on socio-cultural realities of its host cultures. This summary is an extract from his book *Cry Justice* (De Gruchy 1986a). In De Gruchy's other book, *Theology and Christian Ministry in the Context of Crisis* (1986b) requires theological and ethical (re)formation, which is open-ended until 'the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our God and his Christ.' De Gruchy's view reflects on the Christian community as an *ekklesia* of hope. An embodied confession of such a hope inspires believers in Christ to a more meaningful expression and demonstration of justice, reconciliation and healing in the here and now. The Church's ministry of the Word and Sacrament enables the people of God to witness to the Kingdom and grow in the knowledge, grace and love of God (De Gruchy 1986b: 168-169).

The Christian gospel of reconciliation bespeaks of life lived within the covenant of God's promise of new life and new worlds, with new possibilities breaking into the old (De Gruchy 2002). For de Gruchy, contemporary Christian bodily politicking is a theological imperative, which also arises from Christology. De Gruchy also argues that, 'If the incarnation provides the basis for Christian humanism by overcoming the dualism between the sacred and the secular, reconciling God and humanity and asserting human dignity, and if the cross roots such humanism in the reality of a suffering world and the struggle for justice, it is through the resurrection that the power of death is broken and human hope is fulfilled. It is...the 'risen Christ who bears the new humanity in himself, the final glorious "yes" which God addresses to the new human being' (De Gruchy 2002: 212-213). From this extract quoted from his book *Reconciliation* (2002), De Gruchy makes it clearer that contemporary Christianity demands active but responsible participation in *glocal* ethical, socio-cultural affairs. Believers in Christ are called to continuing critique and retrieval of the core convictions and values of Christianity. Such an ethic inspires Christians to engage secular cultures in sustained transformational dialogues. Christian bodily

Given the aforementioned insights, one can pause to ask the following questions: can Yoder's Christocentric social ethics not provide the SCS with a more meaningful ethical vision to rethink and possibly review its often speculative and universalistic ethical visions? Are they not reflexive of some legacies of the abstract magisterial approach of the Enlightenment-based ethical visions? Would Yoder's visionary practice not re-present Christians' witness as an indispensable identity and spirituality for a Christocentric mission ethics of a subordinate Church, which seeks to realize the *missio Dei* in contexts? Will it not recognize and share responsible space with some *religio*-cultural contexts and resources of the host cultures of the SCS? More concretely, will Yoder's Diaspora visionary witness of *ministerium* ethics not assist the SCS to renounce Achebe's idiomatic expression 'water, water, everywhere but not a drop to drink' as true description of its ecclesiological identity and social ethics within its host *religio*-cultural communities?

In his comparison of the social visions of Yoder and O'Donovan, Kroeker (2004) argues that both theologians begin their constructive proposals from within the Christian Church. Yoder and O'Donovan, Kroeker reasons, seek to re-describe 'the political meaning of the Christian narrative vision....and to show how liberalism represents a false copy of the Christian vision.... Both carry out their proposals with extensive reference to biblical texts, to the ordering of liturgical practices of the church, and to post-biblical historical developments concerning the Church and political order' (Kroeker 2004: 42). For Kroeker, *O'Donovan seeks to retrieve Christendom political theology while Yoder elaborates on the Church as a voluntary political community of non-violent believers in Jesus Christ*; for the contemporary world. However, Kroeker also thinks that Yoder's vision seems to take the issue of continuing formation and reformation of the moral agency for granted. In his view, Yoder does not seem to pay 'enough attention to the inner formation of the wills and minds of Christian witnesses who must exercise political discernment in all manner of contexts. There is an ironic lack of attention to the complex character and (trans) formation of the human *voluntas* in Yoder's voluntariness'

politicking serves the well-being of humanity. Being human is 'the final confession of some one who is conscious of the biblical truth that our lives are in the hands of the God whom we have seen in the 'face of Jesus Christ'. In Christ, the Alpha and Omega, God has the final word and that word is 'Yes' to life...' (De Gruchy 2006: 209). This understanding is also reflexive of the Yoderian vision. Yoder reasons on body politics as an indispensable ethos of the Servant *ekklesia* before the watching world. Despite its ecumenical patience towards the 'Just War' theories, Yoder's enduring vision preaches nonviolent dialogical approach even to the adversary (cf. Nation 2006).

(Kroeker 2005: 58). The divine election of the people hood, Kroeker reasoned elsewhere, is a mysterious drama of love, which ‘has implication for Yoder’s elaboration of the Church’s discernment of fidelity in its “body politics.”’ It can neither ‘be possessed nor coercively imposed’ (Kroeker 2005: 170-171).

At first glance, Kroeker’s views also tend to question the validity of Yoder’s vision for social embodiment of the Gospel in the SCS. The theology of the *missio Dei* Guder argues must be rooted in God’s nature, purpose and action. In other words, it ought to be developed from the mission of God:

...who calls and empowers his people to be the sign, foretaste and instrument of God’s new order under the lordship of Jesus Christ.... If our concern is faithful witness to the gospel.... God’s gospel is to be made known to all people as an invitation to healing and to enlistment in the service of God as part of the divine witnessing people. *Thus*, Christian witness is corporate in order that it can also be individual and personal. God calls a people into discipleship formation by Jesus, in order to send it out as an apostolic community....with that flame of the Spirit ignited on *every member*.’

(Guder 2005: 125 [Our italics])

For Guder as for Carter, the proclamation of the Gospel can only reflect the New Testament message if it includes a call for the character formation of individuals to ‘take responsibility for managing the society’ (Carter 2005: 187).

Interestingly, Yoder also discusses such New Testament reflection as, to use the words of Nation, ‘revolutionary innovation’. Such an innovation transforms and empowers the hearers of the gospel to become ‘a part of the people of God, thereby challenging their subordinate status.’ In the Yoderian perspective, ‘the subordinate person in the social order is addressed as a moral agent’ with a responsibility of viewing her/his status in society as ‘meaningful witness and ministry’ (Nation 2006: 117; cf. Yoder 1994d: 173). Yoder as this study hopes to show often reflects on all subordinate believers as Christ’s moral agency for social transformation and development.

In *The Christian Witness to the State* for instance, Yoder expects all Christians to ‘be more concerned and more capable than others in giving the “other side” a hearing’ (Yoder 1997a: 42). Such Christians also embody their proclamation of the politics of Jesus as social ethics within historical contexts. Yoder’s social vision does not seek to reduce the poor to mere receivers

(consumers) or spectators to the social order. On the other hand, it will not glorify the rich to assume the status of philanthropists or dictators for social vision and practices. Yoder's prophetic reflection (commendation of the good and condemnation of evil) on Christian (social) ethics is also suggestive of a more significant visionary embodiment of reflections on 'preferential option for the poor': it summons all believers to active and responsible participation in social witness, in significant ways (cf. Yoder 1997b: 32). Consequently, one can express agreement with Schuurman:

Christians have much to learn from Yoder. His emphasis upon Christian community, his insistence that Christians not become co-opted by those in power, and his challenging vision of discipleship are all crucial for Christian reflection....to shape the broader society by intentional efforts to engage issues of common concern to public life....This does not mean the church should try to Christianize the public order. It does mean the church should try to humanize it and bring the institutions of public life into line with God's creative, providential purposes for the world.

(Schuurman 2007: 22 [Our emphasis])

Yoder summarizes and outlines his vision on Christian's body politics in these (five) embodied marks:

- Binding and loosing as believers' indispensable identity and spirituality in moral discernment and reconciliatory admonition towards offence and the culprit;
- Corporate breaking of bread as believers' true practice of the presence of Christ, which must also reflect a changed 'economic and social relations' in their daily lives even within the larger society;
- Baptism as the mark of a new community inaugurated by the Christ even to demonstrate its ontology as the presence of Good News for the nations;
- The fulness of Christ as a re-orientation of believers' gracious ministry in which every member is favoured with at least a gift or gifting of the Holy Spirit in order to serve one another, and the wider society;
- The rule of Paul re-interpreted and reflected on Christian social ethical witness as serving God and ruling the world projects the subordinate Church as a sign, instrument, and hope of God's preferred future for the nations;

Yoder describes such ethical responsibilities of the Church as five practices of the Christian community before the watching world. Simply put, Yoder's vision for Christian ethics is about an embodied Christocentric body politics (or politicking) for Jesus Christ. His vision for social ethics, as this study shows, is a Diaspora Barthian practice.

The social marks of binding and loosing identify Yoder's Diaspora embodiment of the Barthian vision in its social practice. Yoder's practice, Kroeker (2005) reminds us, reflects a fivefold pattern of messianic body politics, which one can explicitly display within the *polis*. The

Yoderian visionary practice accords the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit a prominent place in its visionary ethics. Its Diaspora Barthian approach responds to contextual needs without jettisoning its *jesulological* identity and spirituality in the process. Yoder's vision for social ethics is also a restorative project.

It is expected that these issues will become clearer as we reflect on Yoder's social ethics and its possible relevance to the SCS, in the next segment of this chapter. Such issues constitute the background to this chapter. The chapter seeks to substantiate the central *thesis* of this study, i.e., that Yoder's social ethics can accord the SCS a more plausible and feasible device to re-vision and rescue its distorted ecclesiological identity from the menace of the *pseudo*-ecclesial visions of the Enlightenment-based theological mission ethics. Yoder's visionary practice of Christian (social) ethics is tied to his vision for Christology.

With above preface, we proceed to analyze the Yoderian social ethics, in relevance to the context of the SCS.

2.1 Yoder's Social Ethics as May be Relevant to the Context of the SCS

We propose to investigate Yoder's multifaceted, occasional, often spontaneous and, non-methodological project on social ethics from its perspectives on, 'Meaning after Babel (i.e., trans-community vision),' 'the fulness of Christ' as well as his rhetoric 'social ethics is Gospel'.

2.1.1 Meaning after Babble.....beyond Relativism (Yoder 1996b)

This segment holds that Yoder's vision for social ethics is not afraid of the challenges of trans-community visionary communication of the Gospel. It appraises Yoder's reflexive vision for trans-community (intercultural) social practice of the Gospel.

As we have hinted above, Yoder is not afraid of the challenges of trans-community embodiments of the Gospel. His vision can also re-present a necessary barrier-bridging practice of the Good News, which respects 'community-dependent quality of moral knowledge' (Yoder 1996b: 125). Yoder reflects on the challenges of visionary trans-cultural witness of the Gospel as a pre-

modern issue, which a biblically oriented Christianity must welcome. This understanding is evident in his article, *Meaning After Babble: With Jeffrey Stout Beyond Relativism* (1996b).²⁷³

Yoder re-presents trans-community communication of the Gospel as true social ethics of the New Testament Church. It provides the contemporary Church with a significant door to move ‘through and beyond the relativity’ of concrete local contexts for ethical guidance in addressing moral and philosophical problems. According to him:

Rather than seeking a “higher” or a “prior” level....we must enter concretely into the other community (that is, one particular community at a time) long enough, deeply enough, vulnerable enough, to be able to articulate our Word in their words. Jews did this in Babylonia....because the prophets told them that was their mission. Peter and Paul and the other Jews in their messianic Jewish movement learnt to speak their faith in the language of their host cultures because their commitment to Jesus as Messiah meant that the ingathering of the nations had begun.

(Yoder 1996b: 132-133)

Yoder’s vision for social ethics will not permit the contemporary Church to sustain the imperial ethical approach of the Enlightenment-based visions. Most Enlightenment ethical visions have no significant respect for local contexts and indigenous resources. Their truistic orientations are often suspicious of pluralism. In contrast, Yoder’s vision for social ethics does not also dread or seek to ignore the challenges of pluralism in its embodied proclamation of the Gospel. For instance, Yoder, in *On not Being Ashamed of the Gospel*, also reasons:

There is nothing embarrassing for the bearer of evangel....about pluralism of styles, modes and grounds for either proclamation or conversation. It is part of the nature of Evangel not only to speak many languages but to enter history and the soul through more than one door

(Yoder 1992b: 296)

In his visionary practice, the credibility of the evangel as Good news is basically and ‘functionally defined by the fact that when someone *proclaims* it someone else *sees it*, hears it, and assents to it, joining the community which bears it....Without *necessarily* leaving their own

²⁷³ This article is Yoder’s response to Stout’s project entitled *Ethics After Babel: The Languages of Morals and their Discontents* (1988; cf. 1990). Here, Yoder criticizes Stout’s project for tending to confuse the historical event of *Babel* in the biblical book of Genesis with, to use Yoder’s word, *Babble*. Yoder argues that what Stout’s “after Babel” seems to regret losing is what JHWH in the Babel story said his creatures have been trying to protect....’ (Yoder 1996a: 126). In Yoder’s perspective, no culture is intrinsically more authentic than the other when nations are at home in their cultures. Each culture humbly and respectfully engages one another in social interchange (interculturality) as potential and progressing conversation partners. Yoder envisions interculturality as a calling to witness to the other. Consequently, ‘babble’ becomes the intentional confusing of cultures by its human users in order to claim authenticity or even sovereignty. In the Yoderian vision, Babel bespeaks of God’s sovereignty. As we earlier noted in this study, Yoder appeals to the biblical myth of Genesis to describe Babel as the multiplicity of culture under the will of God.

world...to join the Jesus-community. The message of such trans-community communication of the Gospel is a distinctive as well as an embodied proclamation' (Yoder 1992b: 294 [Our italics]). Yoder's vision for social ethics will not permit the Church to divorce the messenger from the message she/he confesses in contexts. It will not even permit the Church's structures to demean the embodied Gospel it proclaims in diverse communities. To confess also means that churches are challenged to embody catholicity, wholeness and fulness in the context of *glocality* Koopman (2006a). The Church is also challenged to disciple its members to communicate their unique contributions in social transformation and development of human communities. Yoder's social vision also seeks to restore ecumenical practice in the Church's witness of Jesus Christ among the nations.

Consequently, Yoder's social vision will not tolerate *lazy pluralism* in its ecumenical vision for evangelical witness of Jesus Christ among the nations. Its reflexive vision for *middle axiom* allows the Yoderian evangel to adopt *conscientious* objection to evil and conscientious 'subordination' to the political ethics of Jesus in its evangelical witness. Yoder's social reflection suggests a nonviolent-resistant Diaspora pursuit of the Barthian vision for ecclesial practice. It is rooted in Yoder's suggestive vision for *moral osmosis*. He also re-interprets the biblical phrase *binding and loosing* to mean a Christocentric imperative which empowers the Church to permit or withhold fellowship from the differently *other* as well (Yoder 1997d, 1994b). Yoder's restorative vision for trans-community social ethics seeks a Diaspora realization of the Barthian reflection within historical contexts: it also welcomes meaningful external influences. According to Yoder:

Valid trans-community communication...is therefore not merely something optional or accessory that we can take or leave. Christian...calling to witness to the other has been a constitutive component of the self definition of Jewry at least from Jeremiah and of Christianity since Pentecost. Only the Constantinian detour has made the plurality of communities seem to some like a modern problem, or one which a biblically oriented community would not rejoice to face.

(Yoder 1996b: 137-138)

Yoder's approach to trans-community or intercultural ethics is an orthodox vision. It retrieves Scripture-based Christological resources as warrant for looping back to pre-Constantinian catholicity.²⁷⁴ His social vision seeks, as its penultimate goal, a nonviolent-resistant approach

²⁷⁴ Yoder is rhetorical that the Constantinian detour marks an often-denigrating watershed in the social ethics of the church. The *pseudo-Christian* ethics of the Constantinian vision does not emphasize the non-violent *euangelion* as a public ethical proclamation that is worth celebrating when received. Constantinian *pseudo-ideological*

towards the restoration of Christocentric *shalom* in the world. For Yoder, Christ's figure reproduces a peculiar discernible people whose social ethics are ordered and re-ordered to conform to their Scripture-based convictions in any cultural context and age. Yoder's vision for social ethics seeks to restore Scripture-based Christ-centredness back to the ethical practices of the contemporary Church. It is also an orthodox restorative approach.

Given these insights, the following questions come to mind immediately, namely: may we not consider Yoder's social ethics as a catalyst that can thrust the Nigerian church into a more appreciable prophetic witness? In other words, if churches in Nigeria especially, within the geopolitical vicinity of the SCS are serious with their claims of Christian ethical witnesses, will they not find more meaningful resources from Yoder's ethical vision that reconcile their Gospel-defaming differences as shown in the second chapter of this study? Will Yoder's vision for social ethics not also inspire them to initiate a watershed in the shark-infested waters of politics, and the depressing economic situation of the nation, as mentioned earlier in this study? Moreover, given the understanding that indigenous religiosities of the host *religio*-cultures of the SCS celebrate communal life, hospitality, vulnerability, etc; will the Church not gain new inductions from Yoder's ethical vision to embody a more meaningful intercultural social ethics within its local context and beyond? An appraisal of Yoder's view on the Christian practice of the Eucharist can assist us to respond to these questions in ways, which are more meaningful particularly, as it relates to intercultural ethical practices of the Church among the nations.

According to Yoder in *For the Nations*:

Eucharist...substantially and historically, and functionally understood is the paradigm for every other mode of inviting the outsider and the underdog to the table, whether we call that the epistemological privilege of the oppressed or cooperation or equal opportunity or socialism. To make such sharing seem natural, it helps to *go* through an exodus or Pentecost together....
(Yoder 1997b: 32 [Our italics])

(political) ethics often coerce people to embrace the Gospel. At least The PCN example as we learn from Onwunta (2006) and Udoh (1988) in the second chapter of this study, is a case in point. In this conquerors' proclamation of the Good News, the indigenes were ideologically transformed into a 'people of the Book' (Udoh 1988: 35-40; cf. Nkwoka 2000) to suit the *magisterium* vision of the communicators. With such a magisterial approach, which is reflexive of the Constantinian ethics, 'the common Bible reader is less aware that "gospel"*is also* a kind of publicly important proclamation that is worth...holding celebration for when it is received *in freedom of choice and conscientious consciousness subordinations*' (Yoder 1994d: 28[Our italics]).

His reflections on an inclusive visionary practice of the *ekklesia* also seek to reconstitute and sustain a community of obedience to the messianic authority. In Yoder's perspective, the Church's social life is not different from the calling of all humanity *per se*. Yoder's multidimensional project seeks to offer a normative paradigm for believers to understand the social and political forms of the Church as a renewed humanity in Jesus Christ. His Christocentric vision seeks to restore the issue of the reconstitution of the human dignity of the less privileged members of the society back to the Church's ethical practice of the Gospel.²⁷⁵ Yoder's restorative vision expects the Church to plead for the respect of the human dignity of all persons in the society.

For instance, in *For the Nations*, Yoder also reasons that no member is less worthy than the other. In his view, every one has a role to play or a service to render to the body. She or he is graciously favoured with an indispensable gifting of the Holy Spirit (Yoder 1997b: 33). Yoder's restorative vision also re-presents believers' sustained love and patience towards the differently *other* (which of course includes the real and envisioned enemy) as a Christocentric political approach to address and overcome hostilities (cf. Yoder 1997a: 35-44; 1994d: 112-131; 1985: 40-56). Consequently, eating together represents values of hospitality and community-formation. Bread eaten together also describes economic sharing; hence, eating together becomes an extension of family economic solidarity in the Yoderian visionary practice. It could be in this spirit that Yoder declares:

That basic needs are met is a mark of the messianic age. In short the Eucharist is *also* an economic act. To do rightly the practice of breaking bread together becomes a matter of economic ethics....Baptism is one of those signs, and so is open housing. The Eucharist is one, but so is feeding the hungry. One is not more "real presence" than the other.

(1992a: 21, 27[Our italics])

Yoder's vision for Christocentric believers' practice of the Eucharist, as this study hopes to show, also seeks to restore and reconstitute the human dignity of the differently *other*. Yoder envisions a Christocentric trans-community body of Christ whose embodied politics of Jesus can also co-operate with the differently *other* in nation building, social transformation and development. Christocentric believers' practice of the Eucharist, Yoder argues, is a social process.

²⁷⁵ We shall discuss the burning issue of human dignity in the next section of this chapter, as the study earlier promised.

These issues make it more reasonable for one to argue that Yoder's social vision for the practice of the Eucharist can make a more significant meaning within the sordid context of the SCS. It can inspire the Church *inter alia*, to engage the *pseudo-capitalist* philosophies (as well as their associated vices) within its environment, in continuing reconciliatory admonitions and dialogues. Yoder's visionary practice can also inspire the Church to engage in a more active and responsible Diaspora participation in seeking ways to resolve the perennial ecological crisis and its notorious resultant reprisals in the Niger Delta as well. As we discussed in the second chapter of this study, these *pseudo-capitalist* ideologies economics stretch across the strata of politics, and religion.

Significantly, Onwu (1987) has remarked that the Eucharist also exists as the summit of Christian life. When believers reflect on the Eucharist as covenant, they also interpret it in relation to the family, the local community, and to issues of hunger and social justice. The practice of the Eucharist bespeaks of a covenant-practice of relationships (Onwu 1987: 145; cf. Long 2001: 188-232). Christocentric believers' practice of the Eucharist is a bequest of the gracious Christ-event. Consequently, Christians ought to translate and demonstrate such Christocentric practices within the socio-political, economic and religious spheres of the larger society. After all, God's covenant with Israel also entrusts humanity with the task of caring for and transforming the social order and the overall environment. In other words, God's covenant makes a direct social, political and ecological demand on contemporary humankind (cf. De Gruchy 2002: 188). Additionally, God's life with Israel and Jesus Christ is a public and communal story that is never private though it can also be personal (cf. Charry 2005: 212). Biblical covenant is not a self-generating human act. It suggests a gracious divine act of judgment and enablement; hence, it is a time-binding act of commitment to human beings (Yoder 1986b: 318). Given these insights, this study expects the SCS to take the above-mentioned issues serious in its ethical embodiment of the Gospel among the nations.

Contemporary (shifting) paradigms in ministry formation must strive to integrate useful resources of the past into its multidimensional, occasional, and often *ad hoc* perspectives. Van Engen, from his Reformed perspective, has also pointed out that faith, love, and hope are definitive of contemporary human participation in the *missio Dei*. God's mission 'awaits us like an adventure, a journey in the midst of, and a moving toward, the present and the coming reign of God, a running forward to *re-discover* what we already know – Jesus Christ is King!' (Van

Engen 1996: 262 [Our italics]). Yoder argues also that Christian discipleship is a project whose proclamation of the cosmic lordship of Jesus Christ also loops back to retrieve meaningful historical resources for the contemporary Church and its ministry. Fundamentally, his vision for Christian discipleship speaks about openness, respectfulness, repentance, and doxological awareness and subjection to its historical source and identity; i.e., Jesus Christ. However, we seek to relate the Yoderian ecological demand to the context of the SCS here.

Consequently, we appeal to the ecological challenge, which McFague (a western Feminist theologian) poses to Christians:

Christians need to live differently in order to love nature, and to live differently, we need to think differently – especially about ourselves, and who we are in the scheme of things. And by “thinking differently”, I do not mean our conscious, “for publication” thoughts about ourselves, but the unconscious picture of who we are that is the silent partner in all our behavior and decisions...The Ecological Reformation is the great work before us.... We Christians must participate in the agenda the planet has set before us – in public and prophetic ways – as our God “who so loved the world” would have us do.

(McFague 2000: xi; 210)

In fact, McFague is a student of H. Richard Niebuhr. However, like Yoder, she wants Christian theologians to *demystify theology* to enable all devotees to practice functional theologies. Every Christian must have a working theology that can function in her or his personal, professional and public life. According to McFague, ‘every Christian has one, i.e., *theology*. The question is how good, appropriate and functional is it’ (McFague 2000: xii [Our emphasis]). McFague has engaged this particular work from Christological perspective, as Yoder does.

McFague challenges Christians to rethink, see and engage in ecological reformation and preservation. It represents a meaningful aspect of Christocentric Christian discipleship. In her view, Christian discipleship demands a cruciform life of sacrifice and burden bearing. This perspective tends to reflect the Yoderian conviction. For Yoder, Christian discipleship demands sacrificial but doxological, conscientious and conscious subjection of the believer to the *jesulogical* ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ (we shall give this issue a fuller consideration in the next chapter). This study also strives to x-ray useful theological resources and ways the SCS can draw from Yoder’s ethical vision. The research challenges the SCS to make more substantive contributions toward the ongoing quest for the necessary transformation and development of the inherited ‘consumer oriented’ polity and politics of Nigeria. It summons believers to engage in a

Christocentric transformational development of the society with the *jesuological* ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ.

As we earlier noted, Yoder also reflects on Christocentric believers' practice of the Eucharist as a social process. The Eucharist can empower Christ believers to active and responsible participation in socio-political and economic affairs (Yoder 1991b; cf. 1984). Christocentric practice of the Eucharist, as Yoder re-presents it, seeks to reconstitute the human dignity of the less privileged. It is also suggestive of a Christ-centred vision for a preferential option for the poor (epistemological privilege of the underdog). Its vision for interculturality transforms and restores the status of both the rich and the poor to moral agents for social transformation and development. Christocentric interculturality can also represent human reception and communication of God's goodness. In sacramental expression human beings who are set apart or sidelined 'by accident or circumstance are woven back into the body of Christ to reclaim their own noble identity at the proper time through ecclesial embrace' (Charry 2005: 214). We intend to offer a detailed discussion on these issues in the next segment of this chapter. Simply put, Christian practice of the Eucharist, as Yoder re-presents it, also speaks of human social interchange. It is mediated through relationships. However, we should note that Yoder would not accept William T. Cavanaugh's description of the Eucharist as a 'decentered center'.²⁷⁶ For Yoder, Christ is the focus and locus of the Eucharist. His visionary project is undaunted in its orthodox Christocentric rhythm, *But we do see Jesus* (cf. Heb. 2: 8-9).

From a Nigeria Presbyterian perspective, Onwu provides a niche on Christ as the locus and focus of the Eucharist. His perspective tends to give Yoder's view on the Eucharist a significant *laissez-passé* (entry visa) into the context of the SCS. According to Onwu:

²⁷⁶ Cavanaugh is a western Roman Catholic theologian who seeks to respond to the Enlightenment and Postmodern view of socio-economic realities in a world where global consumerism seems to cover the distinctive ethical practices of Christian communities. Cavanaugh argues that the theopolitical imagination of socio-economic theories must draw on the power of the Eucharist 'to collapse special barriers separating the rich and the poor, not by surveying the expanse of the Church and declaring it universal and united, but by gathering the faithful in one particular location around the altar, and realizing the heavenly universal Catholica in one place, at one moment, on earth.' Cavanaugh claims that the Eucharist 'journeys by telling a story of universalism within the particular face-to-face encounter of neighbors and strangers in the local Eucharistic gathering.' However, Cavanaugh further notes that 'the Eucharist is a decentred centre; it is celebrated in the multitude of local churches scattered throughout the world....' Cavanaugh's project seems to promote the Body of Christ as the locus and focus of the Eucharist. Cavanaugh's work hardly ever reflects on Jesus Christ as the source and goal of Christian celebration of the Eucharist (Cavanaugh 2002: 113-122).

....We must suspect that a distorted or peripheral understanding of the eucharist (sic) robs it of its context, gravity and importance....because scholars have to a large extent ignored the primary covenant-context of the eucharist, its gravity and importance have not been adequately appropriated. To reflect on the eucharist as a covenant is to clarify the other peripheral views of scholars on it and to deepen our perception of the implication of our commitment to Christ.

(Onwu 1987: 145)

For Onwu, a narrative and Bible-based (or historical) Christology is the ground and centre of the Eucharist. Thus, Onwu's view can substantiate Yoder's position in contemporary Nigeria. Yoder's Diaspora pursuit of the Barthian vision adopts a Scripture-based approach. It also seeks to represent Christocentric practice of the Eucharist as an ethical quest for the realization of the Kingdom vision as social ethics within historical contexts. In Yoder's Kingdom vision, as we have shown it in the previous chapter, the memory of Jesus also inspires believers to practice the jubilee as a Christocentric approach to restorative justice. It suggests a social act of grace, which arises from a Christological conviction (cf. Yoder 1994d: 60-71).

In other words, Yoder's Christocentric persuasion also proclaims restorative justice as believers' historical-Christological task. Yoder re-reads the New Testament to re-interpret the practice of justice as incumbent on those who ask for it (Yoder 1994d: 62-63). Restorative justice as we can also learn from Tutu seeks to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator. Restorative justice offers significant opportunities for such persons 'to be reintegrated into the community he or she has injured by his or her offence' (Tutu 1999: 51-52) Thus, Yoder's perspective can also receive strength from Oliver O'Donovan's (2005) conceptualized *telos* of punishment. O'Donovan regards punishment as a way to discipline the offender to return to the pathway of righteousness. However, Yoder would rather prefer to describe discipline as chastisement. His Christocentric vision seeks the restoration of the fallen (or straying) yet covenanted human being. Yoder's reflection on restorative justice is not a weak form of justice *vis-à-vis* its *jesuslogical* paradigm. His restorative project seeks to recover some neglected approaches that can enhance fuller understanding of justice. Restorative justice emphasizes rehabilitation, compensation, the recovery of human dignity and the healing of social wounds (cf. De Gruchy 2002). God's cause in Jesus Christ bespeaks of human flourishing. In memory of Jesus and the expectation of God's final triumph over the Powers, the Christian community celebrates and toasts life while also enduring pains even to the point of dying in hope (Verhey 2001: 101). The memory of Jesus, as Yoder has remarked, enables committed witnesses to persevere beyond repressive tolerance. An embodied experience of the merits of the gracious Christ-event provides believers with a

repertoire (reservoir) of ethical resources for social witness of the Gospel. Such devotees draw necessary resources from Christology in order to engage in Christocentric social witness even in times of afflictions (cf. Yoder 1997c).

Thus, it could be in this spirit that Rasmusson wrote on Yoder's account of the ethical practice of the subordinate Church as it also relates to the Powers; 'The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus created the Church as the continued bodily and social presence of Jesus Christ. And the Church is called to reflect and embody the politics of Jesus and therefore in its own life continue the unmasking of the Powers' (Rasmusson 2002). Rasmusson's view tends to show that in Yoder's vision for ecclesial practices, the presence and practices of the Church are in themselves Good News - which shows that other ways of being a society are possible. Yoder's vision for social ethics replays the Christ-event as a redemptive-restorative act of the gracious God. Biblical (historical) Christology, as demonstrated in the Gospels especially, John 17, redeems and restores fallen humanity (and their social structures) to glorify God. A Christocentric proclamation of God's glory is basic in believers' corporate witness of Jesus Christ among the nations. With these revelations, it becomes more convincing to argue that Yoder's visionary practice can assist the SCS to engage in a *ministerium* quest to restore *shalom* to its crisis-ridden context. It can provide the church with a more appreciable ethical vision. Yoder's (Christocentric) collegiate approach can also inspire the SCS to re-interpret and engage in recovering social wholeness as true pursuit of God's glory by the subordinate Church. Yoder's ethical vision will not permit the SCS to engage in continuing participation and translation of the endemic ecclesiocentric squabbles within its milieu. It suggests an inclusive Christocentric vision for the practice of the Gospel as social ethics. Yoder's perspective on a multifaceted social witness of the Gospel also seeks to re-constitute and sustain a community of obedience to the messianic authority in this sense. Within this Christocentric practice, believers' covenanted life is not different from the calling of all humanity. We noted these points earlier.

Yoder's reflection on *forgiveness and discernment* is challenging and enriching. It re-presents sustained love and patience with the differently *other* as a more significant Christocentric political approach to address and overcome hostilities. In his vision, baptism also initiates Christ believers into a new humanity of inter-ethnic ecumenicity. Its Eucharistic pattern of table fellowship and economic sharing are rooted in the liturgical and celebratory receiving of life as a divine gift. Thus, the fulness of the messianic body becomes expressive in the giftedness of all

members. In a correlated view, Onwu remarks that: ‘This implies that people of various faiths, ethnic groups, cultures and ideologies are caught up in social, economic, political and environmental interdependence and are challenged to seek new patterns in which they can all fully participate’ (Onwu 1992: 1). Yoder’s social ethics also calls for full doxological participation of each gifting in a distinctive (Christocentric) interculturality. This is for him, the true and faithful social practice of an ecumenical Church.

Interculturality is an interface between holders of different cultural points of views and practices (Akper 2006b). It is suggestive of people with varied cultural backgrounds and influences ‘relating with each other; belonging together instead of competing with each other’. Interculturality differs from multiculturalism. Multiculturalism emphasizes and espouses the endemic values, belief systems, and ways of life or ideologies whose ethical perspective compete for the moral high ground in the society. Different groups express different values arising from their heterogeneous beliefs and perspectives on the multicultural environments. Thus, multiculturalism seems to re-echo the conquerors’ rhythm, ‘deprive them of their pathos’ (Rasmusson 2005). It is built around competing myths, which support individual social convictions and beliefs. Multiculturalism suggests in Akper’s words, that ‘there is no common ground, no common interaction and no dialogues’ in the quest for social recognition. Akper also writes on interculturality thus:

Interculturality also implies a plurality of cultures. However, there is a high level on interaction between the cultures. There is communication, willingness to embrace and listen to one another. There is dialogue between the cultures. The set of values are different just as they are different in multicultural environments. But instead of resentments arising from the “myths”...that legitimate various actions and worldviews, there is an interface between the various sets of cultures and therefore values and theologies arising from the cultures...This creates an enabling environment for intercultural theology, hermeneutic, instruction, dialogue and education to take place
(Akper 2006b: 2)

Interculturality is the call to a peoplehood of generous hospitality. Interculturality is a cry from the heart, a plea addressed to all who call themselves Christians. It enables people to theologize together, interpret together, instruct and learn together. Such human beings can jointly engage in meaningful reconciliatory dialogues, which often heal perennial wounds. This insight can also help to strengthen Yoder’s view that a significant approach to healing the wounds of disunity should be at the base. For instance, in his quest and plea for *Christian Unity from Below*, Yoder argues:

If the dividedness of the Body of Christ is to be healed, that must happen where it is experienced as a wound, and it is locally, where people who live together as neighbors and as colleagues are kept from worshipping together by constraints posed from outside their shared world. The solution is then that “the people who live together” may recognize that they are called to override those constraints. One basic meaning of unity’s being “from below” will be that people in one place will no longer be stopped by the....constraints of inherited structures, from acting together as brothers and sisters. They may find themselves led by the Spirit to worship and witness together....

(Yoder 2000: 180)

Consequently, one can infer that Yoder’s reflexive vision for interculturality is about a Christocentric peoplehood. It expects such believers to share space with other humankind in contextual appropriation of the merits of the gracious Christ-event. Yoder’s vision for a Christocentric trans-community, as this study also reveals, asks whether the disunity of the Reformation eras must define the ministry practices of contemporary churches. Yoder is aware that contemporary proclamation of the Gospel must recognize that God’s gracious and sovereign move offers humanity a voice to participate in shaping their destiny. For instance, inspite of his strong *anti-pedobaptist* stance, Yoder also argues for plausible and feasible practice of infant baptism in the intercultural Believers’ (Free) Church:

This fringe inclusion can apply to groups like the Christian Reformed if they make confirmation meaningful....even though they baptized infants, because for them the adult experience of sanctification *can constitute*....the functional equivalent of believers’ baptism....
If that question of inclusion has to be answered, my preference would be an open ended list....in less polarized settings where sharp-edged issues do not come into focus, decisions for the priority of discipleship can be definitional without a group being forced to come clear about pacifism or the status of children.

(Yoder 1997c: 220[Our italics])

Nation (2006) also re-echoes Yoder’s concession on infant baptism in his (Yoder) view of baptism, ministry and the Eucharist elsewhere. He explains:

If, in fact, infant baptism were always understood within the context of a nurturing family and church, and if it was followed by a serious confirmation process, then, at least by some theological accounts, the difference between believers’ baptism and infant baptism would be greatly minimized.

(Nation 2006: 101-102)

Often, Yoder de-emphasizes *ecclesio*-centric doctrines in his pursuit of Christocentric biblical realism. Yoder’s main concern is not for the reputation of the Church, or upholding the Church’s abstract rules. He focuses on ‘the wellbeing of the community, the quality of the *koinonia*’ (Carter 2005: 184). Yoder is more concerned about believers’ faithfulness to their freely chosen

commitments to embody their witness of the lordship of Jesus Christ as daily-life political responsibility.

Yoder's reflection on a Christocentric ethics is a trans-community visionary embodiment of the Gospel as social ethics among the nations. Yoder locates its catholicity wherever Spirit-filled or gifted believers co-operate in proclaiming the lordship of Jesus Christ to the nations. His ethical vision also seeks to restore, reconstitute and celebrate the (often demeaned) human dignity of the less privileged: it is a Christocentric restorative vision. These issues will become clearer as we analyze his concept of the 'fulness of Christ' in the next paragraph.

2.1.2 Fullness of Christ (Yoder 1987)

This subsection shows that Yoder's visionary reflection on catholicity seeks to re-present the common calling of humankind as a Christocentric social ethics. It also strives to proclaim and restore the quest for human dignity as constitutive in the indispensable ministry of the Church. Yoder's nonviolent-resistant (Diaspora) Barthian visionary approach to social ethics speaks of a theology of grace, whose view on the burning question of human dignity can be of great assistance to the Church in Africa especially, the SCS.²⁷⁷

Yoder tailors his view on the Pauline phrase 'the fullness of Christ' towards the recovery and reconstitution of human dignity. Thus, he also re-interprets and re-presents the distribution and multiplicity of ministries as a specific work of grace, which demands corresponding ethical responses from its beneficiaries. For instance, Yoder argues on the meaning of the fulness of Christ as the whole body functioning in unity:

The "fulness of Christ" in Ephesians 4: 13, or "the whole body working properly" of 4: 6, is precisely the correct interrelation of the ministries of 4: 11, 12 in line with the divine unity of 4: 3-6. It is illegitimate modernizing, individualizing, out of harmony with the whole chapter, to apply the image of growth in 4: 13 to the maturation of the Christian individual. The phrases "unity of the faith," "mature humanity," and "measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" are not descriptions of a well rounded Christian personality. They designate the divinely coordinated multiple ministry.

(Yoder 1987: 15-16)

²⁷⁷ Le Bruyns (2007) points out that the moral road is less travelled in (South) Africa. Yet the moral story 'is of profound importance for the future human dignity for all people, especially those at the very edges of life. As we are daily bombarded with news reports and images attesting to our moral failure as a society where such realities as gangsterism, poverty, violence, murder....rape and greed prevail' (Le Bruyns 2007: 210).

Yoder's vision for social practice suggests a standard for the distinctive Christian ethics, which the Christ-event inaugurates. It re-presents the Christocentric ministry of the whole people of God as the true meaning of the fulness of Christ.²⁷⁸ For Yoder, the theological meaning of the diversity of gifts in New Testament thought is crucial for Christian social ethics. His vision for social ethics seeks to restore the question of human dignity back to the ethical reflections and practices of the Church.

In Yoder's perspective, the multiplicity of gifts in Ephesians 4: 8 speaks more about unity in diversity than efficiency in the practice of the Gospel. The biblical fact that it is the same Lord who fills all who also assigns these gifts to all is itself a revelatory climax of the Christ-event. It exists as a demonstration of Christ's lordship over the Powers. As we pointed out in previous chapters, Yoder is of the view that the fallen Powers extends beyond the human persons. Such fallen Powers include *inter alia*, structures, circumstances and phenomena, which banish and restrict people to the status of sub-human beings.²⁷⁹ Yoder thinks that contemporary discernment of the Kingdom must distinguish and focus more on the meaning of events than the desire to get ethical instruction from them. In Christ, everything systematizes and coheres into a unified whole. Harmony and diversity are not in tension but complimentary (Yoder 1994d: 141; cf. Migliore 2004, Okure 2002). Yoder's ethical vision, as we have noted, also seeks the restoration and reconstitution of the human dignity of the less privileged members of the society. For example, In his article, *Armaments and Eschatology* (1988), Yoder posits:

The first *task* in the reaffirmation of the human dignity of the oppressed is thus to reconstitute in their celebrative life the coming Rule of God and a new construal of the cosmos under God. To sing, 'The Lamb is Worthy to Receive Power' as did the early communities....is performative proclamation. It redefines the cosmos in a way (sic) prerequisite to the moral interdependence

²⁷⁸ Carter (2005) seems to shed more light on this understanding. To quote him; 'For Yoder, the mission of the church and the social form of the church are the same thing and both are shaped by the community-creating, barrier shattering practice... This vision....is rooted in the conviction that the living Lord Jesus Christ is truly present in the meeting of the believers and can guide and lead the congregation into unity if the congregation seeks him wholeheartedly' (Carter 2005: 185-187). In the Yoderian perspective, Christocentric ministry of all through all, and to all, represents the true practice of the living Christ working through the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Yoder accords the Holy Spirit a prominent position in his visionary projects.

²⁷⁹ Yoder's ethical visionary approach to the concept of Powers, as discussed in the third chapter of this study, adopts the views of Hendrikus Berkhof. Yoder and Berkhof include religious structures, intellectual structures and political structures among other things, in their inclusive list of rebellious and fallen Powers. These theologians reflect on the Pauline theology of Powers from a Christological perspective. Yoder also argues that the clarity and ambiguity of language of Powers points in all its modulations to the capacity to make things happen. Powers regularize all visible reality (cf. Yoder 1994d: 136-144).

which it takes to speak truth to power and to persevere in living against the stream when no reward is in sight.

(Yoder 1988: 53[Our italics])

Yoder's *jesulological* (Diaspora) Barthian vision also challenges the Church to centralize the burning issue of human dignity in its ethical embodiment of the Gospel among the nations. His visionary ethics strives to proclaim human dignity as constitutive in the *imago Dei*, which humanity receive as divine grace. Yoder further expects contemporary Christians to see the realization of the jubilee practice as a *laissez-passé* for entering the Kingdom of God. Such an understanding is also evident in the third chapter of *The Politics of Jesus*. Yoder re-interprets and presents the phrase 'Our Father' (in The Lord's Prayer) as a jubilee prayer. According to him:

Jesus was establishing a strict equation between the practice of the jubilee and the grace of God. He was not a legalist...."only *the person* who practices grace *may* receive grace"....in all its rigor the equation of "Our Father" is "no grace for *the one* who is not gracious...

The practice of the jubilee was not optional. It belonged to the precursors of the Kingdom. Those who would refuse to enter this path *may* not enter the Kingdom of God.

(Yoder 1994d: 61-62, 68-69 [Our italics])

Yoder is of the view that those who refuse to apply the jubilee practice on earth may not also receive divine jubilee. The jubilee is for him, inclusive in what Jesus calls the joy of the kingdom of God. Yoder re-interprets and re-presents the jubilee practice as a social ethics for contemporary Christians. We noted these issues in the third and current chapter of this study. Yoder's ethical vision seeks the participation of the whole people of God in the embodied practice of the Gospel. The presence and potential of moral influence are not confined to the Christian community: values and conducts, which affirm human dignity also belong to the larger society (cf. Le Bryuns 2007: 205, 210). In other words, Yoder's reflection on the jubilee as a Christocentric social practice bespeaks of a theology of grace.

In Yoder's reflection, the realization of the jubilee freedom lies beyond idealistic wisdom and creativity of the individual. A more meaningful freedom arises from objective and dignified embodiment of the biblical truth. Dignified embodiment of the biblical truth is usually present within the Spirit-guided interaction of the Yoderian peoplehood. Yoder's social vision gives the Holy Spirit a prominent position in its practice. The same Spirit gives every member the right for *ministerium* participation in the corpus. Fundamentally, Yoder's ethical vision accords more honour to the less esteemed members of the body (cf. Yoder 1997b: 32-33). In its foundation and orientations, Yoder's vision for peoplehood bespeaks of a covenanted communal spirituality,

which begins with the populace: it is reflexive of a Christocentric quest for the restoration and reconstitution of the human dignity of persons.

Thus, this study holds that Yoder's vision for such a distinctive peoplehood can be of great assistance to the contemporary SCS. The support it receives from the views of Carter (2001: 220) and Rasmusson (2005: 111) can play a significant role in the process. Both theologians are of the opinion that Yoder's Diaspora vision for ecclesial practice can offer a meaningful freedom to a church, which seeks liberation from the bondage of Western Civilization. It can share space with others. Carter stresses that the shape of its social witness affirms a local community that is modelled on *the extended family* paradigm. Significantly, the SCS is located within a *religio-cultural* milieu, which celebrates and toasts the extended family practice as an indispensable communal identity and spirituality in Nigeria. In most African worldviews, 'human beings are closely connected with each other and with God...the African worldview is anthropocentric, this must not be understood as meaning there is no place for God within it. The focus of this worldview is life, and life ultimately is God's gift' (Bujo 1992: 23).²⁸⁰ Therefore, Yoder's unrelenting tenacity and efforts to negotiate complexities and risks will count when it comes to the question of negotiating the future of the SCS (cf. Coles 2002).

According to Coles, 'Yoder always resists these Constantinian...claims. *His ethics* powerfully inspire and orient the Church to resist the principalities and powers' that would subjugate creation to the idolatries of "power, mammon, fame, and efficacy". They call believers to resist as mythical these closures of history, and begin (repeatedly) to practise an alternative body politics, confident that the future belongs to *caritas* – even in the face of Powers that seek to eternalize subjugation and seem to exhibit enormous capacities to assimilate and brutally crush opposition and alternative hopes. It is expressed thus: "We love our neighbor because God is like that. It is not because Jesus told us to that we love even beyond the limits of reason and justice, even to the point of ...being willing to suffer – but because God is like that too' (Coles 2002: 323). Coles also re-presents Yoder's vision as a more appreciable approach to the epistemological privilege of the underdog.

²⁸⁰ At least the Abiriba name *Ndukwe* is a case in point. This study explained in the second chapter that it reflects a pre-Christian believe in the sovereignty of God by these native Nigerians.

Yoder restorative vision, as this study shows, presents the Church as a public peoplehood, which gathers to deal with community business. It represents God's scattered people who gather in Christ's name, to find out what it means 'here and now to put into practice this different quality of life which is God's promise to them and to the world and their promise to God and service to the world.... But such a group is not only by its existence a novelty on the social scene; if it lives faithfully, it is also the most powerful tool of social change' (Yoder 1997b: 177). Yoder's concept of the Church empowers and obligates both privileged and the less privileged Christians to participate in nation building, social transformation and development. It would not exonerate the disadvantaged person from discharging their primary responsibility; i.e., social embodiment of the Gospel among the nations. The less privileged are constitutive in Yoder's view on the subordinate believer as Christ's moral agent for the transformation of societies.

Mark Nation re-echoes this view that Yoder defines first things first. Yoder's ethical vision often discourages believers' withdrawal from active and responsible social witness (cf. Nation 2006: 164). Yoder's reflexive vision for a preferential option for the poor does not encourage ineffectiveness especially, in social involvements (cf. Yoder 1997a; 1994d). Yoder expects true ethical challenge of Christian descent to address contextual realities prophetically. Such realities often include issues, persons and structures, which banish and/or restrict some human beings to sub-humanities. Yoder's view on the Pauline phrase, *the fulness of Christ*, seeks the participation of all *laos* (people) of God in the discernment ministry of the Church. He re-presents corporate participation of the peoplehood as true proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ over the Powers. Consequently, Yoder criticizes established church hierarchy for often erecting and permitting its structures to command worship. Yoder's critique on established hierarchy of the Church seeks to underscore the lordship of Christ over the Powers.²⁸¹

²⁸¹ At this point and in this particular critique on established ecclesiastical hierarchy, Yoder tends to re-echo the truistic rhythm of the conquerors' ethics. According to Yoder, 'The professional religionist, whatever *her/his* intentions, is a standing temptation for the flock' to fall back into spiritual second-handedness. Even if the shared ministry were....a safeguard against such pitfalls....it would still be desirable by virtue of the calling of each to exercise his or her own "come-of-ageness," by the imperative of spiritual responsibility' (Yoder 1987: 104 [Our italics]). This critique also tends to question the role of human agency in God's demonstration of sovereignty within history particularly, as it relates to the continuing translation of the redemptive-restorative Christ-event. God can use the professional religionist to serve the divine purpose if she or he submits to God's Sovereign will in the process. We re-echoed Tutu in the previous chapter that no person, event, or circumstance is beyond God's redemptive grace. God is Sovereign and that all human beings can do is to witness this sovereignty in humble boldness or bold humility.

Yoder's call for a ministry of all God's people makes the fundamental persuasion of this study meaningful; i.e., that Yoder's social ethics can resonate significantly in the SCS. Its Christocentric vision of peoplehood stresses the confession, *Jesus is Lord* (the Messiah), as the basis of the Church's authority to bind and loose. All gifted members are leaders in a sense. In his vision for ecclesial practice, the Church is where men and women are empowered to speak to one another in God's name (cf. Yoder 1997d: 139). Yoder's vision for ministry-practice celebrates the human dignity of both female and male gender. Thus, it can also substantiate The PCN celebration of the dignity of humankind in ministry-practice. According to the P&P sections G-06.0105 and G-06.0106:

Both men and women shall be eligible to hold church offices....As persons discover the forms of ministry to which they are called, and as they are called to new forms, they ... pray for the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit upon them and upon the mission of the church. To those called to exercise special functions in the church, God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities....those who undertake particular ministries should be people of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and possessing a strong love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world.

(The PCN 1989: 18)

The confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ, possession of the gracious gifting of the Holy Spirit and discipleship are indispensable qualification for ministry in The PCN. These three issues are also central to the Yoderian thoughts for ministry-practice. Yoder's visionary practice respects local contexts and embodied giftings of the Holy Spirit. For Yoder, as Carter shows, the mission of the Church and their social forms are the same thing. Both are shaped by the community-creating, barrier shattering practice of baptism. Yoder's visionary project is rooted in the conviction that the living Lord Jesus Christ is truly present in the meeting of the believers. Christ guides and leads the assembly into unity if the congregation seeks him wholeheartedly. In the Yoderian perspective, Christocentric ministry of all through all and to all is crucial for ministry-practice. It represents the true practice of the living Christ working through the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit (cf. Carter 2005: 185-187). Yoder expects the ministry-practice of the Church to respect the human dignity of all persons, especially the differently *other*.

Yoder's Christocentric vision proceeds from the 'conviction that understanding, like faith, hope and love, is a matter of non-coercive servanthood that is built up in the ongoing drama....of God's sovereign governance – which is why the interpretation of Scripture and history in order to enact this governance....is the central theological task of the Church. Divine governance is

best displayed....in the cross-bearing, fine-grained Diaspora servanthood of the messianic body' (Kroecker 2005: 147). Such divine intervention and direction of human affairs often come as a surprise. Divine intervention and direction also constitutes an aspect of the surprise element, which is central in Yoder's vision for a Christocentric Kingdom political ethics of peoplehood. Yoder also argues that what God is doing will usually be a surprise to humanity: his vision, as we have noted, gives the Holy Spirit a prominent position. This point is very crucial for our research. From Bediako (2004b) and other theologians, we learn that some aspects of this Sovereign surprise are being fulfilled in contemporary African Christianity. These theologians describe this nascent Christianity as a history in the making.

Bediako, in particular, is emphatic that African Christianity is a history in the making. This Ghanaian-born Presbyterian seems to underscore the significance of African agency of this Sovereign move towards giving humanity a voice in their destinies as the surprise element in contemporary Christianity. To substantiate his position, Bediako seems to agree with Falola (2005) and Kalu (2005b). For these African scholars, the African Initiated Churches (AICs) are fast spreading and gaining international recognition in Europe and America. The proclamation (or *kerygma*) of the AICs promote *inter alia*, universal qualities of a religious cosmology of African origin. African (as well as Asian, Central and South American) experience and history of Christianity draws the attention of humanity to the fact that there are some apparent resemblances between indigenous religions especially, African religion and the religion of the Bible. Walls (2001) also reasons along this perspective. In his thoughts, humanity may need to look at contemporary Africa for an understanding of Christianity. Like Bediako Walls reflects on an African phase of Christian history and a Christian chapter in African religion (Walls 2001: 46). Bediako suspects that this shift might drive Western intellectual discourse into oblivion; hence, his premonition that contemporary Western hermeneutics might distort it.²⁸² Given this observation, one becomes more persuaded to argue that Yoder's Kingdom ethics can assist the SCS to *re-vision* its ecclesial practices.

²⁸² Here, Bediako tends to concur with Yoder, O'Donovan, and Milbank's lamentation on the pervasive influence of secularism on Western philosophies. However, unlike O'Donovan and Milbank who emphasize counter (or alternative) ethics, Bediako and Yoder call for a restorative ethics as well. Bediako is of the view that such an historical Christian ethos is located in a Christian interaction with the ancient cultures of Africa and Asia. For him, the quality of Africa Christianity (Asian and Latin American too), and the quality of the 21st century Christianity as a whole will depend on the quality of such interaction (cf. Bediako 2004b: 29-40). In a nutshell, Bediako stresses the surprise element and significance of African agency in this movement as religiosity.

Yoder's vision for Kingdom ethics is firm that what God is doing is usually a surprise. Thus, the Enlightenment-based human hermeneutics can distort it (cf. Yoder 1997b: 240-245). Yoder's vision for peoplehood bespeaks of interculturality. However, if the above-mentioned criticism still questions the viability of his social ethics in the sordid context of the SCS, Yoder also quips on the need for contemporary churches to understand that *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* is a call for continuing reformation of church practices as defined by Scripture:

We are faced with error, into which believers are seduced by evil powers seeking to corrupt the church and to disqualify her witness. To denounce those errors we must appeal to theoriginal tradition, which enshrines the commandment of God. The clash is not between traditions versus Scripture but faithful traditions versus irresponsible tradition....Scripture comes on the scene....as witnesses to the historical baseline of the churches' origins and thereby serve as link to the historicity of *our* Lord's past presence.....*Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* is not really a statement about the church.

(Yoder 1994a: 94-95[Our italics])

For Yoder, *semper reformanda* suggests continuing reformation of earlier church practices. Such practices are witnessed to and defined by the Scripture. In the Yoderian vision, church practices are subject to the discipline of dialogue at the bar of the Word of God. Scripture serves as trusted instrument for renewing ministry-practice and shape of the Church (cf. Yoder 1991a: 19). This reformable practice functions as an instance of appeal whenever believers call for renewed faithfulness and denounce renewed apostasy. Yoder's hermeneutics of peoplehood stresses corporate discernment, deliberation and witness of Scripture and its resultant traditions of the believing community. The (trans)formative potential of the biblical witnesses and their continuing authority across times and cultures lie in their ability to reveal anew, radical perspectives on reality, which often include a renewed way of living in societies.

In Mouton's (2004) view, the biblical witnesses emphasize collective memory as a crucial mechanism for developing the 'moral home' of faith communities. God's surprising love and forgiveness constitute the main substance of believers' hope. God's Spirit continues to invite communities of character to re-imagine their identity and ethos beyond all stereotyped views of God, humanity and the rest of creation (Mouton 2004; cf. 1997). The social ethics of the Church provides the shape of the distinctive interculturality, which the larger society is ultimately called to reflect. As an aspect of its appropriation of the *semper reformanda* Yoder's social vision also engages past, present, and future ethical failures of the Church in continuing dialogues. Its vision for unlimited catholicity seeks to fulfil the common calling of humankind (cf. Yoder 1994e: 320). Yoder's vision for social ethics, as we have shown, also proclaims human dignity as an

implication of the receipt and practice of the theology of divine grace on Christians. For Yoder, the concrete social meaning of the cross is to be like Jesus in whom servanthood replaces dominion, while forgiveness absorbs hostility: those who seek grace embody grace as a Christocentric social practice (cf. Yoder 1994d: 63, 131). Yoder's soundings on a theology of grace re-interpret and communicate social ethics as Gospel from Christological perspective.

Therefore, Yoder's Christocentric vision could be of great assistance to the Church in Nigeria especially, the SCS and other Reformed churches. It can inspire the SCS in particular, to restore and centralize the burning issue of human dignity in its embodied proclamation of the Gospel among the nations. The contemporary *status quo* in the church's socio-cultural environment calls for it. The Reformed vision, as earlier shown, takes the historical context and reality very serious. New historical contexts and challenges may call Reformed churches to radical and far-reaching ecclesiological changes in order to accommodate necessary ecumenism within geographical contexts (cf. Smit 2004d: 72; 2003c: 147). The study further challenges the SCS to take a leading role in organizing especially, the Reformed churches in Nigeria to take the issue of human dignity serious in their theological engagements with society. At present, the President of the Reformed Ecumenical Council of Nigeria (RECON), Rev Fubara-Manuel, is an officer of The PCN (and a Systematic theologian) who resides within the Synod area.²⁸³ Yoder's visionary reflection on the believer as Christ's moral agency can also assist the SCS to check the distressing problems of consumerism, which we discussed in the second chapter of this study.²⁸⁴

As evident in this chapter, Yoder's suggestive reflection on the epistemological privilege of the underdog would not exonerate the disadvantaged persons from discharging their primary responsibility; i.e., social witness. For Yoder, there is something in their experience, 'which gives to these subjects a vision or a breath of a new kind of dignity and responsibility' (Yoder 1988: 53). His social vision is also a restorative project, which further seeks to implement the

²⁸³ In South Africa, such discourses are discernible and Reformed theologians are hardly left out. At least, Dirk Smit, Nico Koopman, Elna Mouton whose works this study appropriates, represent some Reformed theologians who hold this view. Many anthropological and interdisciplinary researchers are embracing this challenge in Africa. Until the latter part of the 20th century, human dignity was not a central theme in (South) African Reformed theology (Smit 2005a).

²⁸⁴ In the said Chapter 2, the study showed that such a consumerist lifestyle cuts across the economic, political, religious, educational and social practices in Nigeria. It retraced Nigeria's consumerist ethics to the inherited consumer-oriented polity and politics, which Britain bequeathed the country. This study expects the SCS to contribute substantively in transforming some perplexing legacies of Nigeria's consumer-oriented polity and politics into necessary theological transformational and developmental projects.

centrality of reflections on human dignity as a crucial theological project of the subordinate Church. Yoder's vision for social ethics is restorative.

Consequently, Yoder's Christocentric vision will not exonerate even the poorest of the poor believers' from a social embodiment of the Gospel among the nations. It expects active but responsible participation in nation building, social transformation and development from them. On the other hand, it will not also transform the rich to the status of philanthropists or dictators for social vision and practices. Yoder's prophetic reflection on Christocentric social practice summons all believers to active and responsible participation in social witness, in significant ways. It can seek *inter alia*, to restore a more appreciable change in social, political, economic and religious relationships of a given society albeit, from a 'glocalized' perspective. Yoder's project strives to empower humankind to active and inclusive participation in social affairs. In other words, Yoder's view on the Pauline phrase *the fulness of Christ* is simply, a theology of grace: it seeks the restoration, reconstitution and reaffirmation of the human dignity of humankind.

Sadly, Akper points out that Reformed Churches in Nigeria are yet to give the theme of human dignity a significant position in theological discussions (cf. Akper 2006a). Even the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria also encourages believers to take the burning issue of human dignity very serious in their theological mission agenda. Actually, this study does not intend to place the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria above the Church. On the other hand, it does not expect the Church to by-pass or claim ignorance of this national document. Despite its acclaimed secular status (cf. Constitution 1999: 31), the Constitution is clear on the duty of every citizen:

'[R]espect the dignity of other citizens and the right and legitimate interests of other...in the spirit of common *sister/brotherhood*; make positive and useful contributions to the advancement, progress and well being of the community where *she or he* resides'
(Constitution 1999: 36)

This study also seeks to remind the SCS, in particular, that this national document encourages all citizens including members of the Church to take the issue of human dignity, social transformation and development serious. As we have noted, new historical contexts and challenges may call Reformed churches to radical and far-reaching ecclesiological changes in order to accommodate necessary ecumenism within geographical contexts. Yoder re-echoes

Barth that ecclesiology is ethics. Thus, ‘for ecumenical practice to be real it must also be local. For the Reformed mindset, this speaks for itself’ (Smit 2004d: 76). Given the above-mentioned insights, we proceed to reflect more on Yoder’s proclamation of social ethics as Gospel, in the next paragraph.

2.1.3 Social Ethics as Gospel (Yoder 1984)

This segment reflects on Yoder’s social ethics as Good News to all persons who find themselves at a disadvantage within a given cultural setting. It re-presents Christocentric believers’ embodiment of Jesus’ political ethics as the central responsibility of Christ’s disciples among the nations. Historical Christology can accord it a warrant to persuade the SCS to engage in social witness (even) to and, for the opposing *other*, which, of course, includes the larger society. For Yoder, Jesus ethical political witness is a non-coercive social Gospel.

Yoder’s ethical vision for believers in Christ re-interprets Christian ethics to mean ‘serving God and ruling the world’ as well. Yoder expects Christ’s followers to embody Jesus political ethics as social ethics for the larger society to see and, hopefully, adopt as lifestyle.²⁸⁵ His vision for royal priesthood or Kingdom ethics re-presents sacrament as a social task, which the Servant Church embodies as *euangelion* to the larger society. According to Yoder, ‘The notion of the royal priesthood or kingdom of priests...capsules well that synthesis of apartness and representation, community and authority, whereby the people of God in present history live from and toward the promise of the whole world salvation’ (Yoder 1984: 12). Yoder’s ethical project is a community forming and sustaining vision. It is also restorative.

Yoder expects the contemporary Church to grapple with the challenge of the tension of not falling into the error of Constantinianism, or the complacent social withdrawal of sectarianism. Such a responsibility also provides his vision of a Christocentric believers’ community with the distinctive otherness of a (Yoderian) church-world relationship. Within Yoder’s visionary

²⁸⁵ This is an instance where Yoder’s vision hopes to transform society through his reflexive view on *moral osmosis*. Yoder hopes that the larger society can learn and adopt the political ethics of the biblical Jesus when Christians embody it, to use Koopman’s words ‘in ethos, in structures, in practices and policies, in every sphere of life wholeness and fulness – albeit in imperfect, preliminary and penultimate form’ (Koopman 2006a) among the nations. This study earlier described *moral osmosis* as a nonviolent moral transformative process. In this process, Yoder expects non-Christians and other believers to adopt and practise some necessary aspects of his vision for an embodied ethics of Jesus over time. Yoder’s ethical vision is Christocentric.

practice, the Church is a transformational and developmental *polis*. Its body politics seeks to re-organize and re-orient humanity towards an embodied politics of the biblical Jesus Christ. Yoder, as we have shown, re-presents the fulness of Christ as a ministry of the whole people of God. His Christocentric vision also pleads with the Church to re-interpret and proclaim the restoration of human dignity as an indispensable aspect of its social witness. Yoder's ethical vision underscores discipleship as the central political responsibility of the subordinate Church. This is a thesis, which the current discussion also sustains in the flow of its argument.

From a related background in *The Royal Priesthood* (1994e: 359-373), Yoder also re-presents Christocentric practice of sacrament as a *jesulogical* social process. It suggests a vulnerable but creative way in which Christ transforms cultures. As Charry (2005) notes, sacramental expression 'reaffirms our life under the divine authority'. In her view, sacramental expression ensues from a sacramental ecclesiology. In her words, sacramental ecclesiology:

...is enacted and symbolized through the sacraments....Sacramental ecclesiology sends the message, "come as you are" but it does not invite anyone to stay as they are, formation is transformationThis is a vision of the church in which God often works with us slowly and gently....

Having been engrafted into the drama of salvation, the sacred reality that sacraments symbolize must take residence in the church's members. Faith is a gift of divine grace. It cannot be forced.

(Charry 2005: 214-215)

For Charry, sacramental expression seeks to restore and reconstitute the human dignity of the less privileged. It reinforces and rebinds the members of a given community around God's 'reign of reconciliation rather than conquest.' Charry's view also reflects Yoder's suggestion on the believers' practice of the Eucharist as a Christocentric vision for the epistemological privilege of the underdog.²⁸⁶ Charry's view seems to mirror Yoder's perspective that ecclesiology is an ethical practice. More importantly, it tends to agree with Yoder's view that believers' practice of sacrament provides Christians with a normative 'paradigm for inviting the outsider and the underdog' into the fellowship of Christ's disciples (cf. Yoder 1997b: 32). Such a practice also permits the Church to ensure a responsible fellowship of Christians. However, Charry's approach is theocratic whereas Yoder's vision is Christocentric. Charry drew resources from the traditions of post-Constantinian (human) church-leaders while historical Christology and pre-Constantinian church traditions provides Yoder with sources for his visionary ethics. In Yoder's view, the empirical community also exists as an eschatological assembly. It is called to embody

²⁸⁶ We discussed Yoder's view on Christian practice the Eucharist in the previous segments of this chapter.

in the here and now, the renewed social ethics, which the larger society is ultimately called to reflect.²⁸⁷ In the New Testament perspective, the internal activities of the gathered people of God and its approaches to life and issues interface with the world.

Thus, Yoder also argues on the visible Church as an embodiment of social ethics for renewed humanity. According to him:

It is an a posteriori political practice that tells the world something it did not know and could not believe before. It tells the world what is the world's own calling and destiny...by pioneering a paradigmatic demonstration of both the power and the practices that define the shape of the restored humanity. The confessing people of God is the new world on its way.
(Yoder 1994e:373)

For Yoder, the 'five characteristics of the Christian community before the watching world' have some implications for the social ethics of the conscientious and consciously subjective *ekklesia*.

As a result, Yoder (1994e: 369-372) analyzes such social implications as follow:

- They are constituted in a wholly human, empirically accessible practice. God does them in, with, and under the human practice.
- Together they provide the believing community with specific, datable, nameable, local, first century, and messianic form of corporate human life which ties the Church to its historical origins and practices
- Each of these practices can function as a paradigm for ethics in which other groups can operate. In other words, people who do not share the same faith or belong to the community can learn through them (perhaps, through *moral osmosis*).
- As public (lay?) phenomena, their paradigmatic accessibility to others and; their translatability into other forms arises from their fact that basically, they are often less religious or ritualistic.
- As part of the order of creation, they are based on the confession of Jesus as Messiah and Lord.
- Encapsulated in a corpus for moral deliberation and discernment, they also respect the dignity of the individual as a specific and gifted member of the body.
- They are derived from already existent cultural models
- the originality and the specificity of their stance (methodological structure) is the prerequisite for the subordinate community's right or capacity to reason
- As apostolic models, they also transcend such hermeneutical dichotomies and grids as Protestant/Catholic; radical/liberal.

²⁸⁷ Carter also seems to concur in this respect. In his reflection, believers' practice of reconciliation of one person and another is a sacrament. It is 'also the social shape of the church's witness to the world. For Yoder, this is an example of "social ethics as gospel"' (Carter 2005: 184),

Yoder stresses that an embodied Christian proclamation of the Gospel is, in essence, a social ethics. Yoder expects Christians to understand their calling as divine summons to public witness within the society and for restoration of wholeness. The existence of believers and their communities signify Good News to the world. Yoder redefines and adopts the biblical meaning of *euangelion* (Good News) in his notion of original revolution. It highlights *inter alia*, a change, which also stresses changed economic and social relations. Yoder reasons in *For the Nations* that such a change must begin with realities. According to him:

Such a change is what Jesus says....will involve attitudes, so that it can be called “repentance,” *metanoia*, “turning-the-mind-around.” But **it also involves social practices**, “fruits worthy of repentance,” new ways of using possession and power. **It** involves social and personal dimensions *inseparably*, with none of our modern speculative tendency to dodge the direct claim on it by debating whether the chicken or the egg comes first.

(Yoder 1997b: 168 [His italics; our emphasis])

In the Yoderian perspective, Christian mission is inseparable from Christian social practice. Such congruence between the Christian mission and its practice reveals that the living Jesus Christ is ever present in the ministry-practice of his followers. They embody the Good News in ethics, which also bespeaks of human flourishing or in the words of McFague (2000), *Life Abundant*. As far as Yoder is concerned, the Gospel is Good News that has much to do with the welfare of humanity (Yoder 1997a: 14-15; 1997b: 167). Yoder’s social vision seeks to realize Jesus’ evangelical quest to ensure that humanity enjoys the fulness of life (cf. John 10:10). It is (as this study shows) a Christocentric evangelical ethics, which seeks to restore *shalom* in the society. Perhaps Okorochoa’s (1992) evangelical submission that the greatest challenge of contemporary African Christianity is to make *Ezi Ndu*, i.e., fulness of life or life abundant its *telos* can assist us to analyze Yoder’s position on Christian (theological mission) ethics more substantively.

Cyril Okorochoa’s work is titled *Religious Conversion in Africa: Its Misiological Implications*. Here, Okorochoa underscores African religious consciousness and its goals as determinative in (the Igbo) people’s response to a change agent. As we discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation, Okorochoa is an Anglican Bishop in Nigeria. He seeks to demonstrate the *telos* of African religiosity as fulness of life (*shalom*). In his reflection, nothing is (thought) impossible for religion within the variety of indigenous cosmologies in *religiocentric* Nigeria. Righteousness is communally desired and expressed in the form of social justice in many African worldviews. African religiosity is unthinkable outside the existence, protection and

provisions of *the triangle of spirits*. *The boundless power of the Supreme God creates, re-creates, preserves and affirms human life and shalom through the triad of relationships* (Paris 2001: 23; cf. Oduyoye 2001: 21). African worldviews on spirit-beings seem to prefigure Yoder's position, as we have argued. Yoder classifies such spirits among the fallen Powers, which Christology can redeem and restore to serve their divinely appointed purpose in Jesus Christ (Yoder 1994d: 134-161; cf. Wink 1992; 1986; 1984). African religions and religiosities bespeak *Ezi Ndu*.

To promote this understanding, Okorochoa expresses a symbiotic view with Turaki (2006a; 1999); Falola (2005); Okure (1993), and Isichei among other Nigerians. These scholars argue that the failure of the western packaged theology to address the needs of African spirituality motivated the emergence of the AICs in Nigeria. Okorochoa also acknowledges the (often) faulty and sometimes syncretic theological positions of the AICs as well as other excesses of these indigenous churches. In the process, he remarks that the AICs remind especially, the devotees of Protestant Christianity that evangelization is about God's love in Jesus Christ.

In contemporary Nigeria, one can describe a theology whose ethical vision does not lead to an inclusive mission for nation building, social transformation and development as alien doctrinal formulation or useless academic exercise. A theological mission ethics, which does not result in social transformation and development, is also dismissible as a waste of precious resources. Christian mission without an embodied vision of God's love in Jesus Christ exists as an alien to the *missio Dei*: it will not make a substantive sense within the context of human predicaments. God's mission centres more on social transformation and development. The God we meet in Jesus Christ offers humanity a chance to contribute a voice in shaping their destiny. Thus, Okorochoa further reasons that contemporary Christianity faces the challenge of making conversion relevant to *Ezi Ndu* in Africa. For him, like Yoder and Bediako, Christianity must engage the realities of African *religio*-cultures in respectful and *semper reformanda* dialogues.

Given these reflections, it becomes more arguable that Yoder's social ethics can present the SCS with a more inclusive ethical vision for a more appreciable social engagement. Its visionary proclamation of the Good News as social ethics will plead for a corporate public ministry of the subordinate Church. Such public witness will *inter alia*, seek to relate with the government and other publics especially, its host cultural societies, the NGOs and the academia. Yoder's

multifaceted and experimental project will not compromise its distinctive identities within such interculturality; it is about the Good News.

Significantly, the above-mentioned reflection on the Good News tends to substantiate the view, which Kroeker and other theologians have expressed on Yoder's project. For them, Yoder's ethical vision often takes the issue of the character formation of the moral agent for granted. In other words, the said reflection on the Good News tends to miss the question of the character formation of the social witness as the moral agency that takes society beyond its traditional borders (cf. Kroeker 2005). Consequently, we appeal to Yoder's view on the same subject in *The Christian Witness to the State*:

....It is clear that the Good News announced to the world has to do with the reign of God among *human beings* in all their interpersonal relations....each individual must make *her/his* own decision about whether to respond in obedient faith to this message or to reject it.... What was wrong with the "social gospel" of two generations ago was not that it was social, but that it lacked certain dimensions of the gospel.... We are *also* concerned about the *individual* own moral integrity, measured first of all by *her/his* own moral standards, even though from our perspective *her/his* highest ideal may still fall short of the vision of Christian discipleship.

(Yoder 1997a: 23-24[Our italics])

For Yoder, the penultimate goal of a true Christian witness is to restore persons to partake in corporate (Kingdom) proclamation of the Good News as social ethics among the nations. In Yoder's vision for ethical Kingdom-oriented practice, the Gospel is embodied as Christocentric Good News to humanity. We discussed these issues in the previous chapter of this study. As this study shows, Yoder emphasizes a Christocentric *ethics of being*.²⁸⁸ His distinctive approach to transformation and developmental ethics is focused. It is more concerned on how the moral agency communicates her or his embodied witness of Jesus Christ among the nations. In his vision, an embodied Christocentric witness is the political responsibility of the subordinate believer. The study also reflected on these issues in the third chapter. For Yoder, such communication is, in a sense, pastoral. The Yoderian communication of the political ethics of the biblical Jesus presupposes that one person has the right to be dealt with as a person 'who is honored but also brought to judgment' (Yoder 1997a: 24).

²⁸⁸ In an ethics of *being*, Smit has observed that questions of identity and character become important. It also asks; 'What kind of people are we? What kind of community do we want to belong? What kind of people do we want to be? What are the virtues we will like to practice and demonstrate?' (Smit 2006b: 381). Yoder is interested in the question of what is the meaning and implication of the gracious Christ-event in the ethical practices of Jesus' followers.

In other words, the human dignity of the differently *other* is also to be recognized when Christians witness to her/him of the implication of divine righteousness. Christian witness is about love for especially the opposing *other*. It is God's pattern - God's strategy 'for dealing with *adversaries* is to love them and give himself for them'. Yoder is of the view that 'Christians love their enemies because God does so, and commands his followers to *embody it*' (Yoder 1985: 20-21 [Our italics]). He expects Christians to embody reconciliation especially, of the adversary as a continuing witness of Christology in contexts. According to Yoder in *He Came Preaching Peace*:

Christian concern for peace is not an optional hobby of some softhearted people....It is part of the purpose of God for all eternity. God is by nature a reconciler, a maker of *shalom*. For us to participate in the peacemaking purposes of that kind of God is not just morality. ...it is not just politics. It is worship, doxology, praise....**The peacemaking work of the believer, in conflict, in suffering, is a continuation of the work of Christ.**

(Yoder 1985: 34-34 [Our emphasis])

As far as Yoder is concerned, the God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ is a reconciling, forgiving and suffering God. Yoder's vision seeks the reconciliation of the whole society through the Church's public witness of the Gospel as a Christocentric social ethics.²⁸⁹ It also holds that 'to recognize the sacredness of the adversary's life and dignity' without adopting her/his terms constitute 'a moral victory and the beginning of a tactical change' (Yoder 1985: 40). Yoder re-presents the Gospel as an embodied Christocentric prophetic witness to all and sundry. A Christocentric prophetic witness also addresses persons, structures and *status quos* particularly, those which banish and restrict fellow human beings to exist as sub-humans. Yoder also redefines the term prophetic witness to mean 'social critique'. The public Church witnesses to itself and the world without denying the world the right to witness to the Church and itself (Yoder 1997a: 36). Prophetic witness commends the good and denounces evil because it seeks to transform the society for the better. A communiqué, which the SCS issued out to Nigerians, should assist us to argue that Yoder's vision for the prophetic witness of the Church has substantive potential in Nigeria.²⁹⁰

This communiqué is captioned, *Presbyterian Synod Charges Yar'Adua on Economy*. The SCS called on the new President of Nigeria to overhaul the economic reforms, which President

²⁸⁹ Carter makes a striking point for Yoder in this case. According to him, 'The practice of truthful reconciliation of one to another is....also the shape of the church's witness to the world. For Yoder, this is an example of "social ethics as gospel"' (Carter 2005: 184). It is Christocentric.

²⁹⁰ Yemi Adebawale reported it in Thisdayonline.com on 9 June 2007.

Obasanjo's former administration initiated²⁹¹. Such reforms are not making a direct impact on the living standard of the masses. Many Nigerians live below the UN poverty threshold of US\$1 per day. In this report, Adebowale presents the church's commendation of the efforts of Obasanjo's administration to revamp the Nigeria economy, on the one hand. We noted in the last chapter that Obasanjo's administration adopted a 'home-grown policy on economic reforms' to transform the political economy of Nigeria (Nellor 2008). At the same time, Adebowale also highlights the dissatisfaction of the SCS over the inability of the benefits of the said reforms to reach the majority of the citizenry. According to Adebowale:

....The Synod appreciated the past administration's genuine intentions at revamping the economy through the economic reforms, but lamented that the reforms made no improvement on the living conditions of the generality of Nigerians....

The Moderator of Synod, The Rev DR. Terty O. Onoh and the clerk.....the Synod lamented the inability of the past administration to successfully tackle the problems of the oil sub-sector and electric power supply....

It hailed the ongoing construction of eleven national integrated power stations in parts of the country to boost power supply and urged the new government of Yar'Adua not to allow these projects to end up a mirage....

(Adebowale 2007)

Through the communiqué, the Church appreciated the commendable efforts of the past administration while at the same time it appealed to the new President to re-design and tailor reforms toward a more people-oriented project. As this study also argues, the portrait of socio-cultural milieu in contemporary Nigeria hardly includes the image of the populace as an indispensable stakeholder in the political economy. This study would urge the (Reformed) SCS to take up a *leading-practical-role* of meeting this challenge particularly, within its *religio-cultural* environment. The SCS spoke out as a voice for the voiceless majority of the people who withstand the worst of non-people oriented projects by the leadership. Yoder would not ignore such a people-oriented critique. However, he would be hesitant to project the Synod Moderator and Clerk as the authors of the communiqué. Yoder would have preferred to use the phrase 'the Church,' which signifies peoplehood. As we have shown, Yoder calls for a Christocentric peoplehood, which takes the 'people at the base' serious. He also argues that the people at the

²⁹¹ In an earlier communiqué, which the SCS issued out to the nation after its 9th Annual Conference, the church charged the President Obasanjo's administration on the poverty alleviation project of the FGN. The communiqué states: 'As Government policies and programmes so far seem not to have been successful in achieving desired results, the Synod calls on Government at all levels, church and NGO's to address the matter through creation of jobs and skill acquisition leading to self employment as a panacea for unemployment, poverty and corruption especially in the Niger Delta region and to curb youth restiveness' (SCS 2005: 25).

base endure most of the constraints of inherited structures and projects of the leadership (Yoder 2000: 180). Yoder's ethical project, as this study shows, it is an orthodox vision.

For instance, Yoder's Bible-based humanitarian concern for preferential option for the poor is not limited to the widow and orphan, or those who cannot eat. Implicitly, his vision for the epistemological privilege of the underdog includes all persons who find themselves at a disadvantage within a given cultural group (Yoder 1997a: 41; 1997b). To quote Yoder's words in *The Christian Witness to the State* in this regard:

The Christian commitment to the neighbor is not even limited to the stranger....Not only those whom our society does not treat fairly...Christian *ethical* witness should represent the claims and needs of the absent; all those whose interests seem genuinely opposed to those of one's own nation or society.

(Yoder 1997a: 41-42[Our italics])

Yoder's ethical vision also calls on believers to be persistent in 'reminding those in power of the continuing injustices of their regime'. However, it is doubtful that the SCS has taken a concrete step to follow-up on its (aforementioned) documented proclamation. For Yoder, Christians should be more concerned and more capable in giving the 'other side' a hearing, a doing, and a being o 'suffering presence' (Hauerwas 1986).

Historical or biblical Christology makes it imperative for believers to witness (even) to and, for the opposing *other* without coercion. In Yoder's vision, such another includes the larger society. Christians plead for the cause of the minorities, the absent, and the present-absent when believers witness to those in power and to the dominant majority groups in the society. Yoder is emphatic that Christian ethics is for believers who do not often constitute the majority of the powerful. Yoder's social ethics is not only a vulnerable yet provocative and creative way in which Christ transforms cultures. It is also a minority ethical vision whose embodied witness exists as social Gospel. In a Yoderian ethical vision, the subordinate believers are moral agents for social transformation and development. Yoder's moral agent includes those who previously, had no *locus standi* to be part of the decision-making process in their socio-cultural milieus (cf. Yoder 1994d: 171-172).

So far, this section has surveyed Yoder's vision for Christian (social) ethics as deemed relevant to the context of the SCS. We discovered that this visionary practice proclaims 'body politics,'

which considers a Christocentric trans-community vision for social ethics as a reflection of ‘the fulness of Christ.’ It re-presents Christology as the premise for the proclamation of ‘social ethics as gospel,’ by the subordinate believers in Jesus Christ and their communities. Yoder appeals to historical Christology in order to re-interpret and appropriate the Church’s ethical proclamation of the Pauline phrase ‘fulness of Christ’ to also mean a ministry of the whole people of God. In his perspective, every believer is graciously favoured with at least one charismatic gift to contribute in the calling, being, and ministry of the Kingdom centred corpus. The Church is also a body for moral deliberation and discernment. Yoder’s ethical vision suggests a *jesulological* (nonviolent-resistant) Diaspora pursuit of the Barthian vision in contexts.

For Yoder, believers are called to serve God and to rule the world in the light of the ethical vision and practices of the biblical Jesus Christ. Within this *jesulological* Diaspora vision, the subordinate persons also serve as moral agents for social transformation and development. They thrive in altruistic identity and spirituality. Yoder’s vision for moral agency welcomes those who were previously regarded as present-absents to be part of the decision-making process in their socio-cultural milieus. Christology provides him with the warrantee for re-visioning Christian ethics to mean a Christocentric social Gospel practice of an ethical Kingdom vision. According to Yoder:

We know more fully from Jesus Christ and in the context of the confessed faith than we know in other ways....in that the lordship of Christ is the centre which must guide *ethical* value choices.... It is therefore not a compromise or a dilution of the fidelity of the radical commitment when the obedient Christian community becomes at the same time an instrument for serving and saving the larger culture. The distinctive faithfulness of the church to her first calling....is exemplified....in “The Kingdom as Social ethics”....

(Yoder 1984: 11[Our italics])

Yoder’s vision for social ethics bespeaks of a minority and Christocentric Kingdom witness by voluntary *jesulological* Christians. For a clearer understanding of this Christocentric Kingdom ethics, we shall investigate its contours in the next section.

3 Contours of Yoder’s Social Ethics

This section discusses Yoder’s multi-faceted social ethics in the light of its ‘orthodoxy’; ‘Kingdom orientedness’; ‘minority (Diaspora) stance’; ‘contextuality’; and ‘theological

transformation and development of society. These perspectives, among other things, can promote and commend Yoder's social ethics to the context of the SCS.

3.1 Orthodox: Christocentric

We reflect on a fundamental conviction of this study here, i.e., that Yoder's Christocentric vision for social ethics is orthodox. It can assist the SCS to draw strength from the merits of the gracious Christ-event to embark on a more meaningful prophetic witness against all *pseudo-Powers* especially individualism and false capitalist ideologies. We also pointed these issues out in the second chapter of this study. They question the substantiveness of the ecclesiological identity of the SCS as a continuing presence of Christ within its socio-cultural environments.

Yoder's 'looping back' to biblical Christology and pre-Constantinian church traditions makes his vision for Christian social ethics orthodox. This point can commend and promote his social vision within the sordid context of the SCS. Yoder's ethical vision for Christians underscore the 'historically situated, historically particular and concrete ethical norms' revealed to humanity in the particular history of Jesus Christ as definitive for believers' ethical reflection and practices in every age and culture. This insight is also discernible in Yoder's charge to Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* particularly, for its reticence in naming Jesus Christ as normative for Christian ethics (cf. Yoder 1996a). According to Yoder:

Niebuhr's challenge "what will you do about this value we call culture?" far from helping us to be responsible, is something we are freed from, by the concreteness with which the Torah and the Kingdom message of Jesus describe our path. One way to clarify why concrete discernment is indispensable is to survey the "culture" of our time. Our world is characterized by racism....genocide, pornography, the glorification of violence....These are authentically "culture," but they are what an older reformation theology called fallen.

(Yoder 1996a: 89)

Yoder's ethical vision, as we earlier argued, is biblically Christocentric; its reflections and practices for social transformation and development take the biblical witness very serious.

Yoder accepts the view that what Paul and other New Testament authors did is always transforming. His vision, a Bible-based vision for social transformation and development, takes account of (a) the Jewishness of Jesus (b) the humanity of Jesus (c) the involvement of the witness and the appeal to the addressee. For Yoder, the biblical Jesus Christ summons believers to active social witness. The commission also involves the moral challenge of discerning what

constitutes the criteria for determining ‘cultural values’, and ‘what is culturally good’ (Yoder 1996a: 87-88). Yoder is of the view that Christian discipleship should not compromise this concrete and particular ethical norm in its varied quests for social transformation and development. Yoder also remarks that the incarnation is a metaphysical mystery, which believers can celebrate and contemplate in diverse cultures without demeaning its historical source of identity and practices. Consequently, Yoder retrieves the Jewish influence of Christianity in order to sustain meaningful continuity in his Christocentric visionary approach to social transformation and development. For Yoder, the continuity that counts is that the same Gospel witness repeatedly evokes the same community-forming response. In the *jesulological* sense of the incarnation, the otherwise invisible God is known normatively, in the concrete historical reality of life and works of Jesus (Yoder 1997c).

Yoder’s *jesulological* vision also points contemporary Christians towards the Hebrew traditions for a meaningful Christocentric ethics and discipleship. His *jesulological* vision is rhetorical in its appeal for believers to revisit the Christian-Jewish dichotomy. Otherwise, peoplehood will remain captive to unhealthy dictates of the principalities and Powers. The Christian-Jewish schism has immense consequences for Christian ethics and politics (Yoder 2003b: 72-75; 2002: 16-20; cf. Rasmusson 2005: 103). In other words, it could even be from a similar perspective that Glen Stassen²⁹² in his essay, *Concrete Christological Norms for Transformation* (1996a), opines that Christian discipleship and ethics need those concrete norms.

According to Stassen, ‘they are based on historically particular revelation in a Jew in Galilee, who taught repentance, conversion, faithfulness, love, justice, prayer, mutual servanthood, delivering justice and transforming initiatives of peacemaking’ (Stassen 1996a: 128). For Stassen, it is a mistake for Christians to attempt to escape or deny this historical *locus* for social ethics ‘by avoiding the historical incarnate Jesus’. Even contemporary Christian emphasis on ‘struggles for the inclusion of the outcast’, ‘attention to the voices of others and strangers’, and ‘peacemaking affirmations’ (especially in favour the adversary) as an aspect of prophetic witness, are rooted in nonviolent-resistant Christology. Stassen traces the concrete source of the identity and practices of the Christian social witness to historical Christology. He also associates

²⁹² Stassen is a Professor of Christian Ethics at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky USA. Stassen seeks to mediate between two rival traditions: Just War, and Pacifism. He draws resources from his politically imaginative hermeneutic, personal involvement in the issues within Europe and America, and his wealth of knowledge on policy issues to pursue his vision (cf. Stassen 1992: 7-11).

with Yoder's view that Christian must take the question of social witness serious in their agenda for ministry-practice. Like Yoder, Stassen also expects Christian social *kerygma* to seek the realization of *Ezi Ndu* in the social order. Yoder does not neglect the individual in the process.

For instance, Yoder also argues in *The Christian Witness to the State* that:

The validity of our witness to society...hangs on the firmness with which the Church keeps her central message at the centre: her call to every man to turn to God and her call to those who have turned to God to live in love. If she fails to keep this call to personal commitment at the centre of her life and work, her prophetic witness to society is either utopianism or demagoguery.

(Yoder 1997a: 36)

Yoder argues that the lordship of Jesus Christ is the ground for Christian prophetic witness. Given this submission, one asks if at this stage Yoder's prophetic witness cannot provide the SCS with a more meaningful approach to social critique particularly, on the question of pawnship and economic exploitation mentioned in the second chapter of this study.

Pawning of land, in particular, is constitutive of increasing source of social conflicts in many regions of the SCS environment. It is most evident in the Port Harcourt, Aba, and Owerri environs. Many poor landowners usually end up as losing their properties. They often default in paying high interest rates, which they also consented to, in their desperate quest to obtain financial assistance from individuals or financial institutions. Ekechi recaptures this state of affairs more succinctly:

While pawning of individuals has declined, the vicious circle of poverty remains. As a result of high interest rates, the poor are "bitter towards those rich few among them who are dispossessing them and enriching themselves with their lands through what they see as subtle maneuvers.

(Ekechi 2003: 182-183)

Ekechi re-presents pawnship as constitutive in the *pseudo-capitalistic* ideologies, which Yoder criticizes.

As this study shows, Yoder classifies such deceptive ideologies among the fallen Powers, which the Church's prophetic witness is expected to address. *Pseudo-capitalistic* ideologies promote injustice, reprisal and counter-reprisal in society. They introduce and sustain unhealthy usury. Such usury breeds reprisal and counter-reprisals in the society (Calvin 1994: 453). In Yoder's reflection in *The Politics of Jesus*:

Corporate proclamation of the lordship of Christ is not a substitute for nor a prerequisite to the gospel call directed to the individual.... Christ is Lord.... is nonetheless a social, political, structural fact which constitutes a challenge to the Powers....the claims such proclamation makes are not limited to those who have accepted it, nor is the significance of its judgment limited to those who have accepted it....

(Yoder 1994d: 156-157 [Our italics])

For Yoder, the vision for a Christocentric social ethics is for all humanity. *To be is to belong, and to belong involves active but responsible participation in social affairs.* In other words, Yoder's vision for Christocentric ethics suggests a more meaningful declaration on the state of affairs of the cosmos, and the significance of history. It names, unmask and engages the fallen Powers and their falsehood in Christocentric *semper reformanda* dialogues.²⁹³ Consequently, Yoder's Christocentric vision pleads for believers' conscientious participation as well as conscientious objection in corporate social witness. Such believers find the authority and promise of their social critiques in the *kerygma* of the lordship of Jesus Christ over the Powers. Yoder's orthodox ethics is also ecumenical; it is Scripture-based. His Christocentric poem, 'But we do see Jesus, revealing the grace of God by tasting death for everyone,' also seeks Kingdom-oriented ethical reflections and practices from believers.

3.2 Kingdom Oriented: Biblically Ecumenical

Here, we reflect on Yoder social ethics as a Diaspora practice. It can also help to restrain the SCS from imposing its conquerors' ethical approach on its socio-cultural context. The Barthian posture of Yoder's social ethics will not also permit the SCS to withdraw from active and necessary social participation.

Yoder's rhetorical rhythm, *But we do see Jesus*, thirsts for a believers' Kingdom-oriented social ethics. Yoder conceives a church as a *jesulological* and voluntary peoplehood. His vision for ethical Kingdom-orientedness of believers hopes to re-organize and re-orient society towards an embodied vision of a nonviolent-resistant community life and spirituality. Yoder also argues from this perspective in *The Priestly Kingdom*:

²⁹³ The fallen Powers and their falsehood also bewitch societies with success cultures. Their conquerors' ethics breed countless casualties in the exploited and the unemployed. These fallen Powers also promote marginalization, oppression, homelessness and increasing rate of poverty in the society. More significantly, these Powers and their *pseudo*-ethics enthrone and promote unhealthy individualism, which constitutes an affront to Kingdom witness as a plausible and feasible historical reality.

Communities, which are genuinely voluntary, can affirm individual dignity (at the point of the uncoerced adherence of the member)...They can likewise realize community without authorizing lordship or establishment. The alternative to arbitrary authority is....an authority in which the individual participates and to which he or she consents.

(Yoder 1984: 24; cf. Carter 2001:188)

Yoder envisions his ethical project from the life and works of the biblical Jesus Christ. We noted this point in the third chapter of this work.

Yoder's vision for peoplehood preaches such *kerygma* as the central task of the subordinate Church. His hermeneutics of peoplehood also seeks a trans-community communication of the Gospel. Although his earlier works made a distinction between Christian, and secular ethics, Yoder modifies his view in later writings to show that Christian ethics can apply to non-Christians (cf. Enns 2007: 140). Yoder's renewed vision for peoplehood does not restrict the interpretation, communication and embodiment of the *jesulogical* ethics as an exclusive possession of Christians. It would not also allow Christianity to impose its ideals on society. Yoder's vision for social ethics does not permit believers to enforce church membership. His vision for a Christocentric Kingdom ethics does not permit the harbingers of its *euangelion* to deny humankind of their rights/freedom of choice and conscience. In Yoder's vision for Kingdom ethics, the Gospel gathers human beings under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to make necessary decisions. Such important decisions can enhance their participation in the *missio Dei*, through uncoerced social interactions. We do reiterate Yoder's vision for ethical project is also a restorative vision.

Yoder's vision for a restorative social ethics (as this study shows) suggests a Scripture-based *jesulogical* practice. A biblical *jesulogical* ethics is nonviolent resistant. As is also evident in this study, Yoder's *jesulogical* practice often strives to transform the (frequently) violent or conquerors' ethics of Constantinianism. As we argued, Constantinianism usually enthrones and legitimizes violence in society. As a restorative practice, Yoder's visionary reflection on peoplehood is suggestive of a distinctive pacifist messianic community. According to Rasmusson:

Yoder was a pacifist, but he represents a special type of pacifism which he once called "the pacifism of the messianic community... *Its embodied social ethics are dependent on the truth of the reality that is disclosed and inaugurated by Jesus Christ, that we meet God in the history of Jesus Christ and thus the nature of reality.... It is communal in that it is lived by a group of covenanting human beings who instruct one another, forgive one another, bear one another's burden, reinforce one another's witness...*

For Yoder, there is no single position called pacifism, which is acceptable to all pacifists. Pacifism is simply one type of moral judgment whose definition becomes more solid with increasing analysis. A Christian pacifist position rooted in (biblical) Christology is not irrelevant to the social order. Yoder's pacifism is an embodied vision for a Christocentric nonviolent-resistant approach to social transformation and development (Yoder 1971a: 10; 1996a: 47; 1997a: 7; 1971b: 48).

Yoder's vision for social ethics is an embodied nonviolent-resistant-pacifist witness. It re-interprets and re-presents believers' embodied politics of Jesus as a true description of the theological mission ethics of the pre-Constantinian Church in the New Testament. Yoder also appeals to the biblical witnesses and the early (or pre-Constantinian) Church traditions to review and communicate the distribution and multiplicity of *ministerium* gifts as a specific work of grace. Thus, Yoder's project provides believers with more significant criteria for re-invigorating the unique Christian ethics, which the gracious Christ-event inaugurates in contexts. Yoder reflects on the ministry of the whole people of God as the true meaning of the Pauline phrase 'the fulness of Christ'. These issues *inter alia*, combine to offer Yoder a robust Christological warrant to argue that Christian ethics is social by nature. Thus, the subordinate disciple of Jesus Christ must embody it as Gospel witness among the nations. From the foregoing, may we not agree with this study that Yoder's vision for social ethics suggests a biblically based ecumenical witness of the Gospel among the nations? Will it not help us to sustain an agreement with this study that his ethical project reflects a *jesulogical* Diaspora pursuit of the Barthian vision in contexts? Perhaps a sustained discourse on the contours of Yoder's ethics from Diaspora perspective in the next paragraph will be of great assistance.

3.3 Minority (Diaspora) Stance: Positive and Covenantal

Yoder's visionary practice for Christian ethics is at heart, a Diaspora or minority stance. It speaks of believers social witness in contexts where Christians are not in the majority. Yoder also restates it more succinctly in *The Original Revolution*: 'We must make our decisions on the assumption that most of the world is not going this way. Only then will Christian moral thinking be realistic' (Yoder 1971b: 117). Yoder also goes further to reveal that Diaspora ethics is for subordinate believers because the political ethics of Jesus Christ shapes their lifestyles. For such

believers, the figure of Jesus Christ and its confession reproduces a thorough and discernible Scripture-based ethics in human lives (cf. Yoder 2003c: 107; 1997b: 111-112; 1994e: 183; 1971b: 126).

Consequently, contemporary believers in Christ can no longer sustain the struggle to determine the course of history particularly, as it affects social order or governance. In Yoder's view, to recognize the nonviolent-resistant church as a minority is a theological observation. Fundamentally, nonviolent-resistant ethic is at heart, determined by biblical Christology. *Jesulogical* ethics presupposes the expression of a small but committed group of Christocentric believers. Their bodily presence is a social witness; it interjects change in the social order. Christ's figure produces and introduces them as a disciplined Christocentric peoplehood in the social order.

The very existence of such a group is itself a deep social change. As a result, the Church is also the most powerful tool of social change, if the subordinate *ekklesia* lives faithfully to its first calling. Yoder's *jесulogical* practice re-presents and appropriates the nonviolent-resistant political ethics of Jesus Christ as the original revolution in a social order. It is a Christocentric Diaspora practice, in which a nonviolent-resistant witness to social issues often takes the unpopular side (cf. Yoder 1997b: 177; 1997a: 40). Yoder reckons on this induction as one of the logical implications of the acceptance of the minority status. A minority stance also saddles the subordinate disciple of Christ with the crucial responsibility, i.e., to demonstrate to all that Christ-believers can embody nonviolent-resistance as their identity and spirituality within a social order. Such believers would not compel or coerce the society to accept the faith, which determines their obedience. Yoder also enjoins *jесulogical* believers to proclaim the Christ-event as a lived, living and liveable social reality in their sustained social critiques. Yoder's ethical vision is a nonviolent-resistant Diaspora practice.

Consequently, we reason that this nonviolent-resistant Diaspora project looks up to Yoder's reflexive vision on '*moral osmosis*' for social transformation and development. Yoder reflects on *moral osmosis* (or moral assimilation) as an attitude 'of honesty and mutual respect, hard work and clean thinking, unselfishness and tolerance.' Believers can appropriate it to make disciples for Christ particularly, in children. Yoder's vision for moral assimilation is a painstaking but resourceful approach. It extends Christian education to young people who may not commit

themselves to become church members. Yoder's perspective on moral assimilation often adopts 'the observable social value of the honesty and industry of believers, and their conscientious objection to participate in social evils' in order to function. Yoder is optimistic that over the years (through *moral osmosis*), even the secular world would find itself 'recognizing certain moral values to which it has no spiritual or logical commitment' (Yoder 1997a: 20-21, 40).

In a similar understanding, Nation also presents *moral osmosis* as Yoder's approach to social change. According to him, 'the church witnesses through *moral osmosis*....Christians will train their own children within the Christian faith. Then, even those who do not remain within the church will take what they have learnt from the church with them' (Nation 2006: 161).

Like Nation, Yoder regards *moral osmosis* as a powerful tool for social witness among the nations. Christocentric *jesulogical* believers can appropriate it to introduce change into the social order. The larger society watches the Christocentric moral characters of individual as well as their corporate witness of Jesus Christ among the nations. Such observations are usually influential in the moral identity of the society. *Moral osmosis* suggests a minority or Diaspora practice of Christ-believers within a given society. Yoder's Diaspora vision for a Christocentric social ethics is about seeing things differently. This study challenges the SCS to draw resources from Yoder's social vision. In his article, *On Learning to See? A Reformed Perspective on the Church and the Poor* (2003c), Smit (a Reformed theologian of African descent) seems to reason from a Yoderian approach (on the Church's attitude towards the poor in South African). According to him:

Without the....social forms of being church, ethical involvement and social responsibility *might be less feasible* in the world today....without ethical involvement and social responsibility, when faced with the suffering and threats we face today, the nature and calling of the church itself is at stake.... Butasking how the *Church* – in its varied and complex social forms – can be a place where we learn to see, we should consider the critical question whether this is indeed possible in a time like this.

(Smit 2003c: 66-67 [Our italics])

In this article, Smit expects (practical) theologians in particular, to do more on learning how to see things differently in (South) Africa. For Smit, they are better equipped to play a crucial discerning role in an age where many South Africans hardly seem to appreciate the suffering of the *other*. Smit remarks that Practical theologians 'are better equipped to analyze and describe this time in which we live in such a way that we can understand ourselves'. Smit poses this

challenge within the context of a Practical theology discipline.²⁹⁴ We appealed to the said project of this theologian (at this stage in our study) to demonstrate that like Yoder, Smit reflects on believers' corporate (social) witness as a minority practice of a redeemed and restored humanity. Smit and Yoder as well as other ecumenical theologians also re-read Scripture as a narrative, which finds its fulfilment in the Christ-event. Yoder's Diaspora evangel has a positive view of human history.

In Yoder's visionary projects, no human condition, circumstance, or disposition lies beyond the transforming power of God's redemptive-restorative love. The gracious Christ-event achieves this for humanity. God invites and permits redeemed-restored humanity to participate in the *missio Dei* through the merits of Christology. We discussed and related this issue to Archbishop Tutu's evangelical theology in the previous chapter of this study. In reality, Christocentric Diaspora (evangelical) Christian ethics thrives more visibly, feasibly and plausibly on repentance and forgiveness in a restored human society. In Yoder's Christocentric vision, minority ethics further exists as a resource for experiencing forgiveness and as a source for ethical guides.

Yoder's Christocentric *jesulogical* and Diaspora ethics emanates from a covenant faith. The gracious merits of the Christ-event empower it to reveal to the world, the true meaning of God in the person of Jesus Christ. For instance, Yoder also writes on believers covenanting from this perspective in his project, *A "Peace Church" Perspective on Covenanting* (1986b):²⁹⁵

To "covenant" is to create a new relationship of reciprocal public accountability....in addition to the other relationships in which those covenanting previously stood. It responds to divine initiative or mandate which authorizes the new structure and sanctions the pledges made....An act of covenant confesses a gracious divine act of judgment and enablement. It is not a self-generating human initiative.

(Yoder 1986b)

In Yoder's ethical vision for social ethics, believers' Christocentric covenanting is a response to divine initiative. His vision does not emphasize the privileges of self-determinism, universalism and abstract theories. Yoder's nonviolent-resistant Diaspora vision is a positive and covenanted

²⁹⁴ One must be apt to point out that Smit does not mean to glorify Practical theological above other disciplines. Smit is a Reformed ecumenical-systematic theologian of international repute, who also calls for *Ecumenical Hermeneutics*. Elsewhere, Smit discusses a similar issue as an ecumenical challenge. To quote him; 'To discern *this* message, to hear *this* living voice, to follow *this* gospel, is not a task for philosophical hermeneutics or theological scholarship, but for the ecumenical church, praying, reading, and living together' (Smit 2003b: 46).

²⁹⁵ In this Review, Yoder contrasts the Peace Church reflection on covenanting with the WCC project on the Just War Tradition particularly, as it relates to the quest for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

ethical approach. It also strives to retrieve Scripture-based Christological as a warrantee for responding to contextual needs. We can learn more on this understanding in the next paragraph.

3.4 Contextual: Self-Theologizing

In this subsection, we re-present Yoder's vision for social ethics as a contextual community-based (ecclesial) vision for self-theologization. Yoder's social practice encourages pluralism in its *jesulological* pursuit of Jesus' political ethics within contexts.

Yoder's tilt towards a preferential option for local priority makes his social ethics a contextual visionary practice. Yoder's non-methodological theological approach, as we earlier hinted, focuses more on concrete human experiences within historical communities. This reading is evident in Yoder's work, *Walk and Word: The Alternative to Methodologism* (1994f).²⁹⁶

According to Yoder:

There *has* to be a human social fabric in which people's relationships *are* mediated by communication....There *has* to be in that social fabric experiences in which the difference between reliable and unreliable communication *becomes* evident. There *has* to be experiences in which specific actions of communication are objects of blame if they are lies or of praise if they are true....Instead of taking the path, which some call "foundationalist," I propose to begin again with what might be called a phenomenology of the moral life

(Yoder 1994f: 79[Our italics])

In Yoder's Christocentric vision, the life of the community is prior to all possible methodological considerations. Methodological identifications do not override the need to the appeal to local communities' resources. They also relate to a social process. Yoder's visionary project seeks an ecclesial (communal) practice of the Gospel by a Christocentric peoplehood. It is of the view that the historical Christ-event graces every member of the believers' community with at least one charismatic gift to contribute to the society. Yoder is also of the opinion that a society is most viable when its social ethics provides a reliable structure for common life

²⁹⁶ In this work, Yoder criticizes the tendency of academic discussion on moral reasoning to begin with the pursuit of 'first principles,' or meta-ethics'. Her points out that such an approach is a foundationalist move. It seeks to find a level of thought that is somehow before or underneath the consideration of moral issues themselves. In his reasoning, a foundational approach or the pursuit of established ethical methods often thrives more on abstract philosophies. Foundational approach to moral reasoning does not give a significant attention to contextual realities, in its theological reflection and practices. Yoder claims that foundational ethical debates are only useful when articulated in the context of a community. He is convinced that the continuing faithfulness of the community to the God of the Bible demands the community's discussions on moral issues to envision its ethics and location from the Scripture.

together. Yoder's vision is also a trans-community visionary practice. It envisions a social fabric that is characterized by communication. Yoder's vision for social practice, as we have shown, is a community forming and sustaining project. Thus, one can argue that Yoder's vision for ethical practice mirrors the African *palaver*.

Benezet Bujo²⁹⁷ re-presents *palaver* as a multifaceted ethical metaphor with which most African communities arrive at catharsis in a crisis-ridden context. It is a (conversational) social approach to dialogue and truth finding. *Palaver* does not permit any conversation-partner to assume the role of a superior *per se*. *Palaver* represents a non-dictatorial or *magisterium* approach to social practice in many African communities. Its faces include:

- **The healing palaver:** In healing palaver, a (native) doctor opens a non-superior dialogue, which enables the patient to unburden her/his problems. The doctor the doctor adopts clarifying approach to crisis counseling. Such a healer assist the patient to understand the source of the problem, make confession, atoning sacrifices and where necessary, restitution. Most Africans understand illness as a result of human disharmony with the deities. Bujo describes a community which adopts this practice as 'a community of healing dialogue...the doctor who is giving the treatment, the patient, and others involved in the conversation form a communicative community, which endeavors to achieve the physical and psychological healing...by means of confession of guilt' (Bujo 2003: 68, 70). The central belief in such cases is that the victims are responsible for their condition; to the extent they had incurred guilt.
- **The family palaver:** Basically, family *palaver* takes place within a narrower family circle particularly, when parents or elders exercise their educational responsibility by calling inviting their children to address some misbehaviors or misgivings. Such parents initiate clarifying conversations, which often leads to significant insight into the issue at stake. Family *palaver* also 'concerns a larger circle, since the questions involved also concerns *de facto* the existence of the...extended family. Family *palaver* engages issues that can contribute to invigorate the vital force of the extended family. In family *palaver*, attempt is made to deal with the problem so comprehensively that it is not necessary to have recourse to a judicial authority outside the family' (Bujo 2003: 71, 72). The family *palaver* establishes, consolidates and furthers the development of family (*ministerium*) ethics in African communities.
- **The suprafamilial and administrative palaver:** This is often the best-known face of the *palaver*. It concerns the life of a larger group: it extends beyond individual families or clan communities. It serves as a second court of appeal especially, in circumstances where the family community fails to arrive at a consensus over a given issue. According to Bujo; 'This *palaver* has an official, political character and is often linked to a trial before a court. Where...this involves a case, which the family *palaver* has failed to resolve satisfactorily, it is a kind of court of second instance. It may however, involve a completely new case, which the public, suprafamilial *palaver* treats directly, as the first instance' (Bujo 2003: 74).

²⁹⁷ Benezet Bujo is a Zairean Roman Catholic Professor of Moral Theology and Ethics at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland.

Thus, the *palaver* metaphor can promote and commend Yoder's restorative vision for social ethics to the SCS. It can complement and substantiate such less concrete efforts, which the SCS has been making towards social transformation and development within the church's *religio-*cultures. Above all, it can assist the SCS to initiate and pioneer moves for The PCN to draw necessary resources from the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Westminster Larger Catechism, among other Scottish bequests (P&P G-01.0601, G-01.0603, G-04.0303)²⁹⁸ to articulate its home-grown Confession of Faith. As we noted in the second chapter of this study, the SCS needs a restorative Confession of Faith, which will emphasize *communal catechisms of the head, the heart, the hand and the feet*. The African *palaver* metaphor can assist to substantiate the Church's ecclesiological identity as a continuing presence of Christ within the crisis-ridden socio-cultural contexts of the SCS.²⁹⁹ Historically, *palaver* is a *ministerium* ethical practice, like the Yoderian ethical vision. It takes the human person serious as Yoder's restorative vision does. The '*palaver*' ethical practice also respects the human dignity of persons. Despite some variations, it favours an open meeting of God's people as Yoder's visionary ethics does.³⁰⁰ However, the '*palaver*' ethical practice is rooted in traditional African theology. Consequently, it is unlike Yoder's ethical vision, non-Christocentric. As re-presented in this study, Yoder's vision for social ethics is a Christocentric vision for a restorative social ethics. It also envisions an active albeit, responsible participation of all God's people in Christocentric nation building, social transformation and development.

For Yoder, the lordship of Christ provides the fulcrum to which all the nexus of human social fabric connect and revolve. The figure of Jesus Christ is not only crucial in the context of unity. Christ's portrait represents a more promising basis for common confession than the comparism of traditional creeds. Appeal to the figure of Christ is also indispensable for theological missionary practices. Such an appeal would hardly defame the *ministerium* ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ in any social context. Yoder's ethical project, as we have shown, is an orthodox vision. It also holds that the historical and gracious Christ-event is communicable to humankind in diverse cultures. Beyond these issues, the appeal to Christ's portrait represents a particular

²⁹⁸ Again, we are hesitant to quote The PCN Constitution in this dissertation. See fn. 51 on p.80 above.

²⁹⁹ This study argued (in its second chapter) that such a crisis stretches across the political, economical and religious spheres of Nigeria's political economy.

³⁰⁰ We noted that open meeting is a crucial pillar in Yoder's vision for body politics, earlier in this chapter.

type of confession of truth. The appeal to Christ's figure is a criterion for evaluating the faithfulness and unfaithfulness of a Christ-believing community (Yoder 1994e: 183).

The *kerygma* (proclamation) of the lordship of Christ also empowers believers to exercise moral discernment in their practice of interculturality. In Yoder's visionary ethics, members call one another to renewed faithfulness. Yoder expects the believing community to 'remember together the common heritage' in their practice of ecumenical hermeneutics. Yoder's vision for social ethics summons Christ-believers to exercise political judgment (cf. Yoder 1994f, 1992a; 1992b). With these observations, one can pause to ask: can we not (at this stage) agree with Yoder that the Church is also called to exercise political judgment? What could the exercise of political judgment mean for the SCS with specific reference to its continuing theologization on, and translation of 'wholesale importation of Scottish theology' as *received* Calvinism by The PCN?

Hendriks (2004) shows that theological reflections in faith communities need to develop contextually especially, in Africa. Authentic communal structures develop contextually as the faith community responds to the initiatives of the living *missio Dei*. Hendriks expresses this view in the book *Studying Congregations in Africa*, in which he further remarks that theology is about a specific time and space (Hendriks 2004: 26-27). Mercy Oduyoye³⁰¹ similarly reasons in her plea for African Theology to reflect and focus more on contextual realities. However, she calls for a distinctive women's hermeneutics (Oduyoye 2003). Thus, Tinyiko Sam Maluleke seems to share a more related view with Hendriks, on *African Theology* (Maluleke 2005a). Maluleke expects contemporary African theology to grow and sustain a meaningful paradigm shift. He does not want African Christian theologians to abandon such a significant shift to the new generation of inquirers. Contemporary African theology faces new challenges in a fast changing world in which the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the adverse effects of globalization loom large. Maluleke is of the hope that the dynamism and innovative creativity in the varied faces of African theology can provide a necessary platform for contemporary humanity to grapple with the challenges of the future. Contemporary African (Christian) theology is a dynamic, growing,

³⁰¹ From her experience as a Ghanaian Methodist and an African woman theologian, Oduyoye (2003) calls for an inculturation of the Gospel that is truly liberating in this article. She argues that the Gospel is yet to permeate African culture with *shalom*, success and prosperity. Oduyoye stresses that leavening African culture with the Gospel would mean breaking the forces of hierarchy and ranking, privileged positions, and keeping ones place. For her, such is a truly liberating inculturation. She also calls for women hermeneutics in the transformation and re-appropriation of Christianity and African cultures.

multifaceted and dialectical movement. It arises from continuing contextual challenges (Maluleke 2005a: 496-497).

Despite few variations in their perspectives, Hendriks and Maluleke agree on the articulation and proclamation of contemporary African theology as 'continuity and discontinuity'. The views of these two (South) African Reformed theologians reflect a reminiscent of the Yoderian position on theological approach to transformation development. Yoder also proclaims transformation in dynamic, innovative and creative ways, which seldom seek to annihilate the old. Yoder's transformational and developmental ethics do not also celebrate unwholesomely the old, as this study maintains (cf. Yoder 1996a). These insights might be of great interest to The PCN in general and the SCS in particular. For instance, Uma Onwunta (in his dissertation) also expects Nigerian Presbyterians to draw meaningful resources from their history and tradition in order to engage the (distressing) socio-cultural challenges facing The PCN in transformational and developmental dialogues (cf. Onwunta 2006: 7). However, his joint project with Professor H.J. Hendriks (Onwunta & Hendriks 2006) is more crucial for the current stage of this study.

They contend that the missionary ecclesiology and the Scottish legacy in Nigeria call for continuing *re-visioning*. This perplexing ecclesiology bequeaths The PCN with a 'distorted ecclesiological identity' as its DNA. We discussed this issue in the second chapter of this study. This *pseudo*-ecclesial identity often constrains The PCN to adopt 'ethno-centered' rather than '*glocalized*' polity and politics as the church's ethical approach in theological mission engagements. Such a DNA introduces and transmits many defaming identities in its pursuit of the *missio Dei* in Nigeria. Onwunta and Hendriks catalogue such grotesque (repulsive) faces of The PCN to include *inter alia*, being 'a fairly old but small church'; 'ethno-local leadership rivalries'; and 'sacrifice of merit on the altar of tribalism'. Consequently, they suggest the following as plausible and feasible way forward namely 'revising our communal identity,' 'visionary and de-ethnicized leadership,' 'cultivating a culture of dialogue in mission,' and 'reconciliatory missiology'. Focusing on these challenges, they recommend 'reconciliatory missiology as a new missional praxis for the church to The PCN (Onwunta & Hendriks 2006:235-246). However, it is doubtful if their project explicates the ethical posture The PCN could adopt i.e., whether *magisterium* or *ministerium*. This study challenges the SCS to adopt

ministerium ethics because its host *religio*-cultures embody communal ethics; i.e., the African ethical practice of *palaver*.³⁰²

Nevertheless, their recommendations can substantiate our hope that Yoder's rhetoric on the role of discernment, forgiveness and reconciliation, (which we discussed in previous chapters of this study) holds great potential for the theological mission ethics of the SCS of The PCN. Such necessary views as Onwunta and Hendriks' can provide a significant portal for the Yoderian reflection on *glocalized* 'moral discernment and deliberation, forgiveness and reconciliation, etc., to usher in more necessary social practice and developments in the SCS. According to them:

....A new missional praxis could help the Presbyterian church of Nigeria to evolve a new missional identity that is representative of the kingdom of God. We argue that until the church becomes a reconciling agent in God's world, especially in Nigeria, ethnic hostilities will continue to blend with religious bigotry in making the nation a "hell or heavenly hell".... Therefore, the church needs to teach the people the way of forgiveness without which there can be no future....
(Onwunta & Hendriks 2006: 246)

Yoder's orthodox vision for a restorative Christian ethics thrives more visibly, feasibly and plausibly on repentance and forgiveness. The Yoderian vision also exists as a resource for experienced forgiveness and as a source for ethical guides. Yoder's restorative vision for social ethics strives for peaceful coexistence of human beings within a given society. Its Christocentric (Diaspora) foundation and orientations issue from a covenant faith in the God we meet in the biblical Jesus Christ. Yoder's hermeneutics of peoplehood does not emphasize universalism, abstractness, creaturely lordship, etc. Yoder's Christocentric vision for peoplehood also provides a more meaningful approach for the Church to challenge liberalism, with specific reference to (liberal) individualism, without coercion.

Yoder's Christocentric ecclesial ethics affirms a local community modelled after the African covenanted and extended family paradigm (cf. Carter 2001). In most African communities, not only the leaders strive to preserve and transmit life; every one in the community is involved in the concerns of members. A person can hardly exist without structuring her/his life in this order.

³⁰² The *palaver*, as earlier noted, represents a *ministerium* ethical practice, which enables Africans to arrive at catharsis in a crisis-ridden context. According to Bujo, 'the *palaver* cultivates a healthy, harmonious relationship within the community. Where there are tensions, peace is re-established and promoted; where there are no conflicts, the *palaver* is very effective in bringing people together so that they can learn the art of listening to one another, tolerance, and a new style of relationship.' The palaver project is a community forming and sustaining approach: it takes the human person 'seriously in her/his totality' (Bujo 2003: 71, 73).

Palaver guides the process of discovering and justifying African ethics (cf. Bujo 2003: 68-77; 1992: 22). An African community denotes a covenanted community. Nevertheless, its concept of peoplehood is not voluntary like Yoder's. Persons are born into African extended family albeit, one can also chose where and how to belong in the contemporary age. Thus, a crucial point of departure between the African, and the Yoderian extended family paradigms is that membership in Yoder's vision for peoplehood suggests a voluntary act of faith. 'It does not ask for blind faith, but....confession....of the decision to recognize Jesus Christ as Lord. That decision is not made for us by....our parents....**that faith is unavoidable**' (Yoder 1985: 42 [Our emphasis]). Yoder's social vision is a Christocentric voluntary practice *jesulogical* ethics.

Such voluntary spirituality offers the Yoderian believers' Church ecclesiology its greatest strength to oppose individualism without coercion. Yoderian believers accept the discipline of discipleship without coercion (cf. Carter 2001: 220). Yoder's ethical vision provides and nourishes believers' communities with strength to engage in corporate moral discernment and moral deliberation. It is also reflexive of believers, 'strength to love' (King 1963).³⁰³ Yoder's trans-community vision for ecclesial self-theologization encourages pluralism in its *jesulogical* ethics. According to Yoder:

The evangelical strategy....accept the language of the environs; it seizes it, expropriates it, and uses it to say things that could previously not have been said in its prior language....It proclaims the God of Abraham as no less than the God of the philosophers....
There is nothing embarrassing for the bearer of evangel....about pluralism of styles, modes, and grounds of either proclamation or conversion. It is part of the nature of Evangel not only to speak many languages but also to enter history and the soul through more than one door.
(Yoder 1994f: 296; 297)

For Yoder, if the epistemological grid of the Enlightenment or its successors continue to reject this approach, such methodologies become questionable. Yoder's vision for social ethics also seeks to remind believers that the earliest understanding of the word *catholic* referred to the presence and practice of different Christian communities summed up as one. Only the

³⁰³ This phrase is the title of Martin Luther's book in which the Black-American Baptist minister's philosophy of nonviolent resistance is apparent. *Strength to Love* is a compendium of sermons on nonviolent-resistance, which Martin Luther preached in many American churches during and after the nonviolent bus protest against economic and racial injustice at Montgomery, Alabama, in the late 1960s. According to him, 'When our most tireless efforts fail to stop the surging sweep of oppression, we need to know that in this universe is a God whose matchless strength is a fit contrast to the sordid weakness of man When days grow dark and nights grow dreary, we can be thankful that our God combines in his nature a creative synthesis of love and justice which will lead us through life's dark valleys and into sunlit pathways of hope and fulfilment' (King 1963: 16). For him, the raging power of injustice does not have the final say in the affairs of godly persons; hence, believers in Jesus Christ should draw strength from their Lord to demonstrate love to the adversary, in particular.

Constantinian detour presents such plurality as that, which a biblically oriented community would not rejoice when it faces (cf. Yoder 1990: 562; 1996b:138). As we earlier noted, Yoder rereads, readjusts and appropriates the secular term *evangel* to mean ‘original revolution.’ Such an exercise enables him to re-present his restorative vision for a Christocentric nonviolent-resistant social ethics as *Good News* to its host cultures. Yoder’s restorative vision for social ethics is radically theological in its quest for a Christocentric transformational development of the society: it is a *jesulogical* project. We explicate more on these affirmations in the next paragraph.

3.5 Theologically Transformational, and Developmental

This segment argues that Yoder’s vision for a restorative social ethics can re-present nation building, social transformation and development as the penultimate goal of its reflection on the political ethics of the biblical Jesus. It can assist the SCS to engage some *pseudo*-bequests of the Enlightenment-based ethics in significant *semper reformanda* dialogues. Yoder’s vision for *jesulogical* ethics will seek to transform, develop and restore such legacies to serve their originally created purpose in Jesus Christ.

Yoder is persistent in calling believers to envision and re-interpret Kingdom ethics in the light of God’s historical response to concrete and diverse human needs. Yoder argues that historical Christology provides believers with the theological warrant for involvement in social transformation and development of society. In *The Christian Witness to the State*, for instance, Yoder also argues on the proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ as the basic reason for believers’ social witness. According to Yoder:

....The testimony that the risen Christ is Lord also over the world is to us the reason for social witness, and the biblical witness....enables us to guide this testimony with definite standards.... Even when we move beyond the implicit witness which is given by the very example of the church....the centrality of the church’s own experience in this witness would definitely distinguish the witness of which we here speak from traditional “lobbying” efforts of church and interchurch agencies.

(Yoder 1997a: 21)

In Yoder’s ethical vision, the Church is not a mere NGO or just conference body (cf. Yoder 1997a: 20). Yoder’s varied but consistent approach bequeaths his social ethics with a Christocentric transformational and developmental outlook. Yoder’s social ethics, is rooted in

Christological convictions. It arises from the concrete human experiences of the nonviolent-resistant Jesus. This study upholds Yoder's fundamental (Christocentric) fundamental conviction, i.e., that the political ethics of the biblical Jesus is relevant for believers' political engagement in all ages and cultures. Yoder also reminds humanity that believers' conscious participation in social witness is grounded in their testimony that the risen Christ is also the Lord of the whole world. Believers' Christocentric identification with God's suffering servanthood does not begin with mere illusionary vision of ending suffering by simple shift in the social order. Such reading is vulnerable to reducing the significance of the Christ-event to 'simply a call to upset society' by reversing, the structures to favour the poor (cf. Yoder 1997a, 1997b). Yoder's suggestive vision for an 'epistemological privilege of the underdog' would not exonerate the poor from social witness. Responsible and active participation in social witness is constitutive in their basic task as Christ's moral agency for nation (community) building, social transformation and development. Historical Christology provides the catalyst for such believers' conscious participation in the life of society: the Yoderian project also bequeaths them with a restorative vision for Christocentric social ethics.

Yoder's restorative project, as this study also re-presents, is *jesulogically* Christocentric in its foundation and orientations. Thus, its visionary engagement in nation building, social transformation and development is simply put, a non-violent-resistant approach to social revolution. Such Christocentric believers will appropriate Yoder's suggestive vision for *moral osmosis* to engage in social transformation and development. Subordinate (Yoderian) believers rely more on the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit for their Christocentric participation in social transformation and development. For Yoder, social transformation and development is constitutive in the Church's primal calling to be the Church. Members of the Church also earn their living and raise their families within the society. The Church, we have noted, suggests a scattered peoplehood, which gathers to do God's business in the name of Jesus Christ. The centrality of the figure of the nonviolent-resistant Jesus Christ distinguishes Yoder's vision for a unique peoplehood from other visions. Perhaps this position will become more substantive as we compare and contrast Yoder's vision and objectives for peoplehood with PROCMURA.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ We hope that a discourse on PROCMURA's existence and witness at this stage of our discussion can assist us to grasp this differentiation. Such a differentiation can also promote and commend the Yoderian approach to the context of this Nigerian church. We noted in the second chapter of this study that PROCMURA is not active within the geo-political vicinity of the SCS.

To refresh our minds, PROCMURA is the body that is engaged with Christian-Muslim relationships in Africa. A continental project was known as *Islam in Africa Project* when it was initiated in 1959, it took on the name PROCMURA in 1985. PROCMURA seeks to promote peace and dialogue between Muslims and Christians in Africa. Through this project, representatives of these two missionary faiths engage in responsible dialogues on practical issues of great importance to both communities (Ogbu Kalu 2005a: 136-137). PROCMURA also strives to engage Muslim and Christian women and youths in different forums to deliberate on how adherents of both faiths can work together in order to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic in their societies. Women and the youths constitute the most vulnerable and readily available agents for Muslim and Christian extremists to manipulate. Most of these religious extremists initiate and sustain violence in Nigeria (Sanneh 2004; cf. Kalu 2004b).

More significantly, the ethical approach of PROCMURA *inter alia*, underscores the necessity for Christians and Muslims to engage each other in continuing dialogues, which respect their status as human beings with the *imago Dei*. In many Nigerian societies, Muslim-Christian dehumanization and demonization of each other are apparent. Most Christians demonize and dehumanize Muslims as hostile children of the bondwoman. Many Nigerian Muslims regard Christians as infidels, hypocrites and agents of secularization. This *status quo* also tends to support Kalu's (2004b) view that the conjecture of radical impulse between Islam and Christianity turn Nigerian religious politics into shark-infested waters. Political violence, as we muted, is constitutive in the sustained (distressing) legacies of the British political ideology in contemporary Nigeria. Nevertheless, PROCMURA is a transformational developmental project, which many churches in Nigeria give little or no attention. Given these observations, one can reason that like the Yoderian project, PROCMURA also challenges humanity to translate and embody interculturality as a social reality with a theological mandate.

Such networks proffered by Yoder's visionary project and PROCMURA can help to restore *shalom* in Nigerian societies. It can also provide meaningful opportunities for Christians and Muslims to enrich each other with their theological conceptions and practices. Both Yoder and PROCMURA projects seem to understand, interpret and emphasize responsible development as the creation and sustenance of physical and spiritual conditions in the society. Social harmony enables humanity to be the best they are called to be in the divine economy. Both projects also seem to emphasize a renewed and restored humanity as the essence of theological

transformational development. Given this position, it becomes clearer that the Yoderian project and PROCMURA can offer a hope for the restoration of peace in Nigeria. Only such transformed practitioners of faith may serve as true human agency of God's current movement to give humanity a voice in shaping their destinies within a polarized Nigerian political economy. These two projects emphasize a theological transformational development, which celebrates interculturality as religiosity.

However, a careful Christocentric critic can observe that Yoder's project and the PROCMURA differ on foundation. Their charter documents for believer's moral agency of theological transformational development also differ. For instance, PROCMURA's quest for *shalom* is often motivated by social needs of society. Historical (biblical) Christology is basic in the Yoder's quest for *Ezi Ndu*. Again, PROCMURA underscores its Memorandum of Association (or Partnership Deed) as a charter document for ethical reflection and practices whereas the charter document for the Yoderian ethical reflection and practices is the Bible. Yoder's visionary project respects social needs in its quest for a theological transformational development of societies. It does not deny the vital roles, which sociological needs play in sustaining interculturality. Bible-based Christology is the source and result of Yoder's vision for believers' practice of the Rule of Christ. Yoder's Christocentric social practice re-presents the subordinate believer as a moral agent whose cruciform life (as a meaningful witness and ministry) can take society beyond its traditional borders in an embodied political ethics of the biblical Jesus.

Yoder is constant in his appeal for the otherness of the Church's social witness. His appeal is rooted in the primal Christian testimony, i.e., that the risen Christ is also the Lord of the whole world. Yoder's vision for social transformation and development bespeaks of Christocentric interculturality. Yoder's visionary project craves for a theological transformational development of the society from a biblically Christological perspective. Perhaps a survey of Karl T. August's work, *The Nature of Interculturality in Development: A Theological Perspective of Relationality* (2006a), can shed more light on our understanding of Yoder's approach to social transformation and development.

August re-presents transformational approach to development as a more inclusive and holistic paradigm. Transformational approach to interculturality offers theology a more significant portal to influence development with its Kingdom values. Theological transformational development

also clarifies the biblical anthropological vision for equality before God. The biblical vision is constitutive of the framework on which human relations in social transformation and development rests. From this theological transformational perspective, August also reasons that:

The unity of humankind as an *intercultural* activity is important for the human race....and its coexistence and survival.... It is important to overcome cultural, political, and economic barriers to meaningful participation in development planning in order to ensure *Ezi Ndu in society*.... Interculturality can also deal with culture as resistance to change....Humankind needs cultural diversity for its survival *in economic, social and political development*....we need to relate to others in a spirit of joyful interest and compassionate love *of God*....This is a truly theological transformational development (cf. John 3: 16; 1 John 2: 9-11).

(August 2006a: 18 [our italics])

The inference is that August expects Christians to seek the *Ezi Ndu* of society by engaging in a substantive trans-community social witness. For him, development provides Christians with a more meaningful framework for looking at humanity and social change, theologically. Contemporary theology values development as long as it is holistic and people centred. Such an approach to development further speaks of a theological cultural fit, which also respects human dignity and self-worth. August re-presents theological transformation development as accommodating interculturality. He also engages interculturality as a more feasible and plausible theological transformational perspective to development.

In August's view, theology defines and sustains a true Christian vision for social transformation and development. Thus, August's reflection on theological transformational development can inspire the Church, which is also trans-community peoplehood, to engage in active social witness. His approach can provide believers with a necessary framework to engage in significant participation in nation building, social transformation and development. August's approach echoes Yoder, in a sense. Yoder reminds humanity that the very existence of the Church is a deep social change if the subordinate *ekklesia* lives faithfully to its primal task of being the Church. The Church's *kerygma* of the *euangelion* as original revolution underscores *inter alia*, change in political, economic and social relations as the penultimate *telos* of its Gospel proclamation (cf. Yoder 1997b: 167-177; 1992a: 14-46).

A church that is subordinate to Yoder's vision seeks to transform and develop society with the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ. Yoder's vision seeks to re-organize and re-orient the social order towards the (partial) realization of the Kingdom vision as a feasible and plausible

social reality within historical societies. It is aware that harmonized social order is a theological hope. It is also a Christocentric social mandate to the empirical Church. Given this understanding, we reason that Yoder and August share a symbiotic view on theological transformational development as a crucial task of the historical Church. August's perspective recasts theological transformational development as a social given to the concrete Church. As we noted in the third chapter of this study, August earlier described the Church as an intercultural community, which the gracious Christ-event inaugurates (cf. August 1999).

However, August's current thesis on theological transformational development appears less explicit for our argument, that is, that the Christ-event is the basis for the Church's engagement in social transformation and development. Consequently, we appeal to his view on Christology as the locus and focus of the being and witness of the Church. August explains:

As the public of the Holy Spirit, the church is then constituted not through "boundaries" but through a "center" that in the core practices creates "space" and "time" and is expressed authoritatively in doctrines. This center is of an utterly christological nature, and as such also indeed demarcate the one 'boundary' the church never transcends.

(August 2006b:89)

Thus, one can argue that like Yoder, August considers Christology as the theological warrant for the Church's participation in nation building, social transformation and development. In their varied perspectives, the Christian's concern is not only to identify and to help change unjust structures. She/him is also committed to changing them in the ways of Christ.

The Church is not an NGO or similar humanitarian organization. The Church's presence, existence and praxis are determined by the agape love, which characterizes the embodied witness of the crucified but living Messiah. This kind of love often aligns itself with those who suffer unjustly. It is more costly in its relation to the agents of evil (Yoder 1997b: 111; 1994d: 105-131). Yoder's vision for a restorative social ethics is a painstaking project. It approaches nation building, social transformation and development as the penultimate goal of its reflection on the political ethics of the biblical Jesus. His restorative vision also seeks to redeem and restore fallen Powers with the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ.³⁰⁵ The transforming story of the

³⁰⁵ Such fallen Powers include the *pseudo*-concept of nation-state of the Enlightenment (and Reformation) era. Yoder also expects such redeemed and restored Powers to serve their originally created purpose in the nonviolent-resistant Jesus Christ. The study has earlier reflected on these issues in some previous sections of this work.

gracious Christ-event serves as the fulcrum, which reconnects human beings and their activities to a Christ-centred vision for social transformation and development. Historical Christology provides us with a substantive power of truth to transform cultures from within (Yoder 1996a: 66-77; 1994e: 359-373; cf. Miller 2001: 243-256).

So far, this section has tried to survey the contours of Yoder's social ethics from its perspectives on orthodoxy, kingdom orientedness, minority (Diaspora) practice, contextuality and theologically transformational development of society. These issues, among other things, can commend, promote and substantiate Yoder's Christocentric vision for social ethics within the crisis-ridden context of the SCS.

Yoder's (Barthian) orthodoxy permits believers' conscientious participation as well as conscientious objection in social affairs. Within his ethical vision, believers' social critiques find their authority and promise in their *kerygma* of the lordship of Jesus Christ over the Powers. Yoder's Christocentric poem, 'But we do see Jesus, revealing the grace of God by tasting death for everyone' also seeks Kingdom oriented ethical reflections and practices from believers. Its vision for Kingdom ethics is biblically ecumenical in its foundation and orientations. Yoder reflects on the ministry of the whole people of God as the true meaning of the Pauline phrase 'the fulness of Christ'. These issues *inter alia*, offer Yoder with Christological mandate to argue that Christocentric ethics is in essence, social. Christocentric believers' ethics is about human social interchange. In order to confess him as Christ, Jesus' disciples also embody Christocentric interculturality 'by virtue of their being his disciples' in contexts (Yoder 1996a: 68).

Consequently, Yoder spells out that such ethics calls for a cruciform embodiment as Gospel, by the subordinate disciple of Jesus Christ within a given cultural setting. Yoder's vision yearns for a communal life. It is 'embodied in concrete ecclesial practices' as social witness particularly, in contexts where believers are not in majority. The Yoderian Diaspora visionary practice presents a concrete way of living out true 'Christian catholicity in a world of nations' (cf. Rasmusson 2005, 2002). Its *kerygma* of a Diaspora fulfilment of the Barthian vision craves for a Christocentric trans-community (*glocalized*) ethical witness in contexts. Yoder re-reads, reinterpretes and appropriates the secular term *evangel* to mean original revolution as well. His vision re-presents Christocentric practice of the Gospel as Good News to its host cultures. Yoder's vision for social ethics is radically theological in its quest for a Christocentric

transformational development of the society. His social ethics demands revolutionary ethical reflections and practices from the subordinate believer. It is tied to his scandalous Christology (cf. Nation 2006: 145-188). Yoder's social ethics, as this study argues, is also a restorative vision.

Given all these observations and submissions, the following questions become necessary: what can we learn from these discussions? Would our inductions also justify this painstaking enterprise of trying to promote Yoder's vision for (Christian) social ethics and commend it to the context of the SCS? Would an overview of our investigations in this chapter not assist us to respond to these questions in ways that are more meaningful?

4 Overview

Yoder's vision for social ethics is tied to his scandalous Christology. Yoder also re-presents trans-community communication of the Gospel as true social ethics of the pre-Constantinian Church. He retrieves Scripture-based Christological resources as warrant for looping back to pre-Constantinian catholicity, in his vision for interculturality. Yoder's vision for a barrier bridging community relies more on Scripture. It re-interprets the calling to witness to the *other* as a constitutive component of the identity of the Servant *ekklesia*. Yoder's (Barthian) orthodoxy, as we have shown, is also rooted in the Jewishness of early Christianity.

Consequently, the hermeneutical challenges of Yoder's vision for trans-community embodiment of the Gospel are not exclusively Christian. They even transcend religious and moral choices. Yoder's social ethics is mostly defined by its Christocentric and *inclusive* vision of peoplehood. It is dauntless in its proclamation of Yoder's rhetorical poem, *But we do see Jesus, revealing the grace of God by tasting death for every one* (cf. Heb. 28-9). Yoder's ethical vision for the subordinate Church is also persuasive that believers' Christocentric social ethics is Gospel proclamation (cf. Yoder 1984).

Given such inductions, one wonders if they cannot be combined to substantiate the central *thesis* of this study for the SCS, which is that Yoder's social ethics can accord the SCS a more plausible and feasible device to *re-vision* and rescue the church's ecclesiological identity. The

ecclesiological identity of the SCS is often plagued with the menace of the *pseudo*-ecclesial visions of the Enlightenment-based theological mission ethics.

In his explication on *Body Politics*, Yoder (1992a: 34-41) also calls for believers' interculturality to transcend the Enlightenment-based quest for an inclusive equal dignity of human beings. The Enlightenment-based vision sustains the Constantinian ethical shift from the New Testament ethics of the subordinate Church. This watershed continues to impact on the reflections and practices the Church. According to Yoder, 'the New Testament has its own grounds for its own egalitarian witness, differently shaped from that of the Enlightenment....The original Christian equality message, to sum up, was rooted in the work of Christ....It was integrally part of the very definition of the meaning of the cross....' (Yoder 1992a: 40). As far as Yoder is concerned, this is an ethical detour, which is rooted in Constantinianism. Constantinian ethics displaced the substantive vision for Christocentric ethical practices of the New Testament Church. Simply put, most of the Enlightenment-based theological visions sustained this detour without significant critique.

For Yoder, such a detour is very apparent in his ethical approach to the burning issue of the dignity of human beings by the contemporary Church. Yoder's ethical vision is interested in the question of believers' concept, interpretation, and disposition towards the otherness in the differently *other* (person). He expects contemporary churches to embody what the Church has always said about the meaning and implication of the gracious Christ-event in believers' ethical witness of the Gospel in contexts. Yoder is of the view that from inception, the Christian *kerygma* is also visible in concrete bodily politicking for Jesus Christ.

From a similar perspective, in *The Fullness of Christ*, Yoder also argues against 'mono-pastoral' ministry. In his words, 'there is no intrinsic reason why shared ministry should be less realistic or more idealistic than the mono-pastoral form' (Yoder 1987: 102). Yoder desires that all God's people participate in the ethical embodiment of the Gospel as social ethics among the nations. Yoder's ethical vision is rooted in biblical (historical) Christology. This enables him to re-interpret the Pauline phrase *fulnness of Christ*, to mean a ministry of the whole people of God as well. As far as his ethical vision is concerned, everyone in the corpus has a role to play or a service to render to the body. She or he is graciously favoured with an indispensable gifting of

the Holy Spirit. Everyone is permitted to contribute in the embodied life and ministry of the Kingdom-centred assembly for moral deliberation and discernment (Yoder 1997b: 33).

Yoder's ethical vision is Christocentric. Thus, it re-presents 'body politics' as a true reflection and practice of the fulness of Christ, in the pre-Constantinian catholicity. It seeks to restore *ministerium* ethics in the subordinate Church; it is biblically ecumenical in its foundation and orientations. Yoder's vision for an inclusive practice as earlier observed is dauntless in its rhetorical proclamation that believers' Christocentric social ethics is Gospel proclamation in itself (cf. Yoder 1984). He reflects on social witness as an indispensable political task of the Church. Yoder's vision for a restorative social ethics calls for an embodied social witness of the subordinate believer as true witness of the Gospel. His restorative vision for social ethics is a multifaceted, often *ad hoc* and spontaneous, experimental Christocentric project: it thirsts for a theologically minded development of societies.

With these reflections, it became necessary to discuss Yoder's multi-faceted social ethics in the light of its 'orthodoxy,' 'Kingdom orientedness,' 'minority (Diaspora) stance,' 'contextuality,' and 'theological transformation and development of society. We noted that these perspectives can *inter alia*, promote, commend and substantiate Yoder's vision for social ethics to the SCS. The SCS is a Reformed Church. From its foundation, as interpreted and espoused particularly by John Calvin, among other Reformed theologians, social witness is fundamental in the theology and witness of a true Reformed Church. We reflected on this point in the second chapter of this study. Calvin also articulated and espoused his theological thoughts in the light of *sola scriptura civitate interpretata* (Scripture alone as interpreted within the context of the city).

For instance, Calvin in his letter to Nicholas Zerkinden on 21 February 1556 also exclaimed, 'Life is not dearer to me than the holy bond to which is annexed the public welfare of our city!' (in Wallace 1988: 29). Despite his misgivings, Calvin was very much concerned with Christian social witness. We have also shown in this study that Dirk Smit further sustained this position. Smit argues that Calvin's work as a social reformer was also based on such a symbiotic conviction. In his view, there is no way of understanding Calvin's thought and theology without taking into account the historical context of the Diaspora, the material and spiritual conditions of the congregation. Calvin's views on God's gracious election, God's providential care and God's

covenantal faithfulness as well as his work as a social reformer reflect the contextual realities in the Genevan city of his time (cf. Smit 2006b: 38; 2005c: 367).

For Smit, one can hardly accomplish a fair interpretation of Calvin's life and work without reference to his view on the contextual challenges, crisis of public life and social realities of the city. Smit's view often agrees with many Yoderian reflections. This symbiosis in the views of Yoder and Smit seems to arise from the apparent Barthian influence in their theological positions. For instance, both theologians expect the Church to be actively and responsibly involved in social witness. Yoder and Smit reflect on incarnated Christology as a more significant demonstration of the gracious Christ-event in the Bible. Both theologians show a firm grip of the history of Christianity. In addition, Carter remarks that Yoder was a thinker who was steeped in the writings of the Church fathers (and mothers). Yoder upheld the creed and historic orthodoxy with meaningful respect (Carter 2001: 17). Smit, like some other theologians, is also orthodox. Unlike Yoder, he theologizes from African especially, a South African Reformed and ecumenical perspective. Yoder writes from a western (Mennonite) ecumenical point view. Nevertheless, both theologians engage in a Diaspora pursuit of the Barthian vision as an orthodox practice.

Yoder's orthodoxy pleads for believers' conscientious participation as well as conscientious objection in social affairs. He wants the Church to take more seriously, what it has always said about Jesus as the Word of the Father, as true God and true man (cf. Yoder 2002: 11-17; 1994d: 102). Yoder's vision for social ethics draws from the ethical political witness of the biblical Jesus to re-present a distinctively biblical (ecumenical Kingdom oriented) ethics for the subordinate Church. Yoder re-presents a Christocentric ministry of the whole *laos* of God as true meaning of the Pauline phrase 'the fulness of Christ'. Yoder's Christocentric evangel also welcomes meaningful participation of unbelievers and other believers in its embodiment of the *missio Dei* among the nations. These issues *inter alia*, accord him a Christological warrant to retort that Christian ethics is in essence, social.

Yoder also re-presents a distinctive visionary socio-ethical practice, which shifts emphasis from nationalism or ecclesiocentrism to Christocentricity. His vision for social ethics calls for a cruciform embodiment by the subordinate disciple of Jesus Christ. Consequently, we reason that it could be from this perspective that Stanly Hauerwas also argues that:

Prior to Yoder the subject of Christian ethics in America was America. *The Politics of Jesus* helps us as believers to relocate our lives in the catholic faith. Yoder helps us to retrieve resources from liberal Protestantism in order to assist believers to rediscover meaningful ways to serve our non-Christian brothers and sisters by being unwavering in our commitment to the politics of Jesus'

(Hauerwas 2000: 136 [Our paraphrase])

Yoder has articulated and espoused a distinctively restorative ethical vision for the subordinate Church. His peculiar vision strives to live out and restore a meaningful catholicity in contexts where believers in Christ are not in the majority. Unlike the Constantinian vision, which coerces majority membership, it is a minority practice. Yoder's unique vision for social ethics adopts an unpopular stance (cf. Yoder 1997a: 40). His reflexive vision for 'middle axiom' permits believers' conscientious and conscious objection to evil in social witness. His ethical vision proclaims doxological, sacrificial, conscientious and conscious subjection of the subordinate believer to the political ethics of Jesus Christ. One can also argue that it could be in this spirit that Stassen (1996b) reasons that conscious withdrawal from and participation in (social) transformation does not mean inconsistency. To quote him:

The selective practices of...*withdrawing* from...*and participating in transforming* a complacent church or polluting corporation are not signs of inconsistency. More likely they are signs of having clear ethical norms, and discerning how to relate with different dimensions of culture in a way consistent with those norms. This is a point we have learned more clearly from John Howard Yoder.

(Stassen 1996b: 247)

Yoder's multidimensional, occasional and often spontaneous project, as we earlier re-echoed Huebner, is an ongoing experiment in understanding the peace of Christ. Yoder's work is necessarily fragmental and *ad hoc*. It is episodic, exploratory, and experimental (cf. Huebner 2006: 118). Yoder, as we also reasoned with Carter, was a logical and systematic thinker. Yoder emphasized that in Jesus Christ 'everything "systematizes," everything holds together' (Yoder 1994d: 141). In his vision for social ethics, the figure of Christ provides the fulcrum to which all nexus of social witness connect and revolve. The study reflected on these issues in some previous sections of this work. Yoder's vision for social ethics is also a restorative project for Christocentric ecclesial practices.

To summarize, Yoder's vision for a Christocentric social ethics yearns for a communal life. It is embodied in concrete ecclesial practices as social witness particularly, in contexts where believers are not in the majority. Yoder's vision for social ethics is a nonviolent-resistant

Diaspora visionary practice. It craves for a believers' trans-community (*glocalized*) vision for social ethics in contexts. In his earlier projects, Yoder argued that the Christian ethics is for Christians. His Diaspora social ethics also seems to be for contexts where Christians are not in the majority. However, as Fernando Enns and other theologians have pointed out, Yoder also modified his position in his later writings albeit, the axioms of his 'claims remain unchanged throughout' to show that Christian ethics can also apply to non-Christians (cf. Enns 2007: 140).

Yoder's restorative vision for social ethics transcends the walls of his Mennonite tradition as well as Christianity at large. It is a restorative project, which Yoder also presents to 'unbelievers or other believers' (Yoder 1984: 8). Yoder re-reads, re-interprets and appropriates the secular term *evangel* to mean 'original revolution' in order to demonstrate his practice as Good News to its host cultures as well. Yoder's *jesulogical* vision for social ethics is radically Christocentric in its quest for a theological transformational development of the society. It canvasses for revolutionary ethical reflections and practices from the subordinate believer. The Yoderian ethical vision is nonviolent-resistant. Yoder's vision for a Christocentric *jesulogical* practice is also evangelistic in its foundation and orientations. Yoder's visionary practice also adopts a covenantal ethics that is tied to the unique mission ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ. Perhaps a return to Charles Van Engen's work, *The Uniqueness of Christ in Mission Theology* (1996), can shed more light on our understanding of this *jesulogical* ethics.

We focus more on the section, which Van Engen captions, 'Missiological Implications of the "Evangelist" Paradigm'. It tends to summarize his argument that 'Jesus Christ is Lord' is also a Bible-based personal confession of faith, which questions the traditional pluralist, inclusivist, and exclusivist perspectives held by various Christians. The *evangelist's ethics* of Van Engen calls on God's missionary people to embrace the mobilization of the Holy Spirit, and co-operate with others, in Christ's mission. Van Engen's project is a Christocentric vision which is 'culturally pluralist, ecclesiologically inclusivist, and faith-particularist' (Van Engen 1996: 169). From his Christological and distinctively evangelistic perspective, Van Engen espouses the following *thesis* to buttress his point:

- Jesus Christ is Lord as 'faith particularist'. In the evangelist paradigm, confession of Jesus as Lord involves a personal relationship with the living Christ. Such relationship embraces all of life with all its contradictions. The evangelist paradigm questions institutional structures of all churches. 'The evangelist paradigm also calls

into question the inclusivist perspective that the cosmic Christ-event is salvific for all persons regardless of their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And it questions the pluralist' relativistic reduction of the confession to Jesus being only "a Christ" among many' (Van Engen 1996: 183). Jesus is the Lord who also calls for continuing conversion and transformation of all who confess his name.

- Jesus Christ is Lord as 'culturally pluralist'. The evangelist is concerned about how humankind can live together in peace and justice especially in the midst of increasing difficult clashes between conflicting allegiances. '[N]ot all so-called non-Christian culture is sinful....But neither is it all relative....For all is brought together under the lordship of Christ' neither are all humankind ontologically determined to be included in Christ's salvation against their will....' (Van Engen 1996: 184-185).
- Jesus Christ is Lord as 'ecclesiological inclusivist'. The evangelist is conscious of the biblical fact that 'there is always room for one more sinner. But this also means....that the church of which Christ is the head is called to proclaim that Jesus is the Lord of all humanity, not just "a christ" for the Christians' (Van Engen 1996: 186).

Van Engen, like Yoder, considers this world-encountering church as broad as all humanity (pluralist), as accepting as Christ's cosmic lordship (inclusivistic), and as incorporating and gathering as Christ's disciples (exclusivistic). It is still the Church of Jesus Christ. According to Van Engen:

Ultimately, *believers'* conviction, reflection and proclamation involve only a restatement of the mystery of the gospel for all people, a mystery that "for ages past was kept hidden in God....*whose* intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom should be made known....in Christ Jesus our Lord.... If Paul and the early church should so emphatically state such a conviction....we can feel confident in doing so as well.

(Van Engen 1996: 187[Our italics])

Van Engen as Yoder also emphasize the need for social realization of this confession, as a plausible and feasible business of the Church. Both theologians seem to share the persuasion that believers must be bold to confess this conviction even in contemporary cultures and faith enterprises (cf. Yoder 1994f). Yoder and Van Engen respect such social realization as a mystery, which the visible Church realizes through the merits of the Christ-event. Grounded in Christology, the Church's social witness is guided and sustained by the Holy Spirit. This mysterious business is a theological mandate as it also suggests a sociological given to the empirical Church. The visible Church, Yoder reminds us, is composed of human beings whose primary business is the realization of the *missio Dei* within historical contexts. Like Yoder, Van Engen further calls on believers to appropriate this grace with bold humility or humble boldness. Consequently, this study considers human (invited) participation in God's mission as an aspect of God's sovereign and surprising move to give humanity a voice in shaping their destiny.

For these two theologians, Christ's lordship is not only over the Christian Church but also over the entire world. We hinted in Chapter 3 that Van Engen also speaks of Ecumenical Christology. Yoder, like Van Engen, also appeals to Hendrikus Berkhof in his exegetical work on Christ and the Powers. However, Van Engen is less explicit on whether his practice is suggested to all believers. In contrast, Yoder is unequivocal that his practice is for joyous, sacrificially conscientious and consciously subordinates of Jesus Christ. Yoder's practice is biblically Christocentric. The Apostle Paul also encourages believers to fulfil this joy, which inspired Jesus to embrace the shameful death on the cross with gladness, as the Bible tells us in Phil. 2: 1-11. To such believers in Jesus Christ, the political ethics of the biblical Jesus is a lived, living and liveable reality at all times. Yoder's ethical vision is a Christocentric Diaspora practice, which also seeks to restore *jesuological Ezi Ndu* or *shalom* back to society.

In conclusion, Yoder's vision for social ethics is tied to his vision for Christology. This act can inspire believers to a faithful and sacrificial proclamation of the lordship of Christ over the Powers. Such believers would rather accept innocent suffering than compromise their faith in Jesus Christ. Yoder's Christocentric vision for social ethics also enables committed witness to persevere beyond repressive tolerance. It exists as a ministry of remembrance and for the renewal of the Church with the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ. When re-interpreted and translated as historical phenomenon, Christian ministry's practice of remembrance is, at heart, a biblical Christological task. In Yoder's vision, Christocentric believers' social ethics is rooted in a scandalous (Barthian) Christology.

From its Barthian perspective, Yoder's vision for social ethics seeks to retrace the sameness of Jesus across all generations. It is a Scripture-based Christocentric vision and ethical practice. Through it, the Church receives a normative revelation of God in the concrete historical reality of the life, death and rising of Jesus. For that reason, Yoder argues that this truth will never change, neither will the Church. All that orthodoxy can debate is the shape of the immutable (cf. Yoder 1997c). Consequently, one can describe Yoder's multifaceted ethical vision for believers as a *Bible-based-Christocentric approach to ecclesial realism*. Yoder's vision for social ethics also calls on believers to engage in active but responsible participation in nation building, social transformation and development. Rooted in the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ,

Yoder's *the evangelist's* social ethics is inherently, faith-particularistic, culturally pluralistic, and ecclesiologically inclusivistic.

Can we not proclaim it an original revolution as well? Perhaps an articulation of its inductions and relevance to the context of the SCS in the next chapter would assist us to answer this question in a more meaningful way. Consequently, we proceed to discuss the inductions from Yoder's ethics in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

INDUCTIONS FROM YODER'S SOCIAL ETHICS: 'ORIGINAL REVOLUTION'

...The figure of Christ is crucial not only in the context of unity....as one whose human ministry is explicable and can be communicated to humans in every culture. Beyond this, the appeal to Christ represents a particular type of confession of truth, a criterion whereby to evaluate faithfulness (and unfaithfulness) within the....community.

This most significant impact of the appeal to Christ was *primarily*....within the.... *nations*. This development *is* rooted in the impact of Karl Barth, renewing all theological disciplines by concentration upon the claims of Christ.

(Yoder 1971b: 126 cf. 1994e: 183[Our italics])

....We hold that some useful resources from Yoder's Christocentric vision for believers' socio-ethical engagements can promote and commend the social witness of the SCS to contemporary Nigerians. Yoder's vision for social ethics will strive to transform and integrate some meaningful indigenous *religio-cultural* resources into the ecclesial reflections and practices of the church. It is a nonviolent-resistant Diaspora vision in which religion and culture are as inseparable as they are tied to Christology

(Ndukwe 2008)

To confess....also means to embody in ethos, in structures, in practices and policies, in every sphere of life *Ezi Ndu*.

(Koopman 2006a [Our italics])

1 Introduction

From the previous chapter, we learn that Yoder's social ethics is tied to his vision for Christology. This can encourage Christ-believers to engage in faithful and sacrificial proclamation of the lordship of Christ over the Powers. Such believers can accept innocent suffering instead of compromising their faith in Jesus Christ. From its Barthian perspective, Yoder's Christocentric vision seeks to retrace the sameness of Jesus across all generations. Within this Scripture-based Christocentric vision and ethical praxis, the Church receives a normative revelation of God in the concrete historical reality of the life and death and rising of Jesus. This truth will never change, neither will the subordinate Church. Orthodoxy only grapples with the challenges of this unchangeable truth (Yoder 1997c).

We also learnt that one could describe Yoder's multifaceted social ethics as a Bible-based Christocentric approach to ecclesial realism. Yoder's vision for social ethics is a Diaspora practice and it seeks to restore *Ezi Ndu* or *shalom* back to society. This restorative vision further summons believers to engage in active but responsible participation in nation building, social transformation and development. It is rooted in the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ. Yoder's vision for social ethics also reflects an embodied presence and praxis of the evangelist's social ethics: it is faith-particularistic, culturally pluralistic, and ecclesialogically inclusivistic. Yoder's visionary practice binds here and unbinds there in order to evangelize its hosts for the Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, we asked the question: Cannot Nigerian churches, particularly the SCS proclaim Yoder's social ethics as an original revolution as well?

As a *preparatio evangelica* or precursor to the Good News we made a promise; i.e., to articulate the inductions and relevance of Yoder's multifaceted and experimental social ethics for the SCS in the next chapter. We trust that such an exercise will enable us to answer the above question³⁰⁶ more meaningfully. Such an exercise is the project of this chapter.

The next section discusses the basic insights, which one can gain from Yoder's vision for social ethics. Such inductions will include theological reconstruction, re-orientations and re-appropriation in the SCS. These inductions will pave the way for us to examine the promised vision of church renewal from Yoder's project, as we hinted in the third chapter of this study. The study seeks to discuss and promote theological transformational development as the penultimate goal of Yoder's ethical vision, in the section, which follows. In the last section, this research will point out some issues, which can serve as contributions to subsequent academic enterprises.

We shall investigate the lessons that we can learn from Yoder's social ethics in Nigeria, in the next paragraph.

2 Inductions: Theological Reconstruction, Reorientation and Reappropriation

Anyone reading Yoder may not easily deny the fact that this Mennonite theologian challenges humanity with revolutionary theological ideass. As Hauerwas Nation and some other theologians point out, Yoder persuades contemporary believers to ask and seek answers to the same

³⁰⁶ That is, whether Nigerian churches particularly, the SCS cannot also proclaim Yoder's social ethics as an original revolution.

questions they have always posed albeit, from a new perspective (Nation 2006; Hauerwas & Sider 2002). In our age, ecumenism has not only come to stay. Responsible ecumenism also plays determinative roles in Christ-believers' active but responsible participation in nation building, social transformation and development. The challenges of the biblical witness as an orthodox public document, and *kerygma* (proclamation), transcend Christianity. We discussed these issues in the previous chapter. The hermeneutical challenges of Yoder's vision for trans-community communications are not exclusively Christian. They even transcend religious and moral choices. Christ's figure reproduces a peculiar discernible people who seek to order and re-order their social ethics to conform to their Scripture-based convictions in any cultural context and age (Yoder 2003c; 1997a; 1997b, etc.).

Yoder's multidimensional, occasional and (often) *ad hoc* project *inter alia*, seeks to persuade the subordinate Church to embark on theological reconstruction, re-orientation, and re-appropriation. Some of his theological admirers have commented from this perspective. For instance, in his foreword to *The Royal Priesthood*, Richard Mouw acknowledges that Yoder's project persuades mainstream Christianity to take an honest look and retrace its step from 'historical and theological' stereotyping of the Free Church traditions. The Yoderian project we encounter here is itself a full-fledged and coherent reflection on 'the crucial issues of theology'. Yoder presents his views with convincing clarity, which does not emphasize much on 'long-standing satisfactory schemes for mapping out ecclesiological' positions without necessary criticisms. Yoder's approach challenges believers in Christ to rewrite 'the ecumenical agenda' (Yoder 1994e: viii-ix). The Yoderian challenge is a vast subject for discussion. It is centred on the public ministry of the Church. For Yoder, *semper reformanda* is a necessity. The Church has to be delivered from its past failures and idolatries especially, its false ecclesial vision and practices.

However, this study will strive to narrow its inductions to Yoder's rhetoric that historic (biblical) Christology is a ministry to church renewal; that Christological ecclesiology is an ethical proclamation of Christ's lordship among the nations and; that *jesulogical* social ethics is the historic kerygma of the revolutionary Gospel. Such restraints can assist us to substantiate Yoder's Christocentric social ethics to the SCS. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, which has no social ethics without the Christ-event. Believers' Christocentric social ethics bespeaks of the social interchange (interculturality) of Christ-believers as the original proclamation of the *euangelion*, which the biblical Jesus as well as the pre-Constantinian catholicity demonstrated

among the nations. Yoder's (ethical) visionary praxis summons the Church to active and responsible public ministry. It suggests a Diaspora Barthian practice. Fundamentally, Yoder's vision for social ethics is a Christocentric nonviolent-resistant Diaspora practice (cf. Yoder 1971b).

In order to fulfil our promise, this chapter will examine these inductions in relevance to the crisis-ridden context of the SCS.

2.1 Historical Christology as a Ministry for Church Renewal

From this study, it is evident that Yoder's project re-presents Bible-based or historical Christology as a ministry to church renewal. As we showed in the third chapter of this work, Yoder also appeals to the book of Hebrews to argue that the reason for believers' ministry of remembrance is to trace the sameness of Jesus across the generations. According to Yoder in *Historiography as a Ministry to Renewal*; 'the ministry of remembrance, which is the task of the historian, is...at heart a Christological task. Its vocation is to trace the sameness of Jesus across the generations' (Yoder 1997c). Yoder's perspective on historical Christology speaks of a ministry of remembrance. It recaptures the concrete community-based activities of the biblical Jesus and the historical pre-Constantinian Church affirmation of the Gospel for contemporary believers in Christ. Such reflection, Yoder further argues, enables committed witnesses to proclaim their faith with a normative witness to the Christ who never changes.

Thus, when it is interpreted as an historical given, Yoder's biblical Christological vision can inspire believers to engage in faithful and sacrificial proclamation of the lordship of Christ over the Powers. As we have argued, Christ-believers embody the merits of the gracious Christ-event as the primary social witness of the Church. Such a practice can challenge the SCS to give serious attention to contextual challenges without reducing its ministry to a movement 'from Western ethnocentrism to Afrocentricism' (Akper 2006a). Yoder's visionary project is also a Christocentric vision for trans-community (*glocalized*) practice. Consequently, its *glocalized* approach can also assist the Church to engage the perennial pervasive influences and challenges of spiritism/spiritual forces within these local cosmologies, which host the SCS in Nigeria. Fear and consciousness of demons, and demonic forces play crucial roles in human life and practices within these cosmologies.

Such dread and consciousness of demons and demonic forces introduces *pseudo*-spirituality. It often leads many Christians to live in fear and superstition.³⁰⁷ According to Fubara-Manuel:

A Christianity that denies the presence of demons in the world has quite a lot of explaining to do especially in Nigeria and Africa in view of the practical experiences of millions of people, which no other word may better describe than “demonic.”

This, however, is not the case with the way this spirituality is emerging in Nigeria....Many *Christians* think of God and the devil as nearly equal powers at war with each other....There is, therefore, a great emphasis on the techniques of overcoming the devil. And this is often in “power and might” rather than the “Spirit”....

(Fubara-Manuel 2007: 12-13 [Our italics])

Consequently, violence becomes believers’ celebrated approach towards emancipation from the menace of demons and demonic forces in many contemporary Nigerian church traditions. Therefore, Yoder’s reflection on the Christocentric ministry of the Church to the Powers can provide the SCS with a significant framework to engage this state of affairs in *semper reformanda* dialogues. In *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder argues that ensuring her own existence is the Church’s primary task. It is in itself a proclamation of the lordship of Christ to the Powers. The Church does not attack the Powers. It concentrates on not being seduced by them. By its existence, the Church demonstrates that their rebellion has been vanquished (Yoder 1994d: 150; cf. Enns 2007: 124). Yoder’s visionary practice as we have shown is a nonviolent but not non-resistant Diaspora vision. Yoder entrusts his reflexive vision for *moral osmosis* to the merits of the gracious Christ-event. Believers can appropriate the merits of the Christ-event through the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit in order to transform society.

In other words, the Yoderian ethical witness to the Powers constitutes an aspect of its proclamation of Christ’s lordship over them. Such affirmation of Christ’s lordship over the *pseudo*-Powers is the original revolutionary Good News. It expresses and affirms the lordship of Jesus Christ in meaningful practical ways. Yoder’s vision also recognizes the biblical fact that Creation is fallen from its divinely created goodness. In their fallenness, these *pseudo*-Powers lure and coerce sovereignty. This is why Christ’s universal lordship should be witnessed to them. Despite their fallenness, the Powers continue to discharge their function. In their *pseudo*-ethics, they *inter alia*, strive to regularize all visible reality. Even in their fallen and rebellious state, the

³⁰⁷ Fubara-Manuel (2007) argues that such spirituality would have given Nigerian Christianity an advantage over what goes on in many other parts of the world. It promises a better grip on both the biblical worldview and the experiences of many people in different parts of the world.

working of the Powers is not beyond the limits of the redemptive-restorative Christ-event (Yoder 1997a: 134-161; cf. 1997a). Yoder engages the *pseudo*-Powers as fallen but redeemable good creations of God. They can be redeemed and restored to serve their divine purpose in Jesus Christ. Consequently, this task of breaking the sovereignty of the Powers through prophetic witness is, for Yoder, a justification of the Church's calling and witness among the nations.

We raised a similar argument in our critique of Oshun's declaration that Nigeria is under the control of 'the principalities and powers'. As defective or demonic Powers and structures, the presence and epiphanies of these fallen Powers constitute an affront to *shalom*. Most defective Powers and structures often legitimize structures, the *status quo* and persons, whose words and actions tend to glorify Satan rather than God. They also malign and backstab others by treating or demeaning their existence and identity to sub-status (cf. Yoder 1996a: 47). Yoder affirms that the Church is called to an embodied affirmation of the lordship of Jesus Christ over the Powers.

From the foregoing, we return to our earlier argument, the need to recognize the term, *ancestor*, as a way of imaging the Christ of the New Testament in Africa.³⁰⁸ As we pointed out, ancestors, continue to share communion with the physically living. Most Nigerians revere their ancestors without offering them worship. We hold that Yoder's ethical witness to the Powers can assist the SCS to adopt an indigenous understanding of the term, ancestor, as a *conceptual Christological title*. Yoder's Christological vision suggests an ecumenical reflection. Further, we re-echoed Rasmusson in the third chapter of this study that Yoder's Christocentric vision can adopt significant socio-cultural resources of its host in order to witness to Jesus Christ among the nations. This adoption occurs without betraying Christological faith (Rasmusson 2005: 111).

Yoder's ecumenical Christology, also proclaims responsible participation of Christ believers in social affairs. It can guide the SCS towards an appreciable approach to integrate the term, ancestor, as a local Christological metaphor into the ecclesial *theoria* and *praxis* of the subordinate Church. Yoder's visionary project will not deify such a metaphor. A Yoderian prophetic witness can incorporate this *religio*-cultural conception as well as the African *palaver*, among others, into the challenges of Babel. The SCS must engage such challenges in continuing transformational dialogues for a meaningful proclamation of the *euangelion* as social ethics

³⁰⁸ We raised this argument in the third chapter of this study.

within its host *religio*-cultures. Yoder's project also seeks to break all *pseudo*-sovereignties without dismissing them as summarily evil in themselves (cf. Yoder 1996b: 138). Yoder also remarks in *The Politics of Jesus* that, 'Their sovereignty must be broken. This is what Jesus did, concretely and historically....' (Yoder 1994d: 144). Yoder's ecumenical vision is also Christocentric. Within his visionary project, only God is Sovereign. From an African perspective, we showed in Chapter 3 that Bediako also holds a related view of God as the only sovereign.

Thus, we reason that it could also be from this perspective that Bediako (2004b) argues that ancestors can become de-sacralized through Christian *kerygma*. Bediako observes that the roots of sacralization are embedded in religion, in most African societies. Indigenous cosmologies conceive of religion as power, and as solution to all problems. In addition, Bediako opines that Christian proclamation must also pay attention to local cosmologies. It can assist believers to re-invigorate the de-sacralizing impact of the Gospel as a living experience in contemporary African societies. In African cosmology, authority belongs to, and derives from the transcendent realm. Consequently, in this regard, Bediako remarks that Christian teaching affirms African tradition. Both traditions seem to agree that authority and political power do not reside with human beings; not even the sacral ruler. To strengthen his thesis, Bediako further inquires:

....Is the ruler not merely 'the one who sit on the throne of the ancestors'... If authority does not reside with the merely human, then why should it be located in the realm of the essential human spirits of the ancestors? In Christian perspective, ancestors become de-sacralized. Authority belongs only to God.

(Bediako 2004b: 103)

Like Yoder, Bediako appeals to historical Christology to argue that in the incarnation, Jesus de-sacralized all *pseudo*-Powers. Jesus also relativized their inherent tendencies to absolutize themselves in a fallen universe. Jesus demonstrated his 'conception of power... by making himself of no account... (Yoder 1971: 13-33)' (Bediako 2004b: 104). Bediako also argues in a Yoderian manner that contemporary Christianity must not remain captive to the categories and methods, which also shaped it in the Western Civilization. Bediako expects contemporary Christian theology to assist believers in Christ, who seek liberation from the bondage of 'Western Civilization' to breathe an air of relief (cf. Bediako 2005: 1; Rasmusson 2005: 111). In Bediako's (2004b:104) words:

If Christianity desacralises, it does not de-spiritualize. The African worldview continues a spiritual world; what changes is not a configuration of forces. The human environment remains the same, but the answers to its puzzles are different....

Moreover, Bediako would not permit contemporary Christianity to dehumanize or de-spiritualize theology. Christian theology is for them an affirmation of Christ's universal lordship, which believers embody in theory and practice among the nations. As we have shown, Yoder's project also mirrors the African *palaver*. Although the *palaver* is not Christocentric as Yoder's, both ethical projects entail and embody a theological vision for ecclesial reflection and practices. Bediako is of the view that contemporary African Christianity is a history in the making. Given these inductions, it becomes more convincing that Philip Jenkins sounds outdated in his view that 'much of Africa reflects the continuing influence of pagan and animist beliefs'. In this book *The New Faces of Christianity* (2006), he writes:

....in the land that would become Nigeria, for instance.....those new converts came from peoples who had earlier been **animists** or ethnoreligionists. For Africa as a whole, the religious shift during the twentieth-century meant that around one third of the continental population transferred its allegiance to native religions or **animism** to different shades of Christianity. Most Africans are....members of the faith, so that a lively **animist presence is always in evidence**.
(Jenkins 2006: 101[Our emphasis])

It is evident in our study that most Africans have incurably religious roots. Despite the so-called *Evil Practices in Africa* (Jenkins 2006: 100), it is doubtful if such unethical quests for God and human existence are more devilish or animistic than nationalistic political ideologies of western cultural imperialism in Africa. The majority of *colonized* Africans experienced such dehumanizing and de-spiritualizing political ideologies under their colonial masters. At least the Nigerian experience under British rule is a clear example. Some Igbo (particularly, Abiriba) names such as *Ndukwe* and *Mgbodichimma* reflect active and responsible trust in the sovereignty of God by these indigenous peoples. These names antedate Christianity in Nigeria. Thus, this study denies that the contemporary dilemma of the SCS has a foundational animistic coloration. It rather suggests that believers' bodily politicking (or body politics) for Jesus Christ constitutes an aspect of the missing link in contemporary Nigerian Christianity. Consequently, the study reiterates its conviction that Yoder's approach to body politics can offer significant meanings to the SCS. It can also compliment and substantiate some aspects of the church's less significant efforts towards nation building, social transformation and development in ways that are more

concrete.³⁰⁹ As a nonviolent-resistant Diaspora ethics, Yoder's Christocentric ethical vision pleads for an embodied proclamation over the Powers, in contexts.

For Yoder and Bediako, an embodied proclamation of the lordship of Christ over the Powers can de-sacralize the Powers without re-echoing the conquerors' rhythm; *deprive them of their pathos* (cf. Rasmusson 2007). Both theologians expect believing-communities of Jesus Christ to engage the pseudo-Powers in *semper reformanda* Christocentric dialogues. According to Yusuf Turaki, 'This Lordship is not to be determined or debated by the world of religion and cultures, it is an historic *revelation* rooted and grounded in the *Christ-event*' (Turaki 2006b: 14 [Our italics]). The *jesulogical* Christ-event provides Yoder's project with a stable platform to engage the *pseudo-Powers* in *semper* transformational and developmental dialogues.

These *pseudo-Powers* are dictatorial; hence, their violence. Even their struggles to serve the purpose of God show little or no effort to recognize and embody the lordship and servanthood of the biblical Jesus Christ as an indispensable ethos in the *missio Dei*. In contrast, as we have shown, Yoder's social vision recognizes the *evangelist's* (cf. Van Engen 1996) social ethics as a primordial way through which Christ transforms cultures from within. It is an *a posteriori* political stance that tells society what it did not know and could not believe before. The evangelist uses the language of prose to tell the society about the calling and destiny of humankind. Being an unpopular member of the Church (the bearer of history), the evangelist does so through practical demonstration of the ethics of Jesus Christ as the ultimate ethical practice, which the larger society is called to reflect (cf. Yoder 1994e: 360-373). Yoder's vision for social ethics is faith-particularistic, ecclesiological-inclusivistic, and culturally pluralistic. Thus, Yoderian subordinate believers in Christ are nonviolent but not non-resistant.

Consequently, such believers also adopt conscientious and conscious objection to evil and to the political ethics of Jesus in their ethical witnesses. Yoder's reflexive vision for a middle axiom speaks of a multifaceted attempt to introduce and promote a distinctive Christocentric social ethics, which non-believers can also accept. In his later works, Yoder modifies his position of Christian ethics to show that non-Christians can also practice his vision for social ethics (Yoder

³⁰⁹ We appraised these efforts of the church in Chapter 2 of this study. They have negative effects on the participation of the SCS in TPUHC, Aba. These less significant efforts also have negative impact on the Synod's involvement in programs and projects that seek to counter or assuage the pains of people living with the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Nigeria.

1984: 8; cf. Enns 2007: 140). We reflected on these issues in the previous chapter of this study. Yoder's suggestive vision for a middle axiom does not emphasize abstraction, universalism, and speculative principles. His ethical vision pleads for believers' active Christocentric participation in *glocalized* social affairs. Its position on middle axiom also permits meaningful communication of Christian social critique as an aspect of believers' ethical responsibility. For a Yoderian subordinate believer of Christ, love for the neighbour especially, the adversary is not an imitation of Christ *per se*; Yoder expects the believer to embody the *jesuological* political ethics of the biblical Jesus in her or his normal daily life. Such a believer shows love to the neighbour because love is God's attribute (Yoder 1997a: 33; 1985: 21; 43; 1971b: 50-51). Simply put, theology is about God's love. Therefore, we affirm that the culture of theology entails a practical love, which the blind can see; the deaf can hear; and to which the lame can walk. The sovereign God, the Bible reminds us, loves practically (John 3: 16; Rom 5: 8, 1 John 3).

Consequently, the Yoderian subordinate believers in Christ would rather accept innocent suffering than compromise their faith in Jesus. Within this Scripture-based Christocentric vision and ethical praxis, the Church receives a normative revelation of God in the concrete historical reality of the life and death and rising of Jesus. In celebrating the Christian faith, biblical history makes it clear that what believers recount is not their strength in the face of suffering. They also draw strength from the Christocentric life and activities of their predecessors (perhaps, believing ancestors). Believers remember Jesus Christ and the 'cloud of witnesses' in their struggles to complete the 'race marked out for us' with success (Heb. 12). Yoder also reflects on the historical merits of the gracious Christ-event as a renewing ministry of remembrance.

It is significant to note that Verhey also comments on Yoder's ethics of remembrance as a necessary approach to juxtapose human life with the story of Jesus. According to him:

Against Constantinianism, Yoder set the story of Jesus, and particularly the story of his obedient "powerlessness" on the cross. Yoder did ethics "by way of reminder" too. He is right to set the stories of our lives alongside the story of Jesus so that our lives may be judged and made new by the story of Jesus. And he is right about this: our common life is still possessed by demons that will not be exorcised by violence.

(Verhey 2001: 463)

We also reflected on Verhey's remarks in the third chapter of this dissertation.

For Verhey, the memory of Jesus judges and renews humanity. The common life of humanity is possessed by demons, which violence cannot exorcise. We also noted this point in Chapter 4 of this study. Verhey extols Yoder's ministry for ethical reflection as a meaningful approach in juxtaposing human life with Jesus' story. Yoder's visionary approach, as this study reasons, can become meaningful in the sordid context of the SCS. Verhey esteems Yoder's Christocentricity as indispensable for Christ-believers' ethical reflection and practices (Verhey 2001: 460-463). Yoder's vision for social ethics suggests a Diaspora pursuit of the Barthian project and calls on subordinate believers of Christ to 'reflect a cruciform life in their daily engagements' (cf. McFague 2000).

With these insights, we recommend McFague's Christocentric reflection on cruciform lifestyle to the SCS. It can serve as an entry point to retrieve her Christ-centered ecological challenge, which constitute some distressing effects of the said legacies on the consumer-oriented polity and politics of Nigeria as we introduced in the previous chapter. We consider that her Christological reflections can also inspire the SCS to assume a leading role in checking the consumerist lifestyles of Nigerians within its vicinity. McFague engages this project from an incarnational (historical) Christology. Again, Yoder appeals to historical Christology for his visionary projects.

McFague also speaks of 'incarnational Christology' as that, which calls for embodiment. She seeks believers' social witness to reflect an embodied visionary practice of Christocentric kingdom of God as a social reality. McFague challenges Christians to rethink, see and engage in holistic reformation and preservation of society; it also reflects a necessary aspect of contemporary Christian discipleship. In this project, McFague seeks an ecological economic worldview of human existence and practices. In her perspective, this worldview represents a different notion of abundant life as the promise of a new life in God for all. She claims that:

It is a vision of the world opposed to an individualistic, merit-centered view of human life with insiders and outsiders, haves and have nots. It is just as clearly on the side of a community-oriented, egalitarian view of human life..... For Jesus, the Kingdom of God was epitomized by every one being invited to the table; the Kingdom is known by radical equality at the level of bodily needs.

(McFague 2000: 172-173)

For McFague, ecological economic worldview is a different way of living in the world. In her vision, individuals live in sustainable concrete communities with just distribution of necessities to all. Ecological economic worldview teaches self-restraint, self-control, and self-denial among other things, as meaningful ethos of Christians. Ecological economic worldview insists that the way to this new life involves pain and sacrifice. Ecological prophetic witness would not spare persons, groups, structures that deprive others of their rights to flourish as dignified creations of God. This worldview is opposed to individualism. McFague expects believers to re-interpret abundant life in ways that can also show that:

In the Christ-event we see more clearly what is.... God is with us, with all of us in our struggle to give God glory by working for the fulfilment of all creatures. We are not alone as we seek to grow into the image of God – into the image we see of Christ....to aiding and serving the afflicted and the poor.

(McFague 2000: 180)

McFague also seeks an embodied witness of the merits of the gracious Christ-event as Good News in ecological practice. Embodied historical Christology is social ethics as Gospel. Consequently, McFague's approach in this project strengthens Yoder's vision for ethical projects.

As this study shows, the Yoderian vision proclaims Christocentric social ethics as Gospel. Its visionary Kingdom *kerygma* also seeks to realize the New Testament concept of biblical egalitarianism. Yoder reflects on the Enlightenment-based approach as a detour from the biblical vision (cf. Yoder 1987). Thus, one can argue that Yoder and McFague approach social transformation and development from historical Christological perspectives. Even in their differing theological tilt, Yoder and McFague both call on Christian theologians to demystify theology. They want every human being to embody Christology in their normal daily lives. Like McFague, Yoder also summons Christians to demonstrate restored and dignified *Ezi Ndu* (wholeness) as true social ethics of the subordinate Church of Jesus Christ.

Yoder, unlike McFague, is not a feminist theologian. However, his vision for Christocentric ecumenical witness of the Kingdom ethics will not dismiss McFague choice to be a feminist theologian. His vision for a Christocentric trans-community witness of the *missio Dei* permits believers to co-operate with the differently *other* as a partner-in-progress. Yoder also holds that when substantially and historically understood, Christian table fellowship is a paradigmatic way

of inviting the outsider to participate in the Kingdom realization. Yoder's vision for believers' practice of the Eucharist suggests a Christocentric practice of 'epistemological privilege of the oppressed or cooperation or equal opportunity or socialism' (Yoder 1997b: 32). Consequently, Yoder's reflection on the table fellowship (the Eucharist) can also provide the SCS with a more stable platform to extend its social witness to the *pseudo*-ideological political economy of Nigeria.³¹⁰ For Yoder, the *euangelion* of Christ also stresses change in the concept and practices of economic and social relations. Thus, the Church does not need another social ethic. When it is adequately embodied, the Church's life and witness are, in essence, social. The Church's embodied confession of faith affirms the *nonviolent* Good News of Jesus Christ as the original revolutionary Gospel, which the human Jesus and his early believers proclaimed among the nations (Yoder 1997b; 1992a; 1971b; cf. Hauerwas 1989).

Consequently, the observations so far made in this section make it more arguable that Yoder's historical Christology can inspire the SCS to meaningful social engagement. Yoder's vision for social practice suggests a Diaspora Barthian stance. Thus, his vision can persuade the church to engage its challenging contextual realities from the perspective of a Christocentric *glocalized* (trans-community) *jesuslogical* ethics. The perennial (especially, the Scottish) legacies of the Enlightenment-based *pseudo*-ethics make it unavoidable for the SCS to reflect on its Christological vision from historical perspective. With its status as the pacesetter Synod in The PCN, the church needs to 'evolve new identity that is representative of the kingdom of God.' The sordid context of the SCS may continue to reflect the Nigerian nation as 'hell or heavenly hell' if the church plays down on the seriousness of this appeal to embrace the sovereign move to recover its life and witness as 'a reconciling agent in God's world' (Onwunta & Hendriks 2006). Many people within its vicinity look up to the Church to demonstrate its embodied witness as a 'people of the way' (Rasmussen 1993). Smit (2006b) reminds Reformed Churches that contextuality is the motive for qualifying their ecclesial identity with the epithet *reformed*. In his reflection, a Reformed creed is a statement, which a Christian community formulates spontaneously and publicly within a given geographical context (cf. Smit 2006b: 159).

Given this insight from Smit, it becomes more convincing that Yoder's vision for social ethics is significant for the ethical witness of Christ in Nigeria. It can challenge Nigerian Reformed

³¹⁰ In Chapter 2, we discussed such *pseudo*-political ideologies to include *inter alia*, the success culture and demonic capitalist ideologies.

churches especially, the SCS to initiate reconciliatory moves that can heal the wounds of segregation and restore ethical ecumenical witness of the Church within the Nigerian public sphere. Akper (2006a) has also remarked on the segregational witnesses of churches in Nigeria:

While there are church-based programs and projects such as community-based....programmes and other social services; research institutes such as the Institute for Church and Society, among others, there have not been, especially in the Nigerian theological circles, discussions about the theological basis for the Church as a public to engage in such activities as it is the case in South Africa and elsewhere in the West.

(Akper 2006a: 3)

Akper points out that the Church in Nigeria seems to be playing its role independent of the Society and the academia:

There is yet to be a clearly identifiable three interrelated publics described in the works of David Tracy, Nico Koopman and other public theologians. What is responsible for this? How can a move toward an interrelated three publics be facilitated, especially for the purpose of nation building, *social transformation* and development in Nigeria?

(Akper 2006a: 1[Our italics])

The questions of human dignity, social transformation and development still receive ephemeral attentions from churches in Nigeria, especially the Reformed churches, with particular reference to The PCN in general and more specifically within the SCS.

This study holds that resources from Yoder's Christocentric ecclesial praxis can assist the SCS in particular, to respond to Akper's concern, among others, more concretely. The Church's *kerygma* of social ethics should highlight its embodied witness as original revolutionary *euangelion* among the nations. According to the P&P (Section G-03.0102, G-01.0103 and G-03.0501):

God was in Christ, who announced Good News to the poor, proclaimed release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, let the broken victims go free, and proclaimed the year of the Lords favour... God's redeeming and reconciling activity in the world continues through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, who confronts individuals and societies with Christ's lordship of life and calls them to repentance and to obedience to the will of God... The incarnation of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ gives to the Church not only its mission but also its understanding of membership.

We hope to see such reflections as we discuss (Yoder's) Christological ecclesiology as social ethics for the nations from the next paragraph.

2.2 Christological Ecclesiology as Social Ethics for the Nations

In the Yoderian vision for ecclesiology, historical Christology determines the shape and approach to ecclesial reflections and practices. Yoder's Christological ecclesiology strives to rediscover and re-present the portrait of Jesus Christ as the central figure for its ecclesial reflections and engagements. For instance, Yoder in *The Original Revolution*; and *The Royal Priesthood* also appeals to the Lund 1952 Faith and Order conferences of the WCC to see the most significant impact of 'the appeal to Christ' as first and foremost, a criterion for determining faithfulness and unfaithfulness within the Church. In his opinion:

...the figure of Christ is crucial not only in the context of unity, as a more promising basis of common confession than the comparison of traditional creeds would be, and not only for mission, as one whose human ministry is explicable and can be communicated to humans in every culture. Beyond this, the appeal to Christ represents a particular type of confession of truth, a criterion whereby to evaluate faithfulness (and unfaithfulness) within the Christian community. This most significant impact of the appeal to Christ was *primarily*, that of a criterion for judgment within the *nations*. This development *is* rooted in the impact of Karl Barth, renewing all theological disciplines by concentration upon the claims of Christ.
(Yoder 1971b: 126 cf. 1994e: 183[Our italics])

Yoder's Christocentric vision for ecclesiology also is a restorative vision. Yoder envisions ecclesiology as an embodied ecclesial practice. It is articulated for the realization of the kingdom of God within historical contexts. Yoder's vision for ecclesiology also presents its embodied affirmation of Christ's lordship over an ecclesial polity and politics as a sacrificial practice. Yoder summons believers to a doxological, conscientious and conscious subordination to an embodied affirmation of the lordship of Jesus Christ over the Church. As far as Yoder's ecclesial vision is concerned, ecclesiology is ethics because sacrament is a social process through which Christ transforms cultures. Sacramental expression binds believers into the body of Christ experientially. Sacrament reinforces and rebinds the believing community to its centre (cf. Charry 2005: 215). Consequently, Yoder re-interprets and re-presents Christian discipleship as an indispensable political responsibility of the subordinate believer in Jesus Christ.

Again, we stress that Yoder's ecclesiology is Barthian in its foundation and orientations. Historical Christology accords it the warrant for the pursuit and demonstration of the Kingdom as a socially realizable project of the Church within historical contexts especially, where believers are in minority (cf. Yoder 1997b). Yoder's Christocentric Kingdom vision constitutes the heart of his practice-based Free Church ecclesiology. It is suggestive of a *no Kingdom*

without a King ecclesial vision. Yoder's Kingdom vision emphasizes Christocentricity. Corporate discernment and witness as well as ecclesial identity and spirituality constitute its distinctive marks (or otherness) of a faithfully subordinate Church of Jesus Christ. It is an historical Christological ecclesiology. We have already discussed these issues in Chapter 4.

The peculiarity (otherness) of Yoder's Christocentric-Kingdom reflection can offer the SCS a more stable (restorative) ecclesiological vision. Its Christocentric vision for ecclesial polity and politics can provide the church with a way forward beyond its perennial pendulum-like ecclesial identity. Some reflections of Yoder's ecclesiology can inspire the SCS to regard the figure of Jesus Christ as central in its sustained attempt to *re-vision* the church's Constantinian-Docetic-faced ecclesiologies. Yoder's restorative (reflexive) vision for a middle axiom will strive to recover and integrate meaningful resources from the Constantinian-Docetic based legacies to witness Jesus Christ within its host cultures. It is nonviolent-resistant; hence, it will not dismiss these *pseudo*-legacies as summarily evil. More significantly, Yoder's ecclesiological vision preaches, sustains and thrives in voluntary Christian discipleship. As a Diaspora ecclesial vision, it also re-presents evangelization as an indispensable identity and spirituality of the Church. The biblical Jesus Christ is its paradigm while the *other* is a partner in progress in the *missio Dei*. Such (differently) *other* is allowed to express her/his right/ or freedom of choice and conscience as a Christocentric given. Yoder's vision does not accept lazy pluralism. Its vision for ecclesiology calls on the subordinate *ekklesia* to demonstrate a Christocentric (inclusive) Kingdom witness of Jesus Christ as a feasible social given to the empirical Church. Yoder's ecclesiological vision focuses more on Christocentric Kingdom political ethics.

In other words, Yoder's vision for ecclesiology does not emphasize nationalist or ethnocentric political ideologies. It involves a biblically envisioned ecumenical ministry of a subordinate Church of Jesus Christ. Thus, its Christocentric Kingdom vision can offer the SCS a necessary relief from some distressing Scottish legacies in The PCN. In their lamentation of its adverse effects on the polity and politics of the church, Onwunta and Hendriks (2006) reflect on *ethnocentrism* as a DNA of the ecclesiological identity of The PCN. In their words:

Indeed ethnocentrism which is a twin of racism has since been a part of the distorted ecclesiological identity (DNA) of the PCN. Its effect is so pervasive and corrosive that there is now a clear correlation between it and lack of progress even in the nation. Yet, despite its painful and overwhelming impact on our ecclesiological polity, "we seldom call it by its name in our

meetings except to justify a decision or certain course of action which is itself ethnic in nature” (Udoh 1988: 272)

(Onwunta & Hendriks 2006:235)

Therefore, Yoder’s Christocentric Kingdom vision can also assist the SCS to engage ethnocentrism in *semper refomanda* dialogues. His vision for Christ’s figure reproduces a discernible people who are prepared to order their lives in accordance with their Scripture-based convictions (Yoder 2003c). It is reflexive of a Diaspora Barthian ecclesial vision. Moreso, Yoder accepts the view that the ecumenical movement also persuades Christians to think of the Church in other places. His model of ecumenical ministry envisions a distinctively visible church. Such a church can *inter alia*, initiate and responsibly co-operate with all necessary movements that seek the restoration of *shalom* in the public sphere. It holds a shared vision, which is also conscious of the fact that a community needs to recognize its life support systems as well as their influence and influential factors (cf. Ukaga & Maser 2004). Yoder’s restorative vision for ecumenical ministry of the Church is also evangelical and catholic in its foundation and orientations.

Corporate discernment and forgiveness are central to its vision and message of hope for *shalom* in the society. Yoder’s ecclesiology stresses peoplehood as an indispensable identity and spirituality of the subordinate Church, which takes the *missio Dei* as exemplified by Jesus Christ, serious. This restorative vision also underscores discipline (chastisement) as a meaningful practice of the *Servant-ekklesia*. As a Christocentric ecclesiology, Yoder’s ecclesial vision reflects on the biblical phrase ‘binding and loosing’ as the authority, which Christ gave the Church to accept or withhold fellowship.

Yoder’s vision of unlimited catholicity would not compromise with heresy or its perpetrators. It will not tolerate uncritical celebration of unfaithful church and/or its traditions in the name of catholicity. Yoder’s vision for Believers’ Church model does not favour an undifferentiated *corpus christianum* (body, or fellowship of Christians) but, in Enns’ words, “‘the covenant fellowship enjoyed with others who have pledged themselves to following the same Lord.’” The final goal is the restoration of an early Christian model of community....’ (Enns 2007a: 113). Yoder’s visionary ecclesiology is nonviolent-resistance. For example, Yoder argues in *The Priestly Kingdom* that, ‘any existing church is not only fallible but in fact, peccable. That is why there needs to be a constant potential for reformation and in more dramatic situations a readiness for the reformation even to be “radical”’ (Yoder 1984: 5). Yoder’s ecumenical ministry is also

reforming. It re-appropriates the Reformed slogan, *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*, to call for continuing reformation of the Church and its traditions. Yoder calls for a faithful Church whose basic concern is to embody and translate the politics of the biblical Jesus Christ as its witness in diverse cultural contexts (Yoder 1994a).

Yoder's call for the *Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Guder 2000) can assist the SCS (the pacesetter Synod of The PCN) to respond to the above-mentioned lamentations of Onwunta and Hendriks (2006). Enns points out that Yoder fixes the limits of his view of the missionary church with an ethics that is freed of paternalism, sacramentalism, and clericalism. His approach highlights an element of Free Church ecclesiology that is also significant for all Reformation churches; hence, it merits a renewed attention. Yoder's progressive (evolving and generous) thought can designate the 'marks of the church' (*notae ecclesiae*) to mean the church's 'marks of mission' (*notae missionis*). Such *notae missionis* are, for Yoder, an understanding of the Church as primarily a community of people who are also concerned about their relationship and conduct as well as the interpretation of mission in terms of the church-world relationship (Enns 2007a: 118-120). Yoder seeks the continuing conversion of the Church; he desires that the subordinate *ekklesia* would adopt the *jesulogical* politics of Jesus to restore *shalom* in the society.

Given this perspective on Yoder's restorative vision, we wish that the appeal of Onwunta and Hendriks for a missional ecclesiology would receive necessary attention in The PCN. The church can *re-vision* its ecclesial polity and politics from the Yoderian historical Christological perspective. The ecclesiological vision of the (magisterial) Reformation eras did not emphasize that God's work in Christ 'not individuals decision for the church's faith, makes the church....If doctrinal assent constitutes the church, it is not clear that the church exists apart from those who believe its faith' (Charry 2005: 202). Thus, Charry's view tends to substantiate Enns' position that Yoder raises a significant issue on Free Church ecclesiology that is relevant to all Reformation churches. Charry and Enns' views also strengthen Mouw's position that Yoder's vision for ecclesiology, in particular, persuades 'those of us who found it easy to marginalize the "free church" tradition' to retrace 'our historical and theological steps' (Yoder 1994e: ix). Yoder inspires us to take an honest look at some questions, which we often fail to consider. Enns further remarks on Yoder: '....His radical critique, along with his ecclesiological and ecumenical alternative, remains a "thorn in the flesh" of every tradition that is at risk of relegating visible Church discipleship to the second or third to consider in systematic theology' (Enns 2007b: 144).

For Yoder's Barthian project, ecclesiology is ethics. Simply put, ecclesiology speaks of a church's affirmation of Christ's universal lordship over its own polity and politics. Yoder's vision for ecclesiology is a Christocentric ecumenical project. This Barthian poem is also the rhythm of Yoder's Diaspora (*jesulological*) pursuit of the Barthian ecclesial vision. Yoder's poem, *But we do see Jesus*, is a Christocentric *jesulological* missional (evangelist's) song. Consequently, its Christocentric consciousness will strive to tame and transform the tides of ethnocentrism into a sweeping missionary movement in The PCN. Yoder's Christocentric vision for ecclesiology is also reforming (evolving). Its altruistic or generous (progressive) hospitality identity and spirituality seek to recover and restore strained, breaking, or broken relationships. Yoder's vision for ecclesiological witness mirrors the African *palaver*, i.e., 'healing, family, and suprafamilial' (Bujo 2003: 66-77). Yoder's ecclesiological vision and the African *palaver* seek to reform and reconstitute the human dignity of persons; both projects seek to promote to us, the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*.

Consequently, Yoder's vision for a reforming ecclesiology can as well inspire the pace-setting SCS to initiate reconciliatory moves with churches such as the Mennonite Church of Nigeria, among others. It can persuade The PCN to recover its waning relationship with these churches. Besides the benefits mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, The PCN-Mennonite relationship also bequeaths The PCN with international and local goodwill. For instance, after thirty-four years experience, a North American Mennonite missionary, Nelda Rhoda Thelin eulogized this relationship in an international mission journal *Common Lot* (2001). She narrates:

My first call came in 1962 from the Presbyterian Church in Nigeria through the Mennonite Board of Missions. I became a midwifery tutor and administered midwifery programs at the *Akahaba Abiriba* Joint Hospital. The women in this... community delivered their babies...alone. As a result, many women ended up in the hospital with delivery complications and dead or "damaged" babies. For me, in that situation, the "greatest need" was to save the lives of mothers and babies...and to provide follow-up health education and family planning services.

I love Nigeria and the Nigerian students and colleagues with whom I worked. But in 1967 when the State of Biafra was formed and the Nigerian government declared war, I packed...and joined the other evacuees...to Ghana.

(Thelin 2001: 17)

For Thelin, The PCN-Mennonite relationship assisted her to respond to the divine invitation for human agents to contribute participatory roles in shaping the destinies of humankind. She also worked in other African countries including Ghana, Zimbabwe and South Africa. As we noted in

Chapter 2, it is significant that this researcher was born in the hospital where Thelin worked and taught. Olo's mother delivered him with the assistance of an indigenous midwife who received professional training from Thelin's ministry.

Furthermore, the first indigenous Administrative Secretary of Akahaba hospital, Chief Otisi also shares a similar view with Thelin. Chief Otisi opines that the manner in which the Mennonite missionaries began and sustained their co-operation with The PCN endeared the missionaries to the hearts of the Abiribas. As we noted in the second chapter, the missionaries did not only attend and participate regularly in The PCN Church Services, they also introduced evening services on the hospital compound, which members of The PCN and able patients attended. According to Chief Otisi, '...the evening Church service at the hospital became a de-facto arm or branch of the PCN Abiriba' (Otisi 2008). From time to time, ministers of The PCN also preached at the hospital church service. The Abiriba community, as we noted Chapter 2, was predominantly Presbyterian.

In a personal oral interview, Chief Otisi explained that the Mennonite missionaries' ethics contributed immensely in restoring a more meaningful co-operation between the churches, and their host Abiriba community. Prior to this time, the conquerors' ethics of The PCN had broken the mutual relationship between the church and its host community (Abiriba). The church violently desecrated shrines, attacked secret societies and forcefully sought to re-integrate mothers of twin children and their offspring into the community. The Christian devotees committed this offence in their missionary activities under the influence of its inherited conquerors' mission ethics. This ill-informed missionary activity wreaked havoc in the relationship of the church with its host community (cf. Ogbu Kalu 1996: 78). As another example of some important fruits of The PCN-Mennonite co-operation at Abiriba, Otisi records that this relationship made it possible for the whole Amogudu-Abiriba community to stay 'off-market' when Elder Kalu Obiwo died in 1969. In contrast to what is obtainable in her surrounding communities, Market Day³¹¹ is observed in Abiriba, even when it falls on a Sunday. Unlike the conquerors' ethics, the missionaries' approach to evangelization (mission) left nobody in doubt about their determination to serve under the ethos of Christian ethics. Their missionary project includes health services, among other things.

³¹¹ In most traditional communities of Africa, this is simply a day for selling and buying goods. No farm work or any other task, which can take one out of the village, is permitted.

The Mennonites were obviously committed to their embodied confession of the church-world distinction. They were deeply involved in developing human beings including the Abiriba community as well.³¹² Consequently, when Chief Otisi assumed office as the first Nigerian Administrative Secretary of the hospital in 1972, he sustained the precedence set by the Mennonite missionaries. Presently, Chief Otisi is retired and was only confirmed a full communicant of The PCN in 2005. Olo got these tips during the said oral interview with Chief Otisi at the latter's residence, Chief Ezema Kalu Otisi's Compound, Okoba Layout, Amogudu Abiriba on 29 December 2006 (between 6.00 a.m and 9.30 a.m).

From these observations on The PCN-Mennonite relationship in Nigeria, one becomes more convinced that Yoder's Christological ecclesiological identity and spirituality sounds feasible and plausible for the SCS. The surrounding context of the church often challenges it with some prophetic lamentations. For instance, the Bible's declaration, 'the harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are [Israel is] not saved' in Jeremiah 8: 20, reflects on the said prophetic challenges to the SCS. Similarly, Achebe's (1960: 27) maxim, 'water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink,' was noted earlier. The SCS, as we have pointed out, is a Reformed Church.

Therefore, this study also supports Smit's arguments that the Reformed tradition does not have a timeless, ahistorical ecclesiology. Within a typology of ecclesiologies, it is certainly possible to situate it somewhere. This claim is one of the obvious implications of the Reformed emphasis on an understanding of the *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*. The Reformed tradition is a faith tradition with enormous liberating potential, which requires continuous liberations from its own failures and idolatries (cf. Smit 2004d; 2005c; 2006b). Its vision for ecclesiology tends to place the Word and the Sacrament in tension. The Reformed vision separates the Word from the Sacrament (cf. Charry 2005: 206). Consequently, the endemic reflections of the *pseudo-Enlightenment*-based ethics in the ecclesial identity of the SCS yearn for *re-visioning*. The life and witnesses of this Nigerian church are often foreign to contemporary indigenes of its host *religio*-cultures. Most of the church's Enlightenment-based legacies suggest a misappropriation

³¹² In addition to these legacies, (Dr) Ude Eke Eni received a scholarship, to study in the United States of America, through Dr Grasse. Dr Ude Eke Eni was one of the first indigenous men who practically worked with the Mennonite missionaries as a junior staff in the Pharmacy of the Akahaba Joint Hospital. He is currently residing in the United States of America. Several attempts to have a telephone interview with him and Dr Grasse did not work out. Olo could not go to meet them in the USA because of financial constraints. He hopes to do so in a post-doctoral research.

of the gracious merits of the Christ-event, i.e., they reflect the *demeaned* theology of grace, as the SCS translates it in contemporary Nigeria.

The gracious Christ-event inaugurates and sustains the Church to translate and contemplate the incarnation in diverse socio-cultural settings. The Church is invited to participate alongside others in God's mission. The life and works of the biblical Jesus Christ constitute the central message of the *missio Dei*, which the SCS as a subordinate church of Jesus Christ must proclaim. Consequently, since the SCS reflects many *pseudo*-visions of the Enlightenment-based ethics in its ecclesiology, the church's polity and politics remain questionable in contemporary Nigeria. The *pseudo*-ecclesiological vision (and practice) of the Enlightenment-based ethics espouses and sustains a shift of ecclesiology from the historical Christology. Thus, the ecclesiological identity of the SCS, as this study shows, reflects what Yoder describes as deceptive typology in his work, *How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned* (1996a). According to Yoder:

A deceptive typology would be one which would be confusing rather than clarifying. It would....therefore constitute the intrusion of bias into telling the story, and a falsifiable limitation of the spectrum of the possible....A typology which is more convincing....than it is true....becomes in the technical sense demonic, a structure which gets in the way of wholeness and understanding rather than serving those goals.

(Yoder 1996a: 47)

In other words, the ecclesiological identity of the SCS looks deceptive; it is confusing. With this understanding, we lean on Smit's above-mentioned arguments to reason that the ecclesiological identity of the SCS also manifests much of the idolatrous practices in contemporary Nigeria. The *ecclesio*-centric, rather than Christocentric ecclesial visionary practice of the SCS also gets in the way of indigenous understanding. It is ambivalent about the way believers should appropriate the gracious benefits of the Christ-event in normal daily lives; it is Constantinian and Docetic faced. Many empirical legacies of this *pseudo*-ecclesiological vision do not emphasize practice-based translation of the biblical witness. This approach is foreign to many adherents of the Church. From their *religio*-cultural background, religious beliefs and practices are embodied in normal daily lives. Most Nigerians would love to believe and struggle to live out the Bible as God's word to them (cf. Udoh 1988; Nkwoka 2000). Significantly, Yoder expects believers to embody their faith in Jesus Christ as a religiosity. For him, the reason for taking the Bible seriously is that the biblical texts do in fact demonstrate fruitful ways of illuminating human moral agenda (cf. Yoder 1996a: 84). Yoder's visionary ecclesiology also seeks to restore and realize the Bible as the charter document for the Church's ethical reflections and practices.

Until the Enlightenment, Mouton notes that Christ believers listened to, interpreted and appropriated the Bible as canon or norm. The Scripture was a lamp to guide their feet in their pathways through ‘everyday needs and challenges, suffering, fears and hopes’. For such believers, the Bible would only be useful if it helps human being to live *coram Deo* or in the presence of God. Believers can appropriate the Bible for comprehension, vision, remembrance and re-enactment. Such praxis constitutes the key to the transformative potential of the biblical narrative. The crust of the transformative potential of the Bible lies in the continuing encounter of the awesome God, with humankind. By hosting (embodying) God’s love and forgiveness in their daily lives, Bible readers are invited to go and do likewise (Mouton 2004). This is a progressive (inclusive) approach, which also agrees with Yoder’s altruistic vision for ecclesial reflections and practices. Yoder’s (Diaspora) Barthian Christological ecclesiology re-presents the subordinate Church as a community for moral deliberation and discernment. In Yoder’s (Christocentric) vision for Diaspora ecclesial practice, moral discernment and forgiveness condition and enable one another in complex ways.

Consequently, we reason that Yoder’s visionary ecclesiology is identifiable with its practice-based biblical realism of ‘the practice of the rule of Christ’ by the Servant-*ekklesia*. A true Yoderian practice of the rule of Christ marks a shift from political theology to theological politics. Yoder’s visionary project entails a distinctive approach to *Biblical Realism* whose methodology we also differentiated from Hauerwas. We reflected on these issues in Chapters 4 and 5.

Yoder’s vision for social practice reflects the *evangelist’s* social ethics: it is faith-particularistic, ecclesialogically inclusive, and culturally pluralistic. Its vision for human social interchange prefigures what Akper (2006b), August (2006a) and Jonker (2006) and other African theologians describe as a *movement from multiculturalism to interculturality*. Yoder’s Kingdom orientedness sustains the vision of early catholicity in its constant affirmation that ecclesiology expresses the Church’s faithful witness to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christocentric ecclesiology is ethics. We also reflected on these issues in the two previous chapters of this research. Yoder’s Christological ecclesiology re-presents the subordinate Church with a viable option for a truly theological transformative approach to the *missio Dei*. Yoder rejects ‘enforced Christianity not only because faith cannot and ought not to be coerced, but also because Christians must never

use lethal force' in their pursuit of God's mission (Schuurman 2007: 16). Yoder's earlier projects were unequivocal that Christian ethics is for Christians.

However, 'while in earlier texts Yoder makes a clear distinction between a Christian and a secular ethics, he modified this in later writings, where he holds that Christian ethics applies to non-Christians. Granted....The axioms of the Yoderian claims remain unchanged' (Enns 2007a: 140). This is crucial for the SCS. According to the P&P (Section G-03.0401), 'The Church is called to undertake this mission even at the risk of losing its life, trusting in God alone as the Author and Giver of life, sharing the Gospel, and doing those deeds in the world that point beyond themselves to the new reality in Christ.' Yoder's enduring vision relies on his (reflexive) vision for *moral osmosis* to build, transform and develop society. Yoder also maintains that his vision is for minority practitioners who wish to live out a significant catholicity among the nations. It is a Christocentric *jesulological* visionary practice, which re-presents believers' Christocentric social ethics as the original revolutionary Gospel proclaimed by Christ and his pre-Constantinian believing communities. We hope that the above-mentioned inductions will become clearer as we explore *jesulological* social ethics as the original revolutionary Gospel in the next paragraph.

2.3 Jesulological Social Ethics as the Original Revolutionary Gospel

We affirm that Yoder's multifaceted, *ad hoc* and often spontaneous experiments on social ethics is tied to his scandalous Christology. It proclaims the political ethics of the human Jesus as the revolutionary Gospel, which our Lord and his early believing communities enacted. In *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder (1994d: 10; 1972: 22) prefaces his position with this question: 'What becomes of the meaning of the incarnation of Jesus is not normative man? If he is man but not normative, is this not the ancient ebionic heresy? If he be somehow authoritative but not in his humanness, is this not a new gnosticism?' We presented this thesis in the third chapter of this study. For Yoder, Jesus' embodied political ethics is normative for believers' political engagement at all times and in every place.

Moreover, Yoder argues that denial or reticence to accord Christ such a value-laden judgment transforms Christian ethics from normative to a descriptive science. He perceives normative discipline as one, which has a way of determining truth and falsehood. In his view, Jesus Christ

is the norm for Christian ethics. As a result, a Christocentric social ethics should also seek to distinguish the right from the wrong values. Yoder remarks that Christocentric social ethics often concludes with value judgments (Yoder 1996a; 1992a; 1992b).³¹³ He challenges believers to active Christocentric participation in moral discernment and deliberation. Believers do it through verbal and bodily politicking (campaigning) for Jesus Christ even in pluralistic contexts. Such believers thrive in ‘a community of moral discourse, deliberation and discernment.’ Their assembly exists ‘as a community of memory’ (Verhey 2005: 152).

Moral deliberation and discernment are constitutive in Yoder’s vision for Christocentric discipleship as political responsibility of believers (cf. Yoder 2003b). It is an embodied affirmation of Christ-centred (social) ethics as body politics (cf. Yoder 2003a, 1992a). The Yoderian ethical vision seeks to promote and commend Yoder’s fundamental call for a distinctive Christocentric social ethics of believers. Yoder holds that the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ provides subordinate believers with normative paradigm for social witness in every culture and age. Given this understanding, we reason that resources from Yoder’s ethical vision for the subordinate Church can also assist the SCS and its admirers to wriggle out of some unhealthy Scottish bequests. Such bequests are often evident in a crisis of identity or to use Udoh’s words, ‘faith schizophrenia’; ‘double-mindedness’; ‘living in two worlds at the same time’ and ‘faith pathology’ in the life and witnesses of the SCS and its adherents (Udoh 1988: 1-15, 263).

Yoder re-interprets and re-presents believers’ embodied body politics of Jesus as the true description of the social ethics of early Church, which the New Testament seems to suggest. Within Yoder’s visionary practice, believers’ embodied response to their calling, i.e., to be faithful to Jesus Christ, is also visible and definable in bodily political terms. The subordinate *ekklesia* is primarily, a structured social body with a definable Christological way of making decision, defining membership as well as carrying out common tasks. It is a community that is based on the memory of Jesus Christ.³¹⁴ As a result, Yoder’s visionary practice appropriates the

³¹³ Enns points out that Yoder avoids approaching Christian ethics as an autonomous discipline. He would not accept Christian ethics, which has little or no relationship with ecclesiology. Ecclesiology is ethics is a non-negotiable stance in Yoder’s thought on the ministry and social ethics of the subordinate Church of Jesus Christ. As far as Yoder is concerned, ethics is to be developed as the visible doxological expression and subordination of the Church to the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ (cf. Enns 2007b: 125, 129).

³¹⁴ For Verhey, to remember the story of Jesus is to allow it to form and inform character and community. According to him, ‘In the New Testament memory is not simply a mental process....memory is to own a

phrase, *body politics*, to underscore that the meaningful otherness between the Church and the State or between the faithful and unfaithful church is evident from the political ethics each adopts. Described as ‘royal priesthood’ and as ‘priestly kingdom,’ believers are called to be today what the larger society is called to become, ultimately. Believers’ *jesulological* social ethics reveals their embodied witness as a people serving God and ‘ruling the word’ (Yoder 1992a: vii-ix; 1997b: 36). We discussed these issues in the previous chapter.

In Yoder’s visionary practice, Christocentric corporate witness of the Gospel evokes repeatedly the community-forming and sustaining response. His vision is also a restorative practice. However, it rejects the exclusivity of the renewed community when such peoplehood exclude the differently *other* without meaningful self-criticism. Yoder’s social vision also rejects the unexamined acceptance of the existing social interchange and its structures. As we have shown, Yoder’s visionary practice envisions an unlimited catholic witness of the Gospel for all nations, from a Christocentric trans-community perspective. Its vision of the Church suggests a trans-community peoplehood, which does God’s business in Christ’s name. For Yoder, the Church’s influence on the larger society results from this distinctive otherness, which the gracious Christ-event generates. Biblical Christology also sustains the Church’s *exuusia* (authority, or warrantee) and *dunamis* (strength or vigor) to witness Jesus Christ among the nations. Yoderian practitioners would not impose their ideals upon the larger society. They would not also demonize and/or dismiss their host cultural resources as summarily evil. We reiterate that Christocentric (*jesulological*) social ethics is a Diaspora visionary practice. Its vision for *moral osmosis* seeks to transform and incorporate some useful cultural resources into the Church’s witness of Jesus Christ. Despite its distinctive otherness, Yoder’s *jesulological kerygma* is foundationally, a proclamation of the *euangelion*.

Consequently, Yoder also calls believers to an embodied and distinctive interculturality. Such a peculiar vision for social interaction transcends the Enlightenment-based paradigm in its quest for inclusive equal dignity of human beings. The Enlightenment-based visions sustain the Constantinian ethical shift from the New Testament ethics of the subordinate Church. For Yoder, such a watershed continues to affect the ethical reflections and practices of the contemporary

particular history as one’s own, to own a past and to own it as a constitutive of identity and determinative for discernment. In the New Testament and in the church there is no identity apart from memory and no community apart from common memory’ (Verhey 2005: 154). In his perspective, to remember the Lord Jesus Christ means to discern God’s will and to do it, among God’s people.

Church. The New Testament has its own grounds for its own egalitarian witness, which is differently shaped from that of the Enlightenment. This original approach to the biblical proclamation of equality is rooted in the work of Christ. It is an integral part of the very definition of the meaning of the cross (Yoder 1992a: 34-41). Yoder's Christocentric vision for social ethics also appeals to the merits of the Christ-event to re-interpret the Pauline phrase 'the fulness of Christ' to include a ministry of the whole people of God.

Given these observations, we become more convinced that Yoder's Christocentric vision for social ethics is crucial for the SCS. It can provide the church with valuable resources to check (or at least, tame) the tides of some often-defaming legacies of its top-down ethical vision and leadership. These distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based ethics also sustain the SCS with *magisterium* rather than *ministerium* ethical reflections and practices. They breed and sustain visible detours in the theological mission ethics of this Nigerian church. We reflected on the distressing effects of such detours on the theological mission ethics and identity of the SCS in Chapter 2.

The socio-cultural context of the SCS is crisis-ridden. The crises are grounded in the church's (seeming) *laissez-faire* ethical approach to the burning issue of the dignity of human beings in Nigeria. It sounds ridiculous that the Church, which ought to be the light bearer, has little or no space for discussions on human dignity in its theological mission agenda for Nigerians. Even the national Constitution expects churches to make quality contributions to the burning issues of human dignity, social transformation and development in Nigeria. It is true that Christocentric prophetic witness suspects nationalism as evil-intended; yet the SCS cannot afford to shy away from such responsibilities of the citizens. The 1999 National Constitution also stresses this point in Section 24 c, d and e.³¹⁵ The SCS is called to draw biblical resources in order to embody and witness Christocentric *jesuological* ethics in the burning quest for human dignity in Nigeria. Yoder reminds believers that today, the subordinate Church is called to embody a distinctive social practice. The larger society is summoned to appropriate the Christocentric social practice of the Church as the shape of the ultimate social ethics of the world.

³¹⁵ The study showed this in the previous chapter.

Thus, the national Constitution calls on citizens to respect *inter alia*, the dignity of other citizens. It also expects every one to appreciate and respect the right and legitimate interests of others. The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) expects people to live in unity, harmony and in the spirit of common sister/brotherhood and to make positive and useful contribution to the advancement, progress and well-being of the community where she or he resides. The national Constitution also summons every one to render assistance to appropriate and lawful agencies in the maintenance of law and order (Constitution 1999: 36-37). In fact, Nigerians have varied experiences on the transiting effects of the British political ideology in the country. Nevertheless, most Nigerians crave for sustained unity amidst the heterogeneity of cultures in the country.

Consequently, this study also argues that theological responses are crucial for any meaningful approach to nation building, social transformation and development in Nigeria. Nigerians are *religio-centric* and their reflexive visions of the African *palaver* take the totality of the human person serious. As we have shown, many Nigerian Christians embody a ‘theology without footnotes’ as their communal identity and spirituality. Therefore, a theologically centred response of the SCS will consider the issue of human dignity as central in contemporary discourses on nation building, social transformation and development in Nigeria. Since the Church is a theological and sociological body, The SCS must thus play crucial transformational and developmental roles in such discourses. Such significant roles are central to the Church’s Christocentric life and embodied witness as a renewed humanity. With their Christocentric life and witness as reminiscent of the transformed humanity, believers in Christ metamorphose into true neighbours. Martin Luther King Jnr. points out that a true neighbour exhibits altruistic identity and spirituality. A true neighbour can risk its position, prestige, and even life for the welfare of others. A true neighbour discerns those inherent bequests, which makes all persons human beings; hence, sisters and brothers. In their quest for social transformation and development, such altruistic believers also allow Christ’s magnanimous life to define their daily lives and practice. In the gracious Christ-event, history’s most magnificent expression of obedience is not enforced (King 1963: 29-35). More significantly, Yoder argues that one of the most crucial tasks of the Church is to exist for the welfare of the neighbour. Pursuit of the neighbour’s welfare is indispensable in the Church’s social witness of Christ’s lordship over the Powers (cf. Yoder 1997a). This study expects the SCS to give this issue the significant attention it deserves in Nigeria.

From the foregoing, it becomes clearer that Yoder's vision for Christocentric social ethics has great potential for the SCS. It can also guide the church to contribute more meaningfully to the ongoing quest for a responsible and sustainable approach to human dignity, social transformation and development in Nigeria. With a Yoderian vision, ethical responses that are tied to the figure of the biblical Jesus Christ would be generated. Incarnated (lived) Christology will play determinative roles in the ethical reflection and practices of the SCS. Such ethical bequests of the Yoderian vision will not neglect the contextual challenges confronting the contemporary SCS or claim ignorance of them. Any post-Christendom (Christian) theology, whose theological mission tends to ignore serious engagement with contextual realities, is dismissible as a reductionism to alien doctrinal formulations in present-day Nigeria. This populous and multi-ethnic *religio-cultural* nation is highly heterogeneous in composition. A society is a sphere among other spheres (O'Donovan 2005). A given society is composed of many spheres. Hence, the idea of an undifferentiated society ends in illusion (O'Donovan 2005: 252). O'Donovan expects the Church as a society to be distinguishable from other societies through its theological identity and spirituality. Further, 'for there to be salvation with a specifiable Christian content' in society, there must be a distinctive theological reflection within the given socio-cultural context. (Milbank 2006: 255-256). Consequently, the SCS must be identifiable as a sociological and theological society within its host *religio-cultures*. The church's theological consciousness cannot afford to ignore or bypass the aforementioned contextual challenges in contemporary Nigeria.

Consequently, it becomes clearer that Yoder's socio-ethical visionary praxis can also inspire the SCS to *re-vision* and embody its ecclesial witness. This can also mean that the Church must reflect a renewed form of African religiosity in its ecclesial identity and witness. Yoder's Christocentric social ethics seeks to restore broken relationship without exonerating the offender from the responsibility of righting the wrong. We reiterate that this approach mirrors the (indigenous) African *palaver*. Most (indigenous) African societies are identifiable as communities for corporate moral deliberations and discernments. A majority of indigenous (African) communities approach conflict resolution (or truth finding) through 'face-to-face' interactive dialogues. A face-to-face (inter-personal) or communal approach to truth finding hardly gives room for the distortion of truth. Offences are named and where necessary, repented and atoned for (cf. Bujo 2003: 66-77). Similarly, Yoder's visionary approach to truth finding is reminiscent of the pre-Enlightenment (indigenous) social ethics in Africa.

Yoder's approach to reconciling dialogues provides his vision with the substance of its moral discernment and the authority of divine empowerment to 'bind and loose'. His Christocentric vision for interculturality (human social interchange) combines a plethora of Christ-believers' gifts in the process. Within this visionary practice, offences are named, repented of and where necessary, restituted. Yoder's vision for a Christocentric believing community is also endowed with the wherewithal for continuing moral discernment. It lays more emphasis on the 'promised guidance of the Holy Spirit'. Moral discernment and forgiveness condition and enable one another in complex ways in Yoder's socio-ethical practice. Yoderian Christ-believers demonstrate their endowed authority to bind and loose in bodily politicking (embodied campaign) for Jesus (cf. Yoder 2000: 178; 1992a: 6-13).

Furthermore, Yoder's visionary approach to 'binding and loosing' can help to curb various forms of dehumanization and demonization of local *religio*-cultural resources, churches, and other publics in the Nigerian churches. It can also assist in correcting the misconception and dismissal of the FGN organization and hosting of the FESTAC (1977) as summarily evil.

It baffles some Nigerians that in some Christian quarters, such a laudable project of the government is proclaimed and stressed as altogether evil. In fact, Olo attended an international conference (in Nigeria) in January 2001. An indigenous speaker was emphatic that the FESTAC was simply an invitation and legalization of witchcraft, sorcery, necromancy, demonism, and their activities in Nigeria. The speaker thus challenged his audience to dismiss the FESTAC as an enthronement of demons over the affairs of Nigeria and 'the establishment of their continental headquarters in the country' (cf. Ogbu Kalu 1996: 126).

Therefore, one is often compelled to ask the following questions: Even though there were some magical exhibitions in the FESTAC celebrations, must the festival be summarily dismissed as demonic? Are Nigerian Christians not also enjoying some of its laudable legacies, which among other things include the National Theater and the FESTAC villages in Lagos? Must Nigerian Christians be encouraged to agree with Oshun (1998) that Nigeria is in the hands of the devil, as we argued earlier? If Nigeria is handed over to the devil's governance, what are Christians in Nigeria doing - celebrating the devil's victory or the victorious power of the Cross? More

importantly, what is the implication of the sovereignty of God and God's redemptive and restorative salvation in Jesus Christ for Nigerians?

This study holds that Yoder's Christology will also assist the SCS to address the above questions more adequately. Yoder's concept of principalities and Powers as well as the cosmic lordship of Christ may transform, determine and sustain the churches' prophetic witness. We also discussed Yoder's concept of, and approach to principalities and Powers in the third and fifth chapters of this study. For Yoder, the merits of the gracious (historical) Christology can redeem and restore them to serve their originally created purpose in the nonviolent-resistant Jesus Christ. He reflects on principalities and Powers as fallen aspects of God's good creation. True proclamation of Christ's universal lordship also seeks to transform and restore creation to engage in seeking the *shalom* of society. In Yoder's ethical project, such affirmations of Christ's lordship would not compromise the sovereignty of God in the Church's theological witness.

With the Barthian posture of its prophetic witness, Yoder's social ethics can also challenge the SCS to re-conceive and engage with the distressing legacies of the British political ideologies (in Nigeria) as a necessary object of its mission. These *pseudo*-legacies left the nation with a political philosophy of militarized (or triumphal) society following violent-salvation religions. At least, the perennial hostility between Christian practitioners, Muslim devotees, and indigenous religious adherents in contemporary Nigeria, is an instance. The hostilities play crucial roles in sustaining the demonic structures, which often banish and restrict some persons to the status of sub-humans. Successive indigenous leadership also sustained these structural deficiencies, which yearn for reformation in contemporary Nigeria. More crucial for this study is the understanding that such militarized political philosophy calls for a Yoderian social critique (as fitting to the Nigerian context) by the SCS. We hope to further this discussion in a subsequent section.

We maintain that Yoder's prophetic witness holds promises of a theological transformational development of society as an aspect of its human ethical responsibility in the *missio Dei*. A Yoderian practice can relate theology to mission and development with creative and responsible distinctiveness (otherness). This can make the mission of the SCS and that of other Nigerian churches more appreciable. When Christ's uniqueness and cosmic lordship is experienced as

intrinsically beneficial to all and sundry, Nigerians would respond more meaningfully to the Church's proclamations (cf. Okure 2002: 71). One can confidently say that Yoder's *jesulological* (ethical) visionary practice would neither allow the Church to play the role of a chaplain to the State nor adopt a sectarian withdrawal from the FGN. Yoder's socio-ethical vision proclaims corporate Christocentric (social) witness as an indispensable ministry of the subordinate Church. It is a nonviolent-resistant approach to Diaspora proclamation of Jesus Christ among the nations.

However, such a significant social witness may not be feasible in the present divided and segregated Church in Nigeria. A segregated Church has no reconciliatory message for the society. The Church as a *polis* is also a witness to the message it proclaims. Its primal calling is for reconciliation. The ministry of reconciliation stands as the key for relating to the other (Yoder 1997a: 16-22; cf. 1992a; 2 Cor. 5: 18-21). These vices can negate the Church's ministry. Thus, Yoder's visionary project also provides a reflexive vision of the African *palaver*, which can also assist the SCS to check such divisiveness or prejudice towards others. The Church exists as a witness within a watching society; hence, its witness must be consistent with its altruistic character and spirituality; otherwise, its status as a Christocentric peoplehood becomes a misnomer. Visible unity amidst diversities is one of the distinctive *notae* (marks) of a faithful reconciliatory ministry of the subordinate Church within itself, and in the larger society. Yoder describes the Church's demonstration of visible unity as true Christian internationalism (Yoder 1971b: 123-124). His perspective for ecumenism is ethical, contextual and fragmentary. Yoder reflects on church unity as unity in ethical commitment. Yoder's social vision is a Christocentric *jesulological* practice, which also seeks to restore an embodied affirmation of unity amidst diversities as a true vision of the ecumenical *ekklesia*.

In other words, Yoder's vision for the Church's social ethics can further assist the Nigerian Church to embody Christ-believers' internationalism as a gracious bequest of the Christ-event. It is suggestive of a Christocentric trans-community (*glocalized*) visionary embodiment of the merits of the gracious Christology among the nations. Such a vision for Christocentric internationalism is inaugurated by baptism and exemplified in the Eucharistic feast. Therefore, it can inspire the SCS and its fellow churches to retrieve necessary resources from the African extended family paradigm to embody the Eucharistic celebration as a Christocentric social practice of believers among the nations. For instance, Yoder's Christocentric practice can assist the SCS to transform the practice of African *palaver* to reflect a Christocentric vision of

epistemological privilege of the underdog. The African *palaver* seeks to promote a common life together (cf. Bujo 2003: 77). Yoder's view on believers' practice of the Eucharist, as we have shown, reflects a Christocentric practice of the epistemological privilege of the underdog (cf. Yoder 1997b: 31-32). For Yoder, the Christian *kerygma* is also visible in concrete bodily politicking for Jesus Christ, right from its origin. In Yoder's vision for ecclesial practice, responsible covenanting of believers begin at the base, i.e., with the populace. Unity from below is a Christological challenge to the Church's process of admonition and reconciliation. As a face-to-face project, Yoder's reflexive approach to the issue of epistemological privilege of the underdog (or the preferential option for the poor) seeks to reach the root of conflicts by localizing it and empowering the whole people of God for corporate discernment and deliberation (Yoder 2000: 175-182). Yoder's *jesulological* reconciliation denounces oppression, suppression and all other forms of violence. Scripture-based Christocentric *jesulological* reconciliation is central to Yoder's practice-based visionary message of hope; it is also restorative, as this study argues.

Yoder's restorative vision for social ethics seeks a renewed peoplehood. All members of the corpus of Christ are summoned to participate in active and responsible witness of Jesus Christ among the nations. From this perspective, Yoder also argues against 'mono-pastoral' ministry. In his perspective, 'there is no intrinsic reason why shared ministry should be less realistic...than the mono-pastoral form' (Yoder 1987: 102). Yoder's Christocentric vision for peoplehood also re-interprets and re-presents Kingdom ethics as that which recognizes that every member is favoured with at least one spiritual gift (or gifting) by the Holy Spirit. A true Yoderian practice of the Church's authority to 'bind and loose' would not arrogate to Christians the sole hermeneutical role and communication of the biblical witness. It will not also accommodate uncritical interculturality of believers as true witness of Jesus Christ among the nations. Yoder's vision for peoplehood expects believers to engage in intercultural or trans-community *kerygma* without compromising embodied servanthood as true proclamation of Christ's lordship over the Powers (cf. Yoder 1997a: 1-28, 35-44; 1997b: 15-93; 1994d). Yoder's restorative vision for a Christocentric peoplehood is transformational and developmental.

Based on the above findings, we become more convinced that Yoder's Christocentric vision for peoplehood can assist the SCS to engage in a more responsible social witness in Nigeria. The Yoderian rhetoric that an embodied servanthood of Christ is a more meaningful proclamation of

his lordship will play a crucial role in the process. It is transformational and developmental. Therefore, Yoder's ethical vision can persuade the church to take PROCMURA serious just as Christians took CAN (Christian Association of Nigeria) serious during the aborted attempt to smuggle Nigeria into full membership of the Organization for Islamic Communities (OIC) by a Muslim military ruler in 1986.³¹⁶ Christians' concerted witness compelled the perpetrators of the act to withdraw from their envisioned evil. *Religio*-centric Nigeria claims to be a secular State (cf. Kalu 2004: 260). This understanding emanates from our view that the ethical approach of PROCMURA can *inter alia*, underscore responsible Christian engagement with Muslims in continuing dialogues. Such dialogues also respect the status of Muslims as human beings with the *imago Dei* (image of God).

PROCMURA provides a platform for a Muslim-Christian network in God's mission. It also engages Muslim and Christian women and youth in interfaith dialogues. PROCMURA's vision for interfaith dialogue places weightier emphasis on how the two missionary faiths can practically network in combating the scourge of HIV/AIDS in their contemporary contexts. Nigeria is said to have the second largest HIV prevalence in Africa after South Africa. That position is contestable when the country's population of about 140 million people is considered. It is generally agreed that Nigeria's infection rate is about 7% compared to South Africa's 30% (Wikipedia 2005). In any case, women and youths are the most vulnerable and readily available agents, whom Muslim and Christian extremists induce to help them sustain religious violence in Nigeria (Ragnjiya 2007: 211-212; cf. Sanneh 2004; Ogbu Kalu 2004). Nevertheless, significant points of departure exist in the foundations and charter documents of the Yoderian ethical vision and the PROCMURA. Indeed, Yoder's visionary project (like PROCMURA) seeks to transform enmity to friendship, hostility to hospitality, rejection to acceptance, and exclusivity to inclusivity. It adopts a Christocentric evangelist's approach in witnessing Jesus Christ to the differently *other*. Yoder's project is a Christocentric restorative vision.

In spite of their differences, like Yoder's project, PROCMURA can inspire the SCS to play a crucial role in the political history of Nigeria. Both visionary projects can assist the church to take independent and collective initiatives to restore *shalom* into the violent and the highly politicized Nigerian polity, and political economy. These projects seek a theological

³¹⁶ There is almost no significant reference or discussion of PROCMURA in any Minute, Report or Communique of the SCS.

transformational development of society that can embody *shalom* as its goal in heterogeneous and multi-religious communities. They are also trans-community visionary projects. Thus, the SCS can play active roles in such a challenging vision to witness Jesus Christ among the nations. As Yoder reminds believers, the challenge of trans-community witness is not one, which a biblically oriented community can joyfully face. Christ's figure reproduces a peculiar discernible people whose social ethics are ordered and re-ordered in order to conform to their Scripture-based convictions within a cultural context and age. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, which has no social ethics without the Christ-event. As far as Yoder is concerned, believers' Christocentric social ethics is Gospel proclamation itself (Yoder 1996a: 137-138; 1994e: 183; 1971b: 126; 1984). Yoder's Christocentric vision for a nonviolent-resistant (Diaspora) social ethics is also a restorative project. It pleads for a Christ-centred *Ezi Ndu* in which Christian churches can play a leading role in initiating dialogue and co-operation with other societies, which often hold symbiotic (related) views on social transformation and development. As Nation has remarked, Yoder believes that the other may hold the key to the elusive truth, which Christians seek.

So far, this section has attempted to present the concrete induction from Yoder's social ethics in the SCS as theological reconstruction, re-orientation and expropriation. The first segment surveyed Yoder's historical (biblical) Christology as a ministry for church renewal. When interpreted as an historical given, biblical Christology inspires believers to engage in faithful and sacrificial proclamation of the lordship of Christ over the Powers. Thus, Yoder's visionary practice can challenge the SCS to give serious attention to contextual challenges without reducing the Church's ministry to a movement from Western ethnocentrism to Afrocentrism. His *glocalized* (trans-community) vision for the *kerygma* of Christ's lordship over the Powers can also assist the SCS to engage the pervasive influences and challenges of spiritism/spiritual forces within local cosmologies in Nigeria and beyond.

Yoder's Christology can also persuade the SCS to initiate serious pioneering participation of believers in social and academic interactions. Such Christocentric interactions *inter alia*, seek to relate the burning issues of human dignity to social transformation and development from theological perspectives. These contextual challenges often receive ephemeral attention from churches especially the Reformed churches, with particular reference to The PCN in general and

more specifically within the SCS in Nigeria.³¹⁷ Yoder's Christological ecclesiology is identifiable with its practice-based approach to biblical realism of the practice of the rule of Christ. We have also differentiated its methodology from that of Hauerwas.

Yoder's Christocentric vision for ethical practice reflects the '*evangelist's*' social ethics: it is faith-particularistic, ecclesiological inclusive and culturally pluralistic. Its human social interchange re-echoes what some African theologians such as Akper (2006b), August (2006a) and Jonker (2006) have described as the *movement from multiculturalism to interculturality*. Yoder is persuasive that his vision for Christocentric ethics is for believers who exist as minority practitioners of faith in Jesus Christ. His renewed vision for *jesulogical* practice re-presents believers' social ethics as the original revolutionary Gospel, which Jesus Christ and his pre-Constantinian believing communities embodied among the nations. Yoder's restorative visionary praxis suggests a nonviolent-resistant approach to a more meaningful Diaspora practice of healthy catholicity among human beings. Yoder's social vision entrusts its (reflexive) view on *moral osmosis* to the merits of the gracious Christ-event. Christocentric believers can appropriate it through their embodied presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit. This view is crucial for the SCS. According to the P&P (Section G-03.0302), 'The Church is called to present the claims of Jesus Christ, leading persons to repentance, to acceptance of Him as Saviour and Lord, and to living a new life as His disciples. The Church is called to be Christ's faithful evangelist....' As we noted above, God's redeeming and reconciling mission continues through visible manifestations of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit engages human beings and their communities with the proclamation of Christ's lordship of life and calls them to continuing repentance and obedience to God's will. Such a church demonstrates God's intention for humanity as a visible social ethics (The PCN 1989: 11). Yoderians seek to restore, transform and develop society with the *jesulogical* ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ. Yoder's project, therefore, envisions and works toward a theological transformational development of society from a Christological perspective. For clarity, we shall explore the Yoderian vision for renewal in the next section.

³¹⁷ As we argued earlier, ecumenism has come to stay in believers' contemporary witness of Jesus Christ. Smit has also remarked that new historical contexts and challenges can inspire Reformed churches to engage in radical ecclesiological changes. Reformed churches are challenged to accommodate necessary ecumenism within geographical contexts. Smit also argues that ecumenism must be local in order to be real. For those with a Reformed mindset, this speaks for itself (cf. Smit 2004b: 72, 76).

3 Vision for Renewal

This section focuses on Yoder's appeal to believers to re-interpret and translate the Reformed slogan, *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* to mean also a call for continuing reformation within historical contexts. At this stage of the research, we shall narrow our inductions to a *Reforming church* in a *Reforming Society* that is in dire need of a *Reforming economy*. The SCS is a Reformed Church, which seeks a transformational development of societies through the merits of the Christ-event. We seek to nuance Yoder's social vision to the context of the SCS.

3.1 Reforming Church

One of the most significant bequests of Yoder's social vision to the SCS will be an embodied Christocentric affirmation of *jesulogical* witness in Nigeria. Yoder's Christocentric project, as described in this study, re-interprets and appropriates its vision for an embodied proclamation of Christ's lordship among the nations. It seeks to reflect the *jesulogical* identity and spirituality of the nonviolent-resistant servanthood of the biblical Jesus Christ. This point is for instance, evident in *The Politics of Jesus*. Yoder also discusses the relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause in Jesus. He does not see it as a relationship of cause and effect. It is one of sacrificial, conscientious, and conscious subjection to the political ethics of the biblical Jesus. In Yoder's view, only a church that has been freed from compulsiveness as well as the urge to manage the world can find more meaningful and responsible ways and words to suggest to those outside its bounds, the invitation to a servant stance in society (cf. Yoder 1994d: 219; 232; 240-241).

Yoder's Christocentric visionary project seeks a more meaningful and responsible ethical witness of the Church in its pursuit of the *missio Dei*. It also calls for the continuing reformation of the Church's reflections and practices as they are envisioned from the *jesulogical* (nonviolent-resistant) political ethics of the biblical Jesus. Yoder does not reflect on the Reformation as a concluded vision or mission. In other words, Yoder pleads for a continuing reforming of the Church, and its traditions (cf. Yoder 1994a). We reflected on these points in the previous chapters of this study.

Yoder's vision for a reforming church can assist the SCS to initiate and lead reconciliatory movements. Such movements can also enable the church to address some unhealthy issues

situations, which bedevil the vision and mission of the ecumenical *ekklesia* within its context. They will strive to grapple with the challenges of the triumphal and unhealthy competitive vision and mission ethics of the Enlightenment-based projects in Nigeria. These Gospel-defaming practices yearn for meaningful reconciliatory dialogues and admonitions. We reflected on the apparent challenges of this problem in the second chapter of this study. They riddle and cripple the life and witness of such Christian bodies as the CAN and CCN as well as the PFN, among others. This study is of the view that some Yoderian inductions can also help the churches to overcome the menace of this cancer. It often denigrates the church's *kerygma* of the lordship of Jesus Christ over the world. Yoder's approach to reconciliatory moves can also enhance and substantiate a *glocalized* proclamation of Jesus Christ by the SCS. His vision is a continuing project. Yoder's restorative vision, as we earlier noted, is fragmentary, exploratory and experimental (cf. Enns 2007; Huebner 2006; Nation 2006).

In other words, Yoder's call for a *semper reformanda* of the Church, and its traditions is crucial for the SCS. It can induct the SCS, among other churches in Nigeria, into a renewed understanding of ecclesial affirmation. Yoder's visionary project will demand a fundamental shift from the Enlightenment-based *ecclesio*-centric (ecclesiological) identity of the church. It seeks a reforming Christocentric ecclesial identity and spirituality from the subordinate Church. Yoder's vision strives to reconstruct and re-appropriate Church traditions as they are defined by the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ. It loops back to history in order to retrieve meaningful resources for the contemporary Church. Thus, Yoder's reforming vision for reconstructing and re-appropriating ecclesial traditions suggests a Christocentric corporate witness to ecclesial reflection and practices. His approach further seeks to rediscover, reconcile, and restore strained or waning relationships. We have already discussed these issues in Chapter 4. A Yoderian reforming vision binds here and unbinds there in its multidimensional and experimental approach to appropriate *ministerium* dialogue as a more significant reconciliatory ethics.

Therefore, Yoder's reforming vision can challenge Nigerian churches to embark on a continuing reconciliatory mission. Its priority will be to recognize and address their internal divisions through a reflexive Christocentric vision of the African *palaver*. Such a renewed approach to the Reformed ministry of the Church can persuade local congregations to engage the wider Nigerian public with a substantive proclamation of the Good News of Christ. A Christocentric vision of

the African *palaver* will assume a crucial role in the churches' reconciliatory ministries. Forgiveness and discernment will underscore human responsibility as incumbent on the Church's demonstration of political judgment in its embodied witness to Jesus Christ among the nations. Forgiveness and discernment constitute a significant aspect of true Christian practice of the Rule of Christ in contexts. A Spirit guided and sustained open meeting can guarantee freedom of speech to everyone. For Yoder, each believer is favoured with at least one charismatic gift to contribute to the life and ministry of the subordinate Church. These issues can combine to re-present the Church as the gathered *laos* (people) of God who embody a Christocentric reconciliatory ministry in a renewed form of ecclesial *ethos* in Nigeria. Yoder's visionary project will make such a difference when approached with a meaningful sense of responsibility. His vision for a reforming ecclesiology also makes it clearer that necessary differences can provide the Church a justification for its witness, when sustained in humble confidence and patient humility.³¹⁸

Thus, Yoder's Christocentric vision can also challenge churches in Nigeria especially the SCS, to a continuing reformation of their embodied witness. Their polities and politics will also seek to affirm a doxological subjection to the altruistic political ethics of Jesus Christ. Yoder's ecclesial approach to a Christocentric Kingdom witness and biblical realism can inspire churches to reflect unity amidst diversities in their transformational mission projects. Yoder's vision for a reforming ecclesia will not permit such churches to continue to re-enact 'a story of many stories....of too many different churches doing different things' (Smit 2004c: 139). His vision, as we have shown, also re-presents ecumenical witness of the Church from a Christocentric *jesulogical* perspective. Thus, his vision for ecumenical ministry will play a crucial role in the process. The contemporary socio-cultural setting in Nigeria demands a network of concerted efforts of Christ-believers. Such Christocentric believers can reposition the Church as the body of Christ – the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and a city on the hill whose light shines for humanity to see and glorify God in heaven (Matt. 5: 13-16). Their perennial distrust and demonization of each other yearn for Yoder's Christocentric vision for ecclesial reflections and practices in Nigeria.

³¹⁸ We reflected on this point in Chapter 4.

As we have shown, Yoder's vision suggests a Diaspora pursuit of the Barthian project. It shares space with others; hence, our fundamental conviction that it is a necessity for a sustainable and more meaningful breakthrough towards reconciliation of churches in Nigeria. Nation (2006) reminds us that Yoder acknowledges the prophetic truth that the differently *other* may after all, hold a much better doctrine. Yoder's altruistic identity and spirituality is central to our intuition that in his Christocentric vision for (biblical) ecclesial realism, *faithful ecumenism* will come to stay. Yoder argues that faithful ecumenism must also play determinative roles in the quest for a responsible and functional Christian ethics in contemporary societies (cf. Nation 2006: 107-108). This also means that Yoder's vision for ecclesiology can engage Nigerian churches particularly the SCS, with a distinctive and faithful ecumenical ministry in contexts. As we have noted, Yoder does not think on faithful ecumenism to mean an organic (universal) unity of the Church. Yoder's visionary project considers the Church's unity in terms of 'unity in ethical commitment' for the proclamation of Christ's universal lordship in contexts.

This means that reconciliation is the heart of Yoder's ecumenical ministry. It also means that the SCS as well as other churches can re-conceive and re-appropriate God's gracious work as ethical ministry with others. Peoplehood would be stressed, while the church would also seek other meaningful ways to re-initiate responsible network with other Nigerian publics.³¹⁹ Consequently, one can also describe Yoder's vision for an unlimited catholicity as that in which Christians can responsibly share space with non-Christians. It involves a geographical expression of ethical commitment to unity amidst diversity, rather than organic unity. Yoder is often emphatic that his vision of catholicity contrasts with sectarian and established views. It does not prescribe any particular institutional requisites for Christ believers who want to join his restoration movement. Yoder addresses his vision of unlimited Christocentric catholicity to include other believers and unbelievers. His vision for a 'royal priesthood', and a 'priestly Kingdom', also welcomes non-Christian believers' participation in its quest for a Christocentric social transformation and development (Yoder 1984: 8; 1997b: 36; 241). Yoder's visionary project is a Christocentric vision for restoring a faithful ecumenical ministry in the *Servant-ekklesia*.

³¹⁹ According to Akper, 'An ivory tower theology does not have a place anymore in post-modern world. Neither is a project-centered mode of public involvement on the part of the Church....enough. Unhelpful criticism of the government and the Church by the academia without the view to providing solutions to the problems in the society is also not helpful' (Akper 2006a). As Akper has shown, churches in Nigeria should also co-operate with other publics to witness the lordship of Jesus Christ over the Powers. We shall return to this later in this chapter.

Given this position, we become more convinced that Yoder's Christocentric vision for social ethics can also transform Nigerian churches into cities on the hill whose light shines for every one to see (as Jesus described it Matthew 5: 13-16). It can persuade them to take collective and individual initiatives to reconcile with the differently *other*. Yoder's visionary project will not permit the SCS in particular, to conceive such differently *others* as aliens. These others will include the Mennonites and other strands of Anabaptism, the AICs, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, and non-Christian believers. It will not also allow the SCS to deny them of responsible co-operation in the *missio Dei*. Even in their *otherness*, strangeness or estrangement, the differently *other* can be (responsibly) welcomed, re-conceived and re-integrated into the fold as a potential subject and object of God's work. Despite her/his otherness, the differently *other* is a covenanted relation. She/he is also a potential human agent for embodying God's surprising movement in giving humanity a voice in shaping its destiny within contexts.

Even believers in Jesus Christ have come to accept the bitter truth that there is hardly a foolproof master plan for social change. Contemporary shift from structuralism to structuration in sociology, as is evident from the 1980s, plays a crucial role in this process. Structuration accepts the possibility of change within corporate and broad structural change. Conversely, structuralism is rarely flexible in its often individualistic and truistic approach to social change. Structuration craves for a renewed peoplehood in social transformation and development. Renewed and reformed peoplehood can modify society even when the odds are against it (cf. Gilbert & Guggler 1995: 5). Structuration de-emphasizes individualism and unhealthy rigidity in social transformation and development.

Consequently, we reckon on structuration as suggestive of Yoder's argument that believers may not reflect or celebrate the social implication of the Christ-event with an unhealthy firmness of position. The practice of such firmness is often reminiscent of the rigidity of the rail track. According to Yoder, in *Historiography as a Ministry to Renewal*:

Checking for direction is a necessary component of the mission which the events of the incarnation began. Salvation becomes history not with the rigidity of the railroad but with the balanced momentum as the bicycle rider, or the walker.... Renewal is like stumbling and regaining ones balance without hitting the ground....radical reformation is like getting back from where one got off the track.

(Yoder 1997c: 217)

For Yoder, the merits of the incarnation, as we have shown, makes it clear that Christocentric believers' life and ethics involve trial and error as well as renewal and restoration. Christocentric discipleship is a process in 'believers' political responsibility', i.e., to witness Jesus Christ among the nations.

More significantly, Yoder's view on the *other* also sounds very crucial for contemporary churches in Nigeria especially, the SCS of The PCN. Yoder is of the view that such *another* might hold the better and more responsible truth about God's revelation in Christ. The sovereign God is not bound to Christians for the realization of God's purpose. Christianity is not graced with the monopoly to interpret Christ for the nations (cf. Yoder 1997b: 237-245). This is one of the many surprise elements in the divine sovereign move to give humanity a voice in shaping its destiny. Consequently, more churches in Nigeria may re-conceive and re-interpret their concepts and dispositions towards others especially, non-Christians. Yoder's vision (like Bediako's) will remind them of this surprise element in God's sovereignty. The study reflected on this issue in its fourth chapter.

Thus, a renewed understanding of the sovereignty of God can greatly assist Nigerian churches. It will inspire them to learn from Yoder's visionary practice that a more inclusive ecclesiology is indispensable for a meaningful (Christocentric) ecumenical ministry. Of a truth, Yoder's visionary approach to the ecumenical ministry of the Church involves pain and scandals. It does not only mean stooping down, and to responsibly welcoming the other in her or his otherness; Yoder's ecumenical witness involves a continuing cruciform lifestyle. It questions human and ecclesiastical pride and arrogance. In addition, Yoder expects believers to retrieve resources from the life and works of Christ in order to proclaim a normative witness to their Lord Jesus Christ who never changes. He wants the Church to loop back to historical Christology and its proclamation by the pre-Constantinian Church in order to embody the Gospel more meaningfully to contemporary humanity. For Yoder, such an embodied witness is the ecumenical ministry of the subordinate believer in Jesus Christ (cf. Yoder 1997c: 222). In Yoder's visionary practice, readiness to accept (responsible) scandal or bear pains, especially hostility, is part of Christocentric believers' message.

For Yoder, the centrality of Christ's figure is indispensable (it must represent a particular confessional truth for churches), even in the context of unity. The Church is a body of human

beings whose participation in Christ is the doorway to their justification. Christ's figure, as we have noted, reproduces a discernible people who are prepared to order their lives in accordance to their Scripture-based convictions. Consequently, Yoderian believers are nonviolent-resistant. They accept *moral osmosis* (assimilation) as a more meaningful Christocentric approach to social transformation and development. Yoder's practice is a restorative visionary approach to nation building, social transformation, and development. Yoder prefers the servanthood identity and spirituality of the nonviolent-resistant Jesus Christ to the often-violent ethical reflections and practices of Constantinianism.

In other words, nonviolent-resistant servanthood must be part of the identity and spirituality of any church in contemporary Nigeria. Such an approach can usher in a significant breakthrough in their translation of the *missio Dei* in contexts. Many contemporary Nigerians are disgusted with the violent pursuit of God's mission in their societies. Violence, as we have shown, characterizes the perennial *pseudo*-bequests of the British political ideology in the nation. It also sustains Nigeria's polity and political economy as *shark infested waters*. Unfortunately, the main sustainers of this thorny bequest in contemporary Nigeria are Muslim and Christian adherents. How else can one explain why 'a King-styled nonviolent march,' which the Kaduna State branch of the CAN organized on 21 February 2000 to protest the imposition of Sharia on all residents of Kaduna State, ended in disaster? Holland narrates that:

[There occurred] a bloody clash between Muslims and Christians that left churches, mosques, schools, libraries, homes, and businesses burned down to the ground. At the end of several days of bitter fighting – both in public riots and in violent acts of retaliation – it is estimated that the crisis led to the deaths of as many as three thousand people, both Christian and Muslims.
(Holland 2004: 133-134)

It appears that the view of the immediate-past Moderator of the SCS, the Rev S.K.Okocha in his address to the 10th Annual Synod recaptures the sordid *status quo*, which has resulted from the *pseudo*-legacies to Nigerians:

Nigeria is not an Islamic country neither does it belong to people of a particular geographic zone. The blood bath in the Northern parts of Nigeria and the reprisal killings in the South must stop and those that encourage such dastardly acts must be dealt with according to the law of the land.
(Okocha 2006: 21)

We also reflected on this pathetic state of affairs in Chapter 2. A Yoderian vision expects its devotees to proclaim Jesus Christ as the reason for their existence in the nation. Yoder's

restorative practice also calls for a reformed peoplehood (or extended family). Such a distinctive peoplehood can negotiate for *Ezi Ndu (shalom)* as the goal of Christocentric believers' theological transformational development of a society. Certainly, Yoder's vision for peoplehood is Christocentric.

Thus, Yoder's vision for peoplehood can also substantiate this African philosophy: a society should not ignore or fail to appreciate its life support systems as well as how they influence, and are influenced by other factors. The organizational structures of these support systems are constitutive of the historical identity and spirituality of the people. For most Africans in particular, it is often the close connection between human experience, structures, and systems, which yields a holistic understanding of the value of life. The psychological maturity of the stakeholders who strive for social environmental sustainability plays determinative roles in the vibrancy and success of the process (cf. Kobia 2004: 27; Ukaga & Maser 2004: xi-xii). No doubt, Yoder respects such an approach to social transformation and development.

In Yoder's Christocentric vision for social practice, the Church is basically, a scattered *laos* of God who gather to do business in the name of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Church is simply a privileged human agency to initiate and sustain Christocentric transformational and developmental practices of Jesus in contemporary societies. The Church embodies a distinctive social practice, which foreshadows the shape of the social ethics, which the larger world is called to reflect ultimately. The Church, in essence, is a social ethic. Its embodied affirmation of Christ's lordship represents a Christocentric body politics for ecclesial practices. Yoder's ecclesial practice accepts responsible interface of cultures as a meaningful communal religiosity. Consequently, Yoder's Christocentric vision for social practice can challenge the SCS to uphold its status as the light that shines for society to see and glorify God (Matt. 5: 16). The church will be challenged to demonstrate a distinctive and embodied Christocentric interculturality.

Given such an induction on its calling and being, the SCS and its fellow churches can also draw necessary resources from their experiences in PROCURA in order to witness Jesus Christ among the nations. They will derive more inspiration from Yoder's servanthood identity and spirituality in the process. This induction can persuade the Church to adopt a non-coercive, none-in-charge, and non-territorial approach to witness the political ethics of Jesus Christ to Nigerians in general, and the FGN in particular. Yoder's prophetic witness can engage some distressing

legacies of the British ideology (and its attendant vices) in continuing transformational and developmental dialogues in its quest for the *Ezi Ndu* of the society. A Yoderian nonviolent reflection on the middle axiom would not compromise its critical witness to the FGN. It will not overlook the visionary activities of NAPEP, and its subsidiary project NEEDS, in the process.³²⁰ Yoder's ethical approach to mission seeks the transformation and development of society so that all humanity can experience a more appreciable Christocentric *shalom*. Yoder's Christocentric vision will challenge the SCS to take up the burning issue of human dignity in its witness of Jesus Christ among the nations.

Constrained by the love of Christ, Yoderian Christian devotees in particular, would still witness to the FGN despite its dominance by Muslims. Most Nigerian Muslims may not readily accept the words of non-Muslims as authoritative (Lamin Sanneh 2004: 156). Islam bespeaks an identity politics, which underscores its ideological policies as integral to the legitimate right of Muslims' self-determination in all contexts (cf. An-Na'im 1999: 103). Christians are challenged to network with Muslims as covenanted relations in God's mission. This is another area, where Yoder's emphasis on contextuality and responsible Christian practice would play a crucial role. The Yoderian vision is a trans-community visionary project.

For instance, in *He Came Preaching Peace* Yoder (1985: 41-42) asserts that 'truth is suspect if it cannot be commended to every one'. However, he also remarks that, 'the gospel is not an obscurantist. It does not ask for a blind faith....' As we have shown, Yoder would not permit Nigerians to proclaim their embodied faith in Jesus Christ as a *blind faith*. Most Nigerian Muslims are not only hostile to the Christian faith but can be said to hold an open-hidden

³²⁰ We reflect on this issue in a later section of the current chapter. However, we note that NAPEP means National Poverty Eradication Program. The NAPEP national coordinator is Alhaji Sirajo Mai-Angale, who acts on behalf of the President of Nigeria. NAPEP is the agency that is responsible for monitoring and co-ordinating all poverty eradication efforts of the FGN. NAPEP's basic objective is rooted in working with relevant agencies of government in order to achieve its aim. It also offers guides for periodic poverty eradication policy reviews with comprehensive data and regular poverty incidence assessment to improve effective use of resources. Additionally, NAPEP seeks to realize the UN MDGoal of halving the proportion of people living in poverty by the year 2015. NAPEP co-operates with various levels of government such as the States and the Local Governments as well as the private sector to provide more resources for poverty eradication projects. With the formulation of the FGN's economic plan as represented in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in May 2004, NAPEP is poised to deploy its institutional monitoring framework to ensure its implementation, especially at the grassroots. NEEDS' objectives include: (a) to reform government and institutions and to restructure, right-size, re-professionalize and strengthen government. NEEDS aspires to improve service delivery to the people, eliminate waste and fight corruption (b) to grow the private sector by reducing the influence of government in the economy, and to accelerate the privatization program of the FGN (c) to implement a Social Charter in order to improve people's access to health, education, welfare, employment, empowerment, security and participation (d) to engage in ethical re-orientation of Nigerians.

political agenda, i.e., the Islamization of Nigeria.³²¹ This study pointed out these issues as some manifestations of the lopsided structure of Nigeria's political-economical history, which yearns for reformation. Yoder's Christocentric Diaspora (ecclesial) practice of the rule of Christ will underscore peoplehood as the goal of its vision of a priestly Kingdom, and a royal priesthood in Nigeria. The Yoderian vision will seek to raise trans-community visionary believers for a Christocentric ecumenical witness for nation building, social transformation and development in Nigeria. It is much concerned with the welfare and the restoration of the human dignity of the neighbour (cf. Yoder 1997a: 20, 24, 35; 1997b: 230-231).

Thus, Yoder's project especially, his restorative vision can also offer the SCS a normative paradigm for understanding the socio-political forms of the Church as a renewed humanity. This restorative vision will also expect the Church to apply *phronesis*, i.e., practical reasoning, or wisdom (cf. Milbank 2006: 338, 351) in its embodied politics of Jesus among the nations. Yoder re-interprets and re-presents sustained love and ecumenical patience with the differently *other* (which of course includes the real and envisioned enemy) as a more meaningful and responsible Christocentric political approach. His visionary practice also seeks to address and overcome hostilities with ethics, which often administers catharsis in the process. As an instance, eating together represents values of hospitality and community-formation. When eaten together, the bread also describes economic sharing; hence, eating together becomes a way of extending family economic solidarity. The Eucharist provides the paradigm for every other mode of inviting the outsider and the underdog to the table. That basic needs are met is a mark of the messianic age in which the Eucharist is also an economic act. To do rightly in Yoder's visionary approach further means that the practice of breaking bread together is also a matter of economic ethics (cf. Yoder 1997b: 32; 1992a: 21).

Therefore, a Yoderian practice of the Eucharist can inspire the SCS as well as other churches in Nigeria to see the EFCC programs as an attempt by the President Obasanjo-led government to address also the evil of economic injustice in the country. The Nigerian Church is challenged to

³²¹ Other wise, how can one explain the fact that in a nation, which the Constitution declares as secular, Muslim fundamentalists went on to impose Sharia law, the theocratic Islamic law, on the State and the city of Kaduna, in particular. As the Christians continued with their protest march to the Governor's House, a number of Muslims who felt offended at such a public display of (nonviolent) resistance attacked them with deadly weapons and killed many innocent protesters. According to Holland, 'Many Christians retaliated and responded in kind, and during the next few days the violence escalated across Kaduna. EYN Pastor Iyasco Taru, married with seven children, was assassinated in his parsonage when he refused to confess to his attackers, "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet"' (Holland 2004: 134).

strengthen its proclamation of the positive side of the EFCC primal concern if the Church's witness is biblically prophetic.³²² A truly biblical prophetic witness of the Church speaks the mind of God by commending the good and condemning the evil. This point is necessary because the EFCC *inter alia*, seeks to bring all forms of economic expropriation to judgment. From the perspective of this study, it is sad that most Nigerians only see the EFCC as a politically masterminded Commission, which emerged to victimize political opponents of the ruling party. Economic injustice bedevils social structures and morality in Nigeria. As earlier noted, economics is often worshipped as religion in Nigeria. Military politicians and civilian politicians in military uniforms constitute the majority of its *pseudo*-priesthood. Consequently, recent developments within the socio-economic setting of the country can speak in favour of the EFCC. The Commission recently began to investigate Senator Iyabo-Obasanjo-Bello (the daughter of former President Olusegun Obasanjo) for an alleged mishandling of funds.³²³

In addition, the incumbent administration of President Musa Yar' Adua recognizes and sustains its life and vision in spite of some irregularities in the activities of the Commission. Many of such vices became known after the relocation of its Chairperson Mallam Nuhu Ribadu to another office on 16 October 2007.³²⁴ The EFCC seeks to restore economic justice in the socio-economic sphere of Nigeria. The Commission also seeks to enlighten, restore and instil discipline to both perpetrators and victims of economic justice so that all can serve humanity as unto God. This induction makes it more arguable that the ethical visions of these two administrators tend to reflect Yoder's persuasion on restorative justice. Yoder's view on restorative (rather than retributive) justice seeks to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator to serve their originally created purpose in Jesus Christ.³²⁵

³²² In the said communiqué, which the SCS issued out to the nation after its 9th Annual Conference, the Synod also declared: 'CORRUPTION: This is seen as the cankerworm that has destroyed our foundation for nation building. The President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo is therefore commended for his fight against corruption and is equally urged to be steadfast in the fight. The Synod calls on all churches to preach and pray against all immoral corruption' (SCS 2005: 25).

³²³ This includes mishandling of ten million Naira (N10, 000,000, approximately R625, 000) belonging to the Federal Ministry of Health (cf. Muraina & Ojeifor 2008, Emakpe 2008, Ige 2008). The EFCC is also investigating her on other allegations.

³²⁴ For instance, President Obasanjo bought 17 plots during the sale of FGN houses at Abuja, while in office. Other staff members of his presidency also bought more than what a civil servant should acquire. These and other issues emerged from a current public hearing on the sale of FGN houses at Abuja, as organized by the Senate Committee probing the sale of the houses and other related matters (Ojeifo 2008). The EFCC did not challenge them on the issue.

³²⁵ We reflected on Yoder's vision for restorative justice in the previous chapter.

Both administrations (of the FGN) *inter alia*, seek to re-orient Nigerians that the national treasury is not for individuals, families or groups to loot. This quest can explain why the EFCC is also handling the charges of corruption levelled against the two top-government officials who were indicted (we noted this in Chapter 2). In other words, these two administrations proclaim the Good News to the disadvantaged Nigerians, in a sense. Despite their failures, these administrations also seek a visible change in social and economic mindset and relationships of Nigerians. Thus, believers in Jesus Christ should also consider the emergence, vision and activities of the EFCC as a renewed visionary approach to restore *Ezi Ndu* in the socio-economic life of Nigerians. After all, a complete and holistic awareness of the human condition is constitutive in the call of the Gospel of peace (cf. Fubara-Manuel 2007: 180). Biblical peace does not mean complete absence of problems or failures. In the words of the EYN³²⁶ theologian, Filibus Gwama, peace speaks of the ‘refusal to compromise with injustice.... Peace is the courage to face evil in all its dimensions through the Spirit of God’ (Gwama 2007: 57). Such a pursuit of economic *shalom* even by an administration with a Muslim as the President (that is, Alhaji Musa Yar’Adua’s) sounds Yoderian. Yoder’s visionary project, as we have shown, does not grant Christians the sole hermeneutical role and communication of the Gospel.

Yoder also re-presents the *euangelion* as that, which further seeks to instill change in social and economic relationships of humankind. He re-interprets and appropriates the Eucharist as a social process, which also embodies hospitality towards the differently *other*. Yoder reckons on believers’ practice of the Eucharist as a social practice, which can as well empower Christ believers to participate actively and responsibly in socio-political and economic affairs (Yoder 1991b; cf. 1984). Yoder’s vision is Barthian albeit, from a Diaspora perspective. Consequently, it would not accept that the Eucharist is a *decent red centre*. As far as Yoder is concerned, Christ is the focus as well as the locus of the Eucharistic celebration of the humanity of persons. Yoder’s visionary practice suggests that Christocentric human relationships can also represent

³²⁶ EYN stands for Eklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria; i.e., the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria. It was founded by two missionaries from the Church of the Brethren (COB) in America, Stover Kulp and Albert Helser at Garkida in Adamawa State of Nigeria on 17 March 1923. The EYN is now an indigenous West African Peace Church in partnership with the COB. EYN has about ‘160,000 members, organized in 44 district church councils, 402 local congregations, and over 1000 local church branches’ (Gwama 2007: 54). The EYN is one of the Christian denominations that have experienced the worst of Christian-Muslim hostilities in Nigeria. One of their pastors, the late Iyasco Taru, as we noted above, was assassinated in his house by Muslim militants for refusing to confess that ‘There is no God but Allah and Mohamed is his prophet.’ Perhaps such experiences are constitutive of the EYN pastors’ retort to Scott Holland, “God is love but not a pacifist” (Holland 2004: 134, 139).

human reception and communication of God's goodness, which is mediated through relationships.

Consequently, this dissertation holds that the abovementioned Yoderian challenges can spur the SCS to *re-vision* and re-appropriate resources from its rich theology of grace to reflect also the church's ecclesiology as a Reforming church. Yoder re-interprets and appropriates the Reformed slogan, *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*, to mean a continuing process of restructuring and recovering ecclesiastical traditions from past 'failures and idolatries' especially, 'false ecclesiological visions of the past'. We agree with Smit that the Reformed tradition does not have a timeless, a-historical ecclesiology. Within a typology of ecclesiologies, it is certainly possible to situate it somewhere. The Reformed tradition is 'a faith and tradition with enormous liberating potentials' which 'must continuously be liberated from its own failures and idolatries' (Smit 2006b; 2005c; 2004d).

Thus, this study also holds that the SCS can draw resources from Yoder's view on the reforming ministry of the church to reconceive and re-appropriate *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* in ways that are more significant. Such a renewed approach to the reformed ministry of the Church can also permit some useful locally confessed and embodied traditions to play complimentary roles to the biblical witness. Without such a renewed vision, even the Yoderian project would end in a *cul-de-sac* in Nigeria, in this regard. Yoder's Barthian narrative approach to biblical realism rejects and denounces natural theology as idolatrous; in the Barthian perspective, natural theology deifies reason. Thus, Yoder's *ad hoc*, *exploratory*, and *experimental* approach can speak for his vision for social ethics in Nigeria. Yoder's stress on contextuality as a more necessary ethic towards *glocalized* visionary practices can make his vision amenable in Nigeria particularly, within the context of the SCS. Most Nigerians as many other Africans celebrate *theology without footnotes* as a valid way of appreciating and appropriating the gracious, creative and continuing acts of God's sovereign control of history.

Theology without footnotes, as we have argued, is not truistic. It suggests a *theology of witness* (or testimony) to the sovereign acts of God in history. Theology without footnotes describes African recognition, appropriation and communication of God's gracious presence even from natural phenomena. Theology without footnotes is often experienced and communicated spontaneously. It is generated from daily experiences of human beings as they reflect and

appropriate the presence of the sovereign God of surprises. Theology without footnotes is a spontaneous and phenomenal theological reflection and practice. The Ikogosi experience, among other similar phenomena, inspires such reverence for the surprising manifestations of the sovereign Lord of the universe. For most Nigerians, the Ikogosi phenomenon generates theology without footnotes. Only the sovereign God can make it possible for the warm and cold waters to spring out from different sources of the earth's crust, and flowing separately to meet each other in a pool with each retaining its thermal identity. The sovereign Lord of history is full of surprises and most *religio*-cultural Nigerians revere their manifestations in nature, without according them lordship. In other words, wittingly or unwittingly, the SCS as well as other churches in Africa recognize theology without footnotes as a valid way of revering and communicating the gracious and continuing acts of the awesome and sovereign God of surprises. As Yoder, Bediako and some other theologians have remarked, what God is doing is often a surprise, which the Enlightenment-based hermeneutics can distort (cf. Yoder 1997b: 243; Bediako 2004a: 30-40).

Thus, Yoder's visionary project can also inspire the SCS as well as other churches in Nigeria to recognize the crucial complementary roles of history, experience and reason in their communication of the biblical witness. Yoder's visionary project can persuade them to engage one another in continuing theological conversations with a view to learning from and assisting each other, in a humble and responsible manner. A Yoderian bequest can also mean that the churches can gain new inductions especially from the AICs. They will be challenged to reflect anew on how their ecclesial visions and practices can integrate socio-cultural resources albeit, in ethical and less syncretic manners. Many churches need to review and develop their ecclesiologies to meet contemporary challenges in Nigeria. A biblically Christocentric pluralism is also acceptable as a valid and abiding challenge in Yoder's social vision for Christ-believing communities (cf. Yoder 1992b). Yoder's vision for ecclesiology stresses faithful ecumenism as that, which seeks unity with all who name the name of Christ (irrespective of their creed). Its ecumenical vision, as we have shown, also seeks to realize the orthodox practice. Mark Thiessen Nation re-echoes Yoder that no church can claim to hold the whole truth about Jesus Christ (cf. Nation 2006: 107-108). For Yoder, practical reconciliation, which celebrates responsible dialogue, forgiveness and discernment are indispensable *notae* of a faithful Church in the midst of a watching world. Yoder's project is Bible-based.

Yoder's Christocentric vision for a restorative social ethics re-interprets and re-appropriates peoplehood to include the biblical phrase, *all that do the will of my Father*. Its *jesulological* quest for a theological transformational development is about a reforming bodily politicking. The Church is graciously invited and empowered to witness Jesus Christ among the nations. Yoder's social vision for the Church also thirsts for a Reforming society. We hope that readers would understand this position better as we consider Yoder's vision of a Reforming society in the next paragraph.

3.2 Reforming Society

Philip Wogaman once described Yoder as a formative moral thinker of the 21st century. Yoder re-interprets and appropriates the nonviolent-resistant Jesus ethics that are politically relevant. As Carter remarks, Yoder was a very logical and systematic thinker. Yoder summons faithful believers in Jesus Christ to resist evil and injustice in loving and nonviolent ways. He places high premium on faithful believers as the Lord's moral agency for continuing reformation of society (Wogaman 1993: 233-235; Carter 2001: 18). In his lifetime, Yoder also argued and called for a reforming society. In his visionary project, Christians play a leading *jesulological* role as the first fruit of the Christ-event among the nations (cf. Yoder 1997b: 15-93). For instance, in *The Christian Witness to the State*, Yoder acknowledges that *moral osmosis* is an aspect of Christian formative influences. Through *moral osmosis*, the larger society can recognize some moral values to which it has no spiritual or logical commitment. We discussed this point in the previous chapters.

Yoder's ethical vision is also rhetorical that the Christian fellowship contributes immensely towards the development of moral standards beyond its membership. Yoder's reflexive vision for *moral osmosis* seeks to reform the moral fabric of societies through Christian education. It also appropriates visible social values and industry of the Christian faith in the process. Yoder's social vision reckons on believers conscious refusal to participate in evil as a more meaningful reflection of a Christocentric middle axiom for social engagements. In Yoder's visionary practice, various 'attitudes of honesty and mutual respect, hard work and clean thinking, unselfishness and tolerance' among other things, constitute the creativities of the Christian witness through *moral osmosis* (cf. Yoder 1997a: 20-21, 40). Yoder envisions a dynamic and

innovative society in which the political ethics of the biblical Jesus is central in nation building, social transformation and development.

Yoder's ethical vision is Christocentric. Thus, it strives to remind Christians that the penultimate goal of their embodied witness is to seek the continuing reformation of societies. Yoderian believers in Christ embody the political ethics of the nonviolent-resistant Jesus as their identity and spirituality. Yoder's Barthian posture will not promote sectarian complacency. It will not also tolerate imperial despondence in its multifaceted, exploratory, experimental and *ad hoc* approach to Christocentric social witness. Yoder's socio-ethical vision is a Diaspora visionary practice. It reflects on nonviolent resistance as a more meaningful confession and embodiment of Christ's lordship in our age. As Nico Koopman has shown, to confess and embody is more than merely determining the challenges of catholicity (wholeness or fullness). It also transcends the simple act of discerning its implications and imperatives to contemporary churches. Embodied confession of Jesus Christ also summons believers to confess in word and deed; to embody in ethos, in structures, in practices and in policies, in every sphere of life wholeness and fullness – albeit, in imperfect, preliminary and penultimate forms (cf. Koopman 2006a: 10). Such an embodied confession of faith is what a Yoderian reflection envisions for society. Yoder has also demonstrated that Jesus Christ and his early or pre-Constantinian believing communities embodied their confession of faith in holistic social witness.

Given this submission, it becomes more acceptable that Yoder's Christocentric project can assist the SCS to be constant in its pursuit of reforms within the larger society. The SCS will be challenged to recover and re-appropriate its social ethics in order to justify its identity as Church. In Yoder's perspective, the Church denotes a group of scattered human beings in concrete societies who also gather in visible communities. Such persons gather to transact business in the name of God as revealed in the embodied *kerygma* of the biblical Jesus Christ. This is a Christocentric challenge, which Yoder's trans-community vision throws to contemporary churches. The Yoderian challenge further summons the Church to a cruciform life and embodiment in ethos, structures and practices, and in policies. Yoder's vision for social ethics seeks the *Ezi Ndu* of its host, and surrounding societies. Its *glocalized* challenges seek to exercise global influences. Although they manifest locally, the challenges of Yoder's social vision influence global realities, while they also welcome necessary influences from existential realities

in the universe. Yoder's restorative project therefore suggests a Christocentric trans-community vision for nation building, social transformation and development.

In other words, Yoder's restorative vision for the Church can inspire the SCS to co-operate with other churches and publics in Scripture-based Christocentric witness. Such a Christocentric corporate witness will draw resources from the political ethics of Jesus to embark on nation building, social transformation and development. Yoder's Christocentric vision will engage the endemic *pseudo*-capitalist ideologies as well as the ecological crisis within the geo-political vicinity of the SCS in continuing transformational and developmental dialogues. These evils are most apparent in Aba, Port Harcourt, Yenegoa, Owerri, Umuahia and their environs. We discussed the fallout of their existence as well as their legacies in the second chapter of this study.

This research also reasons with Akper (2006a) that no single public institution can do without the services of the other, in contemporary Nigeria. The contemporary state of affairs particularly, within the environment of the SCS makes it so. This study has tried to substantiate such a claim in previous chapters. The pervasive influence of some distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based ethics is basically, the catalyst of this *status quo*. For instance, it affects the way many contemporary Nigerians relate with, or appropriate local resources negatively. Historically, as we have shown in this study, most Nigerians are religiocentric. They are hospitable and altruistic in orientation. Many Nigerians embody their *religio*-cultures as indispensable communal religiosities. Their historical identities as well as socio-cultural contexts are rooted in their *religio*-cultural history. The organizational forms and ecclesial practices of these resources play crucial roles in re-creating effective institutions and practices for social transformation and development in Nigeria.

Such communal *religio*-cultural ethos contrasts with many demands and orientations of the Enlightenment-based ethical bequests in Nigeria. Most of these Enlightenment-based projects show negligible respect for local resources, contexts and contextual realities. They are usually rooted in the tristic philosophies of the Reformation era of the West. Thus, they often breed and enthrone crisis within their host *religio*-cultures in Nigeria. We reflected on these issues in previous chapters of this study. It is sad to note that many indigenous theologians do not give these contextual realities meaningful attention in their projects. Until recently, the Church, the

academia and the larger Nigerian society do their things in isolation (Akper 2006a). This should not be the case. An ivory tower theology does not have a meaningful space in contemporary Nigerian societies. On the other hand, a project-oriented mode of public involvement on the part of the Church is not enough. On the other hand, unhelpful criticism of the government and the Church by the academia is not helpful either (cf. Akper 2006a: 6-7). Consequently, these three publics must engage in intercultural or trans-community public witness. Social witness involves the concerted efforts of the scattered *laos* of God who gather to *do the will of my Father* in Christ's name. This research reckons on Akper's remarks on this issue, as a Yoderian reflection on catholicity, from a Nigerian perspective.

In the Yoderian perspective, catholicity can include, without limiting it to Christocentric religious practitioners, government and the academia in contemporary Nigeria. However, as Akper further reasons, contemporary Christological reflections in Africa should not only reflect on Jesus as the Savior whom the world can claim for its salvation; they should proceed to restore and tie mission and development back to the gracious and altruistic Christ-event. In addition, Christian churches should play leading roles in the process. True biblical Christianity ought to teach humanity how to live with possessions as people who can also live without them. It is Christocentric. True biblical Christocentric *kerygma* of the *euangelion* must proclaim change in social and economic relations. Its affirmation of the *euangelion* must reflect the revolutionary Good News, which Jesus and his early believing communities embodied as social witness within concrete societies.

With this Yoderian challenge as well as the Reformed (reforming) identity of the SCS, it also becomes clear that the church would not live for itself but for the nations. The SCS will seek to rediscover and re-appropriate its identity as a social ethic *vis-à-vis* the church's renewed Christocentric (socio-ethical) vision. With the Yoderian identity and spirituality, the SCS will strive to embody and reflect a cruciform lifestyle. Its presence and ministry is for the nations to envision and practice the social ethics the larger society is ultimately called to embody. This can also mean that the SCS stands a better chance of bequeathing Nigerians with a renewed and more meaningful ethics. Its Christocentric vision will seek to engage the *pseudo-capitalist* ideology as well as the ecological crisis (evident in Aba, Port Harcourt, Yenegoa, Owerri, Umuahia, etc.) in restorative and reconciliatory dialogues. These vices enthrone and sustain

many social evils. Their *pseudo*-structures often reduce and banish the Nigerian masses to the status of sub-humans. We discussed these issues from the second chapter of this dissertation.

The *pseudo*-capitalist ideologies usually reduce the female folks, the youths, children as well as disadvantaged males to objects of economic exploitation (including pawnship). They also breed and legitimize prostitution, wife and children (husband) abuse, gangsterism, teenage pregnancy, armed robbery as well as many other similar vices. ‘Survival of the fittest’ is the rhythm of their philosophy: *get all you can, can all you can get, can then can and sit on the can!* In addition, the ecological crisis bedevils the society with flood, diseases and many other life-threatening evils. This is most evident in the Niger Delta. We hope to revisit some of these issues in the next segment of this section. This study reiterates that these evils are contained in the consumerist bequests of the British political ideologies, which are yearning for transformation in contemporary Nigeria. These *pseudo*-capitalist bequests also introduce a distinction between the private and public lives of Nigerians; their truistic philosophies are rooted in abstract scientific theories.

Consequently, Yoder’s Christocentric project can persuade the SCS to interact with other publics in order to assist affected Nigerians to embody a renewed lifestyle. The concerted efforts of these publics can guide such Nigerians to strike a significant balance between their private and public lives. The Church can assist them to draw resources from the Christocentric *jesulogical* ethics to *re-vision* and relive their private and public lives as religiosities. Such an approach can restrain individuals and groups from being victims to various forms of consumerism and consumer orientations. Perspectives envisioned from the ‘ecological economic paradigm’ rather than ‘classical economic’ models will permeate and sustain the worldviews of most adherents and admirers of the SCS. The church will strive to adopt ways that are more adequate to proclaim Christocentric social ethics as the revolutionary Gospel of Jesus Christ. The blind can see and appreciate such Christocentric Gospel; the deaf can hear and respond to it, while the lame can see and appropriate the leap of faith to walk towards it. The embodied social witness of the Church is for the nations. Christocentric believers’ embodied confession of faith is foundationally public. Yoder reflects on it as one of the first fruits of the merits of the gracious Christ-event. A Yoderian visionary practice re-interprets and re-presents the goal of Christology as oriented towards human development and restoration. It also seeks to restore and assist human beings to serve the originally created purpose of humanity in the divine economy. Yoder’s

restorative vision for social practices also pleads for a Christocentric *jesulogical* approach to nation building, social transformation and development. Its ecumenical vision for a Reforming church co-operates with all who name the name of the Lord to seek a Reforming society whose economy is also reformable. With its embodied witness as a nonviolent-resistant Diaspora practice, Yoder's social vision breeds, sustains and espouses a Christocentric ecumenical identity and spiritualities.

Thus, the SCS will primarily exist to witness the merits of the gracious Christ-event as socially realizeable in contemporary Nigeria. Yoder's visionary bequest of renewed ecumenical identity and spirituality can make it possible. As far as Yoder's social vision is concerned, theology determines ethics just as ethics expresses *jesulogical* demonstration of Christocentric love as the culture of theology.

Yoder's visionary practice is *lived in hope and humble confidence* in the reality of God's sovereign ability to transform all creations in Jesus Christ. It is a Christocentric Diaspora practice of nonviolent-resistance. Yoder's social vision can also serve as a more meaningful way of living out catholicity in contexts where Christ-believers are in the minority. Consequently, Yoder's vision can persuade the SCS as well as other churches in Nigeria to adopt a more Bible-based Christocentric approach in their varied efforts to demonstrate theological transformational development as a goal of the gracious merits of the Christ-event.

Yoder's Christocentric challenge would plead with the SCS, among other things, to *re-vision*, re-interpret, and re-appropriate its vision for ecclesial reflection and practices to include the excluded especially the local people and their contexts. Within Yoder's Diaspora pursuit of the Barthian project, cultivation of the human person is central to the goal and sustainable foundation for realizing other developmental objectives. As a result, the Church cannot afford to bypass the indispensability of the local contexts in the process. It is crucial for all stakeholders to be involved in the development process without coercion (cf. Yoder 1994f; 1992b; Ukaga & Maser 2004: 5; Stassen 1998: 119-140). Jesus Christ is the Savior and restorer of Creation wherever he is biblically proclaimed and embodied. It is expected that this induction will become clearer as we discuss its manifestation in the economy, in the next paragraph.

3.3 Reforming Economy

Yoder's ethical vision can also bequeath the SCS with the challenge to seek a reforming economy for Nigeria. Yoder envisions, re-interprets and appropriates Christocentric believers' practice of the Eucharist as an ecclesial economic act. One can induct this challenge from Yoder's argument that the otherness of believers' ethics lies in its rootedness in the content of the Gospel. For instance, in *Body Politics*, Yoder considers the Eucharist as a paradigm for economic ethics. He claims that:

....[T]he family/chabourah model of meal-and-prayer gathering....was a way committed believers shared in one another's needs. The first embodiment of the economic newness of the Kingdom is thus basic economic sharing among the members of the messianic community....The newness of the believing community is the promise of newness on the way of the world. That...those in bondage will be freed and the hungry will be fed is also a criterion...for political economics beyond the circle of faith.

(Yoder 1992a: 21)

To do rightly, Yoder reasons, the practice of breaking bread together is a matter of economic ethics. This vision reflects and extends to a wider circle of economic solidarity, which is suggestive of the African appropriation of the extended family paradigm (or original concept of *ubuntu*)³²⁷ for social relationships. Yoder re-reads such Eucharistic practices of the early believers as a significant attempt to realize the Scriptural injunction that 'there should be no poor among you',³²⁸ or 'you should not neglect the poor, or stranger in your midst'. For Yoder, the subordinate Church exists as a moral (formation and reformation) agency in the society. It also bears witness that there is enough for all. Yoder's perspective on the Eucharist empowers the subordinate Church with the strength to participate in continuing reformation of the economy. His economic vision also loops back to Scripture and pre-Constantinian church traditions. It seeks to envision and re-live the economic ethics of the early apostolic communities, which 'are characterized by a *koinonia* in which they share their goods in common to such an extent that no

³²⁷ We noted in the first chapter of this study that the original concept of *ubuntu* was not limited to Black South Africans. This study suspects that the exclusive concept as used during and after the Apartheid is a reactionary concept to injustice. Traditionally, Africans are hospitable and altruistic in their ethical foundations and orientations. They embody their altruistic philosophies as communal religiosities.

³²⁸ Yoder's visionary project appeals to the Lukean gospel in its constant quest to re-interpret and re-present believers' corporate witness of Jesus' embodied politics as the true description of the social ethics of early Church, which the New Testament suggests (cf. Yoder 1997b: 31-32).

one among them remains a “needy” (Long 2001: 159). Yoder’s ethical project, as we have also shown in this study, is Christocentric in its foundation and orientations. In his visionary project, believers’ embodied witness is also an economic affirmation of the Gospel. Yoder’s Christocentric vision re-presents the *euangelion* as Good News to all and sundry especially, the less privileged members of the society. The political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ redirects believers’ desires towards the reconciliatory practices, which Jesus and his pre-Constantinian believing communities also embodied in their practice of the Eucharist (Yoder 1992b: 14-27).

As far as Yoder’s visionary practice is concerned, the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ provides a normative paradigm for believers’ political engagement, even in the larger society. Yoder’s social vision for ethical practices is a community forming and reforming project. Fundamentally, Yoder’s Christocentric vision also takes the burning issue of recovering and reconstituting human dignity serious. From this submission, we affirm our earlier argument that the Christocentric *jesulogical* Kingdom ethical vision and practices can assist the SCS to embody and translate from consumerism in Nigeria.

For instance, Yoder’s Christocentric vision can inspire the SCS to commend and evaluate the homegrown economic project of the FGN. With the birth of NAPEP in 2001, the political economy of Nigeria began to recover the missing link in its quest to return to the paths of success.³²⁹ Prior to this epoch-making phenomenon, the Nigerian economy was in shambles. To substantiate this point, we have retrieved some resources from the IMF report, which appraised the success of Nigeria’s homegrown economic reform programs in February 2008.³³⁰ This report was presented by David Nellor of the IMF African Department in the IMF Survey Magazine of 15 February 2008. Nellor reports that Nigeria’s current economic situation is the strongest in its economic history. The Nigerian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth over the three years prior to 2003, as we learn from government sources, was estimated at an average of about 3.5%

³²⁹ With the launching of NAPEP, the FGN assembled a highly competent, professional group of reformers to implement macro-economic reform, service delivery improvement, anti-corruption initiatives, and poverty reduction, among other strategies. NEEDS is pursuing these strategies since its birth in May 2004.

³³⁰ Yoder’s social vision would not permit the FGN to sever its relationship with the IMF even though his prophetic witness (social critique) would acknowledge the hardship this financial body caused Nigerians through its Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). Many Nigerians are yet to recover from the distress, which SAP bred and nurtured in their country. Yoder’s visionary practice, as Nation and other theological proponents of the Yoderian project tell us, stresses sustained engagement with the differently *other*, especially, the adversary. It holds that such other might hold the key to the elusive truth. Yoder’s restorative vision for social ethics seeks to recover, restore and re-invigorate waning or broken relationships (Nation 2006).

per day. The national economy depended much on oil and external borrowings. This practice often reduced this 'giant of Africa' to the status of an *unhealthy consumerist beggar* who lives by the mercies of external lenders. Corruption and patronage-based politics also enthroned and sustained unproductive public investment, which the Obasanjo-led administration inherited from successive military dictatorships in the nation. Its most distressing legacies were evident in the high rate of inflation and a devalued naira both of which brought untold hardships to the populace. Economics was worshipped as religion, while corrupt military personnel and militarized politicians constituted the majority of its priesthood. The consumerist *pseudo-ideological* rhythm, *get all you can, can all you can get, can the can and sit on the can*, was the reigning philosophy.

This is a direct opposite of the report by Nellor. As we indicated above, Nellor is of the view that Nigeria's current economic situation is the strongest in its economic history. He expects her GDP to rise to about 9% this year. Nellor attributes this success to Nigeria's homegrown economic reform projects. In his words:

Growth is high, inflation is in single digits, and external and fiscal positions are strong....The recapitulated banking sector and newly active financial markets are supporting private activity. These gains reflect implementations of Nigeria's homegrown reform program....prospects for growth in 2008 are good....The non-oil sector, particularly in the areas of services and agriculture, has been growing strongly. Looking ahead, growth in the non-oil sector is on course to reach about 9% this year as long as weather conditions continue to support agriculture. Single digit inflation targets are within reach helped by a strong naira.

(Nellor 2008: 1)

From Nellor's report, it is evident that the homegrown economic policy of the FGN is an anti-consumerist project. It is turning Nigerians from consumerists to creative initiators. At least, as we can see from the report, the increase and success in the private and non-oil sector of the Nigerian economy is a testimony. However, Nellor is of the opinion that Nigeria needs sustained reforms to improve on this success. He expects Nigerians to maintain and, where necessary, improve on this success story.

Consequently, this study is of the view that Yoder's prophetic witness can play a crucial role here. It can provide the SCS with a niche to offer to the FGN so that Nigeria can realize Nellor's projection through the activities of NAPEP. We are suspicious that the presence of the above-mentioned consumerist and economic worshippers can jeopardize this feat, which the

homegrown economic reform programs of the FGN achieve for all. Such economic priests have no respect for the human dignity of the less privileged (present-absent) members of the society. Economics is their god while privation of the common good is their salvation. Thus, revamping the Nigerian economy needs a Yoderian prophetic witness. An official document of the FGN confirms the argument that the government, through NAPEP's vision for the pursuit of the MDG in Nigeria, needs a Yoderian prophetic witness to sustain her growing economy. According to this document:

The Multi Partner Micro Finance has indeed been revolutionary in pooling together resources to be committed to core poverty eradication programs....With limited amount of NAPEP fund of N1billion, it has so far been able to mobilize the sum of N7.2billion. However, more than that, its collaborators in the multi-Partner has seen increased activities in a number of micro and small wealth generating activities....What NAPEP does is to match the funds so as to increase the out reach to the poor. **In the Promise Keeper Program (PKP),³³¹ with limited NAPEP funds of N141million, while working with some 380 faith based organizations across the country have successfully mobilized N282million.**

For a developing country like ours, Micro Credit scheme is very essential. You cannot fight poverty in a country where you have the kind of poverty rate that we have without using micro credit because what it does is that it is the main avenue for the empowerment for the poor (sic). Just as the big people go to the bank to get big loans to run their businesses, the poor also need to have a place to go to get loans.... So micro credit scheme is a very important means to ensure that the poor are involved....

(Presidency 2007: 2-3 [Our emphasis])

The document, which the Presidency published in 2007, shows that NAPEP fared well in the year 2006. This aspect of the success in the national economy arose from the activities of NAPEP's subsidiary projects such as the MP-MF and the PKP, among others. NAPEP understands accountable-financial-empowerment of the poor as a significant approach to integrate the less privilege into the FGN's vision for the realization of the MDG in Nigeria. Evidently, NAPEP's vision in this instance reflects Yoder's suggestive vision for the epistemological privilege of the underdog. Yoder's visionary approach does not expect the poor to assume the status of irresponsible consumerists in the process. Rather, his vision seeks to recover and reconstitute, in particular, the human dignity of the poor. The poor are inclusive in

³³¹ The PKP is a revolving Micro Credit scheme of the NAPEP, in which the FGN co-operates with religious bodies and Faith Based Organizations (FBO) to ensure that the beneficiaries (less privileged members of the society) of the scheme account for such loans. NAPEP works in partnership with Community Based Organizations (CBO) especially the FBOs. The religious bodies act as guardians/guarantors. The FBOs facilitate the relationship by providing a pool of funds for establishing successful businesses or for providing basic community infrastructure or services, while NAPEP provides matching funds to the projects. The PKP offers micro credit and infrastructural support.

Yoder's vision of believers as moral agents for Christocentric transformation and development of society.

Thus, given such an understanding on the encouraging *status quo* in the Nigerian economy, a Yoderian prophetic witness will commend President Yar'Adua. The President is sustaining and improving upon the visionary projects of his predecessor. Often, political administrations in the country have abandoned projects, which their predecessors in office initiated. Such incumbent administrations usually prefer to start new ones that can bear their names, as the initiators. Evidently, a true Yoderian approach to social critique will not close its eyes to the good works of the statesman in its prophetic witness. Yoder's Christocentric vision is as concerned about the welfare of the statesman as it is concerned with the welfare of members of the society (cf. Yoder 1997a: 24). Therefore, a true Yoderian prophetic witness in Nigeria will also call on President Yar'Adua to ensure that other rural dwellers enjoy the benefits of the KEKE NAPEP scheme. The KEKE NAPEP scheme is a poverty eradication project of the FGN, which gives meaning to the lives of some unemployed youths in Nigeria. According to the above-mentioned Whitepaper from the Presidency:

Under the scheme, NAPEP offers unemployed youth on an owner-operator's basis a 3-wheel passenger vehicle at a significant discount for transport business. To ensure the sustainability of the project, NAPEP maintains stocks of valuable spare parts nationwide and train service personnel for routine maintenance and repairs.

(Presidency 2007: 7-8)

The KEKE NAPEP, a tricycle, is predominantly found around Lagos and Abuja. It is doubtful that this laudable project is visible within the hosting states of the SCS. Above all, the poor hardly get them directly from the government. The political supporters of the ruling parties often secure the allocation of most of the vehicles, which they in turn lease out to the poor at exorbitant rates. Some economic worshippers still parade themselves as priests, and indispensable stakeholders in the (often) patronage-based politics of Nigeria. A true Yoderian prophetic witness to the social order will not spare the *pseudo*-ethical reflections and practices of these economic priests. It will also seek to reconstitute and respect the human dignity of the oppressed. Yoder's Christocentric ethical vision will seek to transform this thorny issue without compromising such values as human dignity, hospitality and community formation and sustenance among other things, in Nigeria. It is a Christocentric restorative vision.

In addition, Yoderian practitioners in Nigeria can also persuade President Yar'Adua to witness the success of the MDG vision in Nigeria to political leaders of Africa. They will expect President Yar'Adua to specifically share the catalyst of the success story of the current Nigerian economy with leaders of such African countries, which Jeffrey Sachs classifies among the poorest of the poor who are locked up in 'the poverty trap' (Sachs 2005: 56-57). Yoderian devotees in Nigeria will envision and seek to translate economics from Yoder's perspective on believers' practice of the Eucharist. Yoder's view on the Eucharist *inter alia*, stresses responsible sharing and appropriation of economic resources at all levels of human existence. In other words, Yoder's restorative vision for social ethics can assist President Yar'Adua's administration to reinvigorate the waning vision of NEPAD in contexts, through the visionary projects of NAPEP. It can restore and affirm Nigeria's status as 'a giant of Africa' without the fear of mockery of her citizenry.

Significantly, Yoder's vision can also empower the FGN to remind Nigerian churches and the SCS in particular, that *to be set apart* does not bequeath them with an identity of *an isolated and insulated* community. Above all, the FGN can witness to the churches on the need to retrieve, re-interpret and appropriate John Calvin's interpretation of Scripture from the perspective of *sola scriptura civitate interpretata*. It can as well mean: 'Scripture alone interpreted with a view to the city, with a view to public life, to the questions and issues, the challenges and crisis of society' (Smit 2006b: 38). Yoder's restorative ethics as we noted earlier, is a Christocentric trans-community vision. It also seeks to restore the human dignity of the less privileged members of the society so that all humankind can participate in Christocentric *jesuological* or nonviolent-resistant participation in nation building, social transformation and development (cf. Yoder 1997c: 217).

From the foregoing, it seems obvious that the SCS in particular and Nigerians in general can benefit much from Yoder's Christocentric project. Nigerians can find resources in Yoder's restorative vision for social ethics in order to allay the fear, which Nellor expressed in the caption for his report; i.e., *Nigeria Needs Sustained Reforms to Build on Success*. Yoder's Christocentric project envisions a faithful ecumenical witness for the Church. Thus, a Christocentric responsible ecumenical co-operation between the FGN and local churches especially, the Reformed, can draw resources from Yoder's social vision to assist NAPEP to realize Nellor's hopes. As we have noted, Yoder's visionary project would not permit the FGN

to sever her relationship with the IMF. As we earlier observed, Yoder's ethical vision seeks to recover, restore and re-invigorate waning or broken relationships. It holds that the other might hold the key to the elusive truth about life and issues. Consequently, this study holds that Yoder's restorative vision for believers' practice of the Eucharist can empower all the subordinate believing communities of Christ to participate in the continuing reformation and revamping of Nigeria's economy.

Yoder's Christocentric vision for Kingdom *kerygma* can inspire Nigerians to esteem the *kenosis* (self-emptying or cruciform) experience as a meaningful and sustainable embodiment of the original revolutionary Gospel, which Jesus and his early believing communities proclaimed as social ethics. Such a Christocentric Kingdom confession of faith envisions and embodies the *continuity of grace* from a *jesulogical* perspective. It *inter alia*, strives to show that those invited into the Kingdom can become inviters. Their guests can also transform into hosts (cf. Janzen 1994: 202-211). Yoder's social vision reflects a revolutionary and participatory Kingdom ethics.

Additionally, Yoder reminds the practitioners of his vision about their status as God's redeemed and restored moral agency in Jesus Christ. The merits of the gracious Christ-event saddle such devotees with the onus to take society beyond its traditional understanding, interpretation and appropriation of humanity, ecology and events. In Yoder's vision for social ethics, the blind, the slave, the unclean, outcast, the hungry and the sick as well as other *demeaned* status of human beings, receive grace to participate in the *missio Dei*. Consequently, ecology can be liberated from 'its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God' (cf. Rom 8: 21). Within Yoder's visionary ethics of the Kingdom, human enjoyment and stewardship of land, in particular, becomes a communication of God's gift of concrete favour. A redeemed and restored humanity will re-interpret generous hospitality to extend beyond repressive tolerance of the differently *other* (cf. Yoder 1997b: 221-245; McFague 2000; Long 2001: 153-300). Generous hospitality can also mean a doxological witness of the *kenosis* experience in Yoder's vision for social ethics. Remembering Jesus inspires 'committed witnesses to persevere *beyond* repressive tolerance with normative witness to Christ who never changes' (Yoder 1997c: 222 [Our italics]).

Yoder's visionary practice of Kingdom ethics embraces the offense of Jesus' *kenosis* experiences as its identity and spirituality. This vision also seeks the subordinate believers' (sustained)

sacrificial but doxological, conscientious and conscious subjection to the political ethics of Jesus even where it involves a scandalous death. Smit (2003c) states that Christians are called to respond to what we see, even to suffer with it. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are challenged to relate to the many faces we see all around us, i.e., to recognize that, as part of them, we are related to them and their suffering. Our stories are integrally part of their stories. The story of Jesus Christ, which constitutes the faith of the Church as well as our identity and integrity, is part of their story especially, when we fail to see (cf. Smit 2003c: 64-65). Yoder's social vision, as we have re-presented in this study, is also a restorative project.

From the foregoing, it is evident that Yoder's restorative project can also envision and initiate a substantive approach to nation building, social transformation and development in Nigeria. Yoder's visionary project will also engage in such transformational and developmental missionary vision from a *jesulological* (historical) Christological perspective. Only renewed and restored Christ believers can serve as true human agency of theological transformational development in a polarized context as the Nigerian example. Such an embodied political witness of Jesus Christ among the nations will be most evident in Yoder's vision of the *priestly Kingdom* as well as *royal priesthood* within the context of the SCS. Yoder re-presents Christocentric peoplehood or extended family as an indispensable religiosity of the royal priests. His view on peoplehood is distinctive; it is biblically Christocentric. Thus, Yoder's Christocentric approach can share space with non-Christian believers in its quest to raise a peculiar priesthood; it is a *jesulological* (nonviolent-resistant) visionary practice.

With such an understanding, it can be assumed that Yoder's distinctive view of priesthood can raise royal priests from a Christocentric *jesulological* perspective. They will strive to witness the urgency of confessing, and embodying Christocentric *ethos* in all sectors of Nigeria's *highly politicized* polity and political economy. Yoder's social ethics is a nonviolent-resistant (Diaspora) visionary pursuit of the Barthian project. As a result, it seeks to reform and transform society through Yoder's reflexive vision for *moral osmosis*. Yoder's *jesulological* social witness engages in Christocentric nation building, social transformation and development as, to use a Reformed phrase, a *semper reformanda* (continuing reformation) project. It envisions a Christocentric *jesulological* approach to nation building, social transformation and development.

Given this *jesulological* posture, it becomes more convincing that Yoder's Diaspora practice (or religiosity) can provide the SCS with more adequate ways to seek a concrete social realization of the Kingdom vision in Nigeria. As evident in this study, Yoder translates and espouses a restorative nonviolent-resistant (and inclusive) visionary approach to trans-community affirmation of the Good News as social ethics. His multifaceted, exploratory, *ad hoc*, and experimental ethics also celebrates hope, vulnerability, relationality, interdependence, etc., in its identity and spirituality. This altruistic ethos is also a part of African religiosity; hence, they can promote and commend Yoder's project to the SCS. It suggests a Bible-based-Christocentric ecclesial realism. Yoder's social vision will also strive to grapple with its creative tension of upholding the identity of the Church as an *altera* (alternative) *polis* in his restorative approach to nation building, social transformation and development in Nigeria. Yoder's vision for the otherness of the Church would not permit the SCS to withdraw from ethical public witness of Christocentric *jesulological* ethics among the nations. It would not also allow the Church to impose or repeat the errors of Constantinian ethics in contemporary Nigeria. Yoder's emphasis on the witness of the Spirit also re-invigorates the Kingdom vision within concrete societies. The Spirit also restores the believers' sense of a living consciousness of the Kingdom vision within concrete historical contexts. A Yoderian view on Christian discipleship is also a project of identity formation as it is a negotiation of moral identity within empirical societies. Yoder's ethical project is foundationally and functionally a *semper reformanda* visionary practice.

Therefore, Yoder's visionary practice can persuade the SCS and other Nigerian churches (especially Reformed churches) to commit themselves practically and wholeheartedly to Yoder's vision of the priestly Kingdom. Yoder's social vision engages in *semper social reformanda* as its penultimate goal of *ministerium* (collegiate) theological mission agenda for societies. His vision for a priestly Kingdom is Christocentric and *jesulological*. It underscores the incumbency of a visibly embodied *jesulological* ethos for a Christocentric social transformation and development on the subordinate believer in Christ. Consequently, one can as well describe the embodied witness of such Christocentric believers as persons who exist for the society (to restore its wholeness, i.e., *Ezi Ndu*) and not against it. Christ's love would rather constrain such *jesulological* believers to demonstrate the Christocentric Good News as God's original revolution in the society (Yoder 1997b; 1971b). This is another crucial induction from Yoder's Christocentric vision for *jesulological* social transformation and development in Nigeria.

Given such an induction, we become persuaded that Nigerian (Reformed) churches will be challenged to speak out as renewed ecumenical and denominational churches. They can also offer to train and give necessary *jesulological* (pastoral) guidance to Christ believers who seek or hold political (economic and religious) offices. Only *jesulological* believers who can retrace and embody Christocentric identity and spirituality in their daily life and activities can initiate and sustain such significant ethos for social transformational developments in contemporary Nigeria. Yoder's ethics, as we observed earlier, would seek to take Nigeria and her citizenry beyond many distressing legacies of the British political ideologies. Yoder's socio-ethical vision is rhetorical that the social practice of the empirical Church must reflect the ultimate shape of social ethics, which the larger society is called to embody.

Such distressing legacies of British political ideology are problematic in contemporary Nigeria. They often reduce many Nigerians to the status of unhealthy consumers in a highly *politicized-consumer-oriented* political economy. This unhealthy status contributes much to the increasing level of corruption in Nigeria. As we earlier remarked, economics is almost worshipped as a religion. Corrupt politicians rather than Christocentric theologians and economists constitute the majority of its priesthood. We discussed these issues in previous sections of this study. The study hopes that Yoder's Diaspora (Barthian) practice can persuade the SCS in particular, to pursue its vision for theological missionary practices with the integrity of Christocentric lifestyles. Yoder's vision for social practice will assist such *laos* of God to bear true and consistent witness to their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, under the guidance of the Spirit. Yoder's vision for a priestly Kingdom adopts a Christocentric *jesulological* identity and spirituality in its visionary practice of ecclesial biblical realism.

In Yoder's vision for Christocentric (biblical) realism, citizens of the priestly Kingdom demonstrate the social witness of the Good News as a gracious bequest of the merits and implication of the Christ-event on the subordinate believer of Jesus Christ (cf. Yoder 1984). Yoder's social vision seeks a servant-oriented (royal) priesthood. It expects Christocentric believers to embody it among the nations. The presence and ministry of such Christocentric priesthood constitutes a primordial way in which Christ transforms cultures from within (cf. Yoder 1994e: 373). Yoder gives significant respect to the embodied life and ministry of the Holy Spirit in believers' theological mission ethics. Therefore, his visionary project will further seek to restore of *Ezi Ndu* with in the highly politicized political economy of Nigeria.

With this insight, it becomes more evident that Yoder's Christocentric vision can help to restore the fear of God, self-control and prudential management of resources in the public and private sectors of Nigeria's economy. Yoder's emphasis on the personhood and ministry of the Holy Spirit could play a great role here. Many *religio*-cultural Nigerians (incurably) embody great reverence for and appropriation of spirit-guided life with impunity. Consequently, Yoder's (or McFague's) appeal for Christian theologians to demystify theology in order to enable humanity to embody theology in their daily lives would play a crucial role in this exercise. Nigerians especially, professional economists and politicians can embody theology without footnotes (i.e., theology of testimony, or witness) in more substantive ways. When theology is demystified and meaningfully translated by the Church, more people as McFague reasons will adopt and practice it in their professional, private and public lives. Yoder's Christocentric vision does not grant Christians the monopoly for theological hermeneutics.

Consequently, a Yoderian appropriation of theology without footnotes can substantiate our earlier argument: that resources from Yoder's ethical vision for the subordinate Church can assist the SCS and its admirers to wriggle out of its Scottish bequest of, to re-appropriate Udoh's phrases; 'faith schizophrenia'; 'double-mindedness'; 'living in two worlds at the same time' and 'faith pathology.' Many *religio*-cultural Nigerians also embody these *pseudo*-identities in their daily engagement with some distressing economic realities in the country. These *pseudo*-bequests usually breed, enthrone and legitimize unwholesome economic relationships in Nigeria. They often erect and fortify deceptive structures, which often banish and restrict the less privileged in particular, to the status of sub-humanities in the society. Such *pseudo*-bequests cannot escape the critiques of Yoderian practitioners of theology without footnotes.

Therefore, Yoderian practitioners of theology without footnotes can make a significant contribution here. They can appropriate their status as Christocentric (professional and non-professional) theologians to engage such deceptive bequests in *semper reformanda* dialogues. Yoderian practitioners of theology without footnotes will also seek to defend the core socio-cultural values of Nigerians from a *glocalized* visionary perspective. They will not lose sight of contemporary ethical reflection and practices in other parts of the world. Yoderians in Nigeria will see themselves as priests who want to embody their (servant-king) priesthood as feasible and plausible Christocentric ethical practices in *religio*-cultural identity, re-orientation and

translation. Christ rather than economics would be worshipped. Yoderian devotees in Nigeria will envision and seek to translate economics from Yoder's perspective on the Eucharist. Yoder's perspective on Christocentric believers' practice of the Eucharist will *inter alia*, stress responsible sharing and appropriation of economic resources at all levels of human existence.³³²

Significantly, Yoder's socio-ethical vision can also assist the SCS to make more substantive contributions in revamping the economy of Nigeria. It will inspire the church to articulate and translate meaningful Christocentric ways of checking the various forms of financial expropriation or misappropriations, which this dissertation noted among others. Yoder's vision for a priestly Kingdom can provide the SCS with necessary resources for such substantive contributions. It can install Christocentric believers who are re-oriented, renewed and restored to embody the *jesulogical* (nonviolent-resistant) political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ in all sectors of the economy. Yoder's restorative (visionary) project will tolerate a Christocentric believers' cooperation with the differently *other* in the pursuit of the *missio Dei*. His vision for trans-community projects transcends the walls of Christian denominations and Christianity at large. We reflected on this issue in the fourth and fifth chapters of this study.

Further, Yoderian practitioners serve as moral agents for theological transformational development of society. Thus, they can also serve God by ruling the world. Yoderians accept the embodied politics of the biblical Jesus Christ as their daily political witness of the Gospel among the nations. Yoder's vision for *jesulogical* ethics bespeaks of body politics. It also seeks to restore the human dignity of all persons for Christocentric participation in recovering the *Ezi Ndu* of society. This is a warrantee, which can substantiate our claim that Nigerians can embody Yoder's visionary practice of body politics in their contexts. Yoder stresses *jesulogical* embodiment of the ethos of Jesus as the religiosity of Christ believers. We maintain that within his Kingdom vision, Christ's figure reproduces a discernible people who are prepared to order and re-order their lives to conform to their Scripture-based Christocentric convictions.

Consequently, Yoder's vision for body politics can also assist the SCS to make necessary contributions towards the FGN struggles to restore *shalom* in the *shark-infested waters* of Nigerian politics. Yoder's vision for a restructured economic order can demonstrate and sustain

³³² We also reflected on Yoder's vision for the implication of Christocentric believers' practice of the Eucharist above.

God's original revolution in ethical theories and practices of economics. In contemporary Nigeria, as we earlier re-echoed Reinhold Niebuhr, economic power determines political power to a significant degree. The pervasive influence of economic power tends to portray that a just political order is always elusive without the reconstruction of the fiscal order (cf. Niebuhr 1994: 463-467). At least the sustained (lopsided) political structure by successive indigenous Nigerian administrations is a case in point. Okonta and Douglas remark that oil 'is the stuff of contemporary Nigerian politics and the Niger Delta is the field on which the vicious battle to control this money-spinner is wedged' (Okonta & Douglas 2001: 21). Economic power, as we noted in the second chapter of this work, constitutes a great threat to many indigenous religiosities in Nigeria. Its embodied practice often challenges a continuing celebration of the dignity of human life and hospitality as indispensable religiosities of many *religio*-cultural societies in contemporary Nigeria.

With this induction, it becomes clearer that Yoder's *jesulogical* appropriation of the Barthian vision can make a very significant contribution to the ethical witness of the Nigerian Church particularly, the SCS. His Christocentric ethical vision will seek to transform this thorny issue without compromising such Yoderian values as human dignity, hospitality, community formation and sustenance, among other things, in Nigeria. Yoder's Christocentric vision for nonviolent-resistant Diaspora witness also re-interprets and appropriates the practice of the Eucharist as economic sharing. We reflected on these issues in the previous three chapters of this study. Albino Barrera among other economic (Christian) theologians explains that the socio-economic milieu provides the meeting point for humanity. Therefore, communication of God's goodness to humanity cannot claim naivety to the indispensable values of hospitality and communal life in the process. The reception and communication of divine goodness is mediated through human relationships (cf. Barrera 2005: 35, 47). Consequently, the Gospel proclamation as original revolution must reflect that *change* 'in our ways of dealing with one another, with ethical differences, with social hierarchy, with money, with offences, with leadership, with power...is the only adequate word' (Yoder 1997b: 179; cf. 1971b: 33). For Yoder, the Good News of God's original revolution in Jesus Christ centres on, specifically, social and economic relations.

With this background on economic communication, one can reason that for Yoder (and Barrera), human righteousness must also emphasize changed economic relationships in Christ. Those who

share with one another in the Eucharist ought to extend the same gesture in their practice of economic relationships. The celebration of the Eucharist as a sacrament also suggests a socio-economic witness of the merits of the gracious Christ-event. Thus, visible change in economic relationships could also mean a radically overhauled or revolutionized prophetic witness of Nigerian churches especially, the SCS. A revolutionized prophetic witness of Nigerian churches will *inter alia*, also call on the FGN and the Oil Companies to offer listening ears to the agitations of the Niger Delta indigenes as well as other complaints of economic exploitation by the rural dwellers. It will also reflect a Christocentric humane (*jesulogical*) approach to conflict resolution.

If the catalyst of conflicts in Nigeria arise (more often) from local phenomena, *jesulogical* approach to resolve the Niger Delta crises in particular needs to begin from and with the rural dwellers. These are ‘the people who live together’ and who withstand the worst of ‘the inertia of distant officials or the constraints of inherited structure’ (Yoder 2000: 178-180). They constitute a majority of the present-absents whose fundamental human rights and dignity are scarcely recognized by the FGN and officials of the Oil Companies. Significantly, these wounded hearts also constitute most of the readily available mercenaries, which contemporary perpetrators of the crises in the Niger Delta often engage to accomplish their nefarious projects. As Martin Luther King Jnr. remarked from his Birmingham jail, if repressed emotions ‘are not released in nonviolent ways, they will seek expression through violent ways: this is not a threat but a fact of history’ (King 1994: 433). In a related view from his article, *On Christian Unity: The Way from Below*, Yoder remarks that if the pains of peoples’ dividedness are to be healed, they must begin from the spot where the wound is actually experienced. In other words, the healing must begin ‘locally, where people who live together as neighbors and work together as colleagues are separated by some constraints imposed from outside the shared world’ (Yoder 2000: 180).

Above all, the said perpetrators of evil use these wounded hearts to ferment troubles within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Such spates of trouble affect the contemporary global oil market drastically. Their effects are most evident in high rate of inflation as well as the escalating cost of living. These unhealthy effects also trigger violent and nonviolent protests in different parts of the world today. Thus, a Christocentric *jesulogical* interaction with these demeaned human beings might go a long way to reduce violence and other vices that are associated with actual (or envisioned) economic and political exploitation especially, the Niger Delta (oil induced) case.

The Niger Delta crises, as we pointed out in the second chapter of this study, have gained the status of international notoriety. Nigeria is among the largest producers of crude oil in the world but its oil production dropped by 25% as at 30 May 2007 (cf. VOA News 2007).

Consequently, the SCS as a bearer and initiator of (Christocentric) *jesulological* body politics before a watching Nigeria is further challenged to re-conceive its vision of the true pursuit of the glory of God. The SCS is a progressive and outlooking church; thus, it can appropriate some Yoderian summons to proclaim a Christocentric social witness of a renewed and restored vision of royal priesthood. It proposes a way forward to save humanity from the social ills of high inflation rates, and escalating cost of living. In other words, some Yoderian social critique (prophetic witness) of the FGN, Oil Companies, and the Niger Delta militants are crucial for the SCS. They will constitute an aspect of the church's reforming vision for, and a restorative Christ-centered approach to nation building, social transformation and development. Until recently, the Oil sector tends to assume monopoly of contemporary Nigerian economy. Therefore, Yoder's ecclesial religiosity can inspire believers to initiate and embody sustainable and more responsible movements from political theology to theological politics. A fundamental shift from political theology to a Christocentric *jesulological* political ethics can assist the SCS to fulfil its public responsibilities in more substantive ways. This conviction constitutes a basic persuasion of this dissertation.

To summarize, this section has examined what the SCS can learn from Yoder's vision for church renewal. We discovered that Yoder's vision of a Reforming church could assist the SCS to grapple with the perennial challenges of reconciliatory dialogues and admonitions in more substantive ways. These perennial problems continue to yearn for attention within the church's milieu. They often arise as fallout of some *pseudo*-legacies of the conquerors' theological mission ethics of the Enlightenment-based visions in Nigeria. Much of its perplexing influence is evident in unhealthy competition of churches/ministries within the geo-political vicinity of the SCS. Above all, they tend to reduce the theological vision and mission projects of the churches to ecclesiocentrism. Their ecclesiological visions are rooted in the ecclesial vision and practices of the Reformation era. We pointed this out in the second chapter of this study. Most churches of the Reformation era endorsed the violent practices of their nation states without significant critique. We also included them in the cancer, which weakens the vision and mission of the Church within the geo-political vicinity of the SCS. Thus, Yoder's vision for social ethics

can also help churches to overcome the menace of this cancer in their *kerygma* of the lordship of Jesus Christ over the world. The cancer riddles and cripples the life and witness of such Christian bodies as the CAN and CCN as well as the PFN, among others. In other words, Yoder's *jesulogical* reconciliatory vision is necessary for the Nigerian Church. It can restore and enhance the church's visionary pursuit of a *glocalized* proclamation of Jesus Christ in Nigeria and beyond. Yoder's vision for church renewal calls for a Reforming church whose embodied politics of Jesus seeks a *semper reformanda* of society.

Again, Yoder's vision for a reforming society also reflects meaningful ways of living out catholicity in contexts where Christ-believers are in the minority. It is a Diaspora approach to realize the Barthian project in contexts. As a result, Yoder's social vision can also present the SCS as well as other Nigerian churches with a Bible-based Christological challenge for a theological and transformational development. Within this Diaspora pursuit of the Barthian project, cultivation of the human person assumes the penultimate goal, and sustainable foundation for realizing other developmental objectives. Human development, as late President Julius Nyerere reminds us, involves the creation of physical and spiritual conditions that can assist humankind to become the best of what God created them to be (cf. Nyerere 1987). Consequently, Yoder's vision for social ethics makes it mandatory for all stakeholders to be involved in the development process without coercion. Yoder's social vision also seeks to reconstitute and restore human dignity with meaningful ethics. It does it with a distinctive ethics, which can allow all humankind to participate in a Christocentric pursuit of nation building, social transformation and development. Such an approach can enhance the church's true pursuit of the *missio Dei* in contemporary pluralistic societies. Yoder's ethical vision for a reforming economy calls for a corporate but Christocentric approach to nation building, social transformation and development by all believers. His restorative vision, as we have shown, reinterprets and appropriates the merits of the gracious Christ-event in significant ways. This approach also qualifies its believers to serve as moral agents for a theological and transformational development of society. Yoder's visionary practice seeks to restore *shalom* (*Ezi Ndu*) back to society; it is (also) a restorative project.

Consequently, the Yoderian restorative practice can as well challenge the SCS to co-operate with other churches in order to *re-vision* and develop their ecclesiologies. These Nigerian churches are supposed to create meaningful spaces, which can tolerate active and responsible

collaboration with the FGN and other publics (especially the academia and the NGO's) in their theological mission agenda for the realization of God's mission within history. True biblical realization of the *missio Dei* also entails an embodied proclamation of Christ's lordship over the Powers. The Powers, as we have shown in this study, include the ecclesiocentric vision and practices of the Church. They constitute an affront to the corporate *kerygma* of Christ's universal lordship in Nigeria. Corporate Christocentric proclamation of Christ's lordship over the Powers is constitutive of the crucial aspect of their ecumenical witness to restore *Ezi Ndu* to society. Such varied co-operations can also inspire churches *inter alia*, to challenge the Nigerian masses to appreciate the positive aspects of the FGN and her programs (such as the NAPEP, NEEDS, FESTAC and EFCC) even as it criticizes the negative visions and practices.

In other words, Yoder's vision for Christocentric royal priesthood (or extended family) can also go a long way to spur the FGN and the church to network with others. They are challenged to initiate feasible ways to address Nigeria's vices (at all levels of the society) without compromising the Gospel. Therefore, Yoder's demonstration of the practice of the rule of Christ as ecumenical royal priesthood can restore a true vision of (ethical) Christocentric Kingdom witness in Nigeria. It embodies a very crucial religiosity for the SCS. The church can appropriate its vision for theological mission in diverse and substantive ways. Yoder's restorative vision for social ethics celebrates renewed and restored visionary practice of Christ-centred peoplehood as a necessary communal identity and spirituality. Yoder presents his vision for social ethics as the original revolutionary *euangelion*, which Jesus and his early subordinate *ekklesia* proclaimed as body politics among the nations. In our view, Yoder's vision for social ethics suggests a Christocentric reflection on the African *palaver*, from a western ecumenical perspective.

So far, this study has argued that the problem of the inadequate social witness of the SCS is fundamentally a theological problem. It holds that the SCS can resolve this problem substantively, through a (Yoderian) theological perspective. The problem of this Nigerian church centres on the person and works of Jesus Christ who is the touchstone of theology. An overview of the entire study at this stage might assist us to appreciate this problem of the SCS as well as the vision of this study. We adopted a (Yoderian) Christological approach in order to highlight the said problems and to suggest a Christocentric *jesulogical* ethics as a more adequate approach for contemporary SCS.

4 Overview of the Study

From its outset, this study proposed to investigate the inadequate public ministry of the SCS. The project argues that the church is well positioned to play a significant role in reconstituting and reforming public life in Nigeria and beyond. Although the SCS is favoured by providence, the study is of the view that the SCS appropriates these natural endowments with some inadequate ethics in its embodied vision for theological mission projects. For instance, in the first chapter of this study, we appreciated the efforts of the Church to transform society. From its inauguration in 1996, the SCS directed all its parishes and presbyteries to establish schools in the cities in order to inculcate godly morals in youth. The SCS sustains this vision by awarding University scholarships for its deserving youths to study Humanities and Science. It is considered that the youths exist as the hope for a healthy moral ecology of church and society.

Furthermore, the SCS is also known for addressing some burning national issues through communiqués arising from its various annual conferences. These efforts are based on the church's persuasion that the vision for a reconciled community and the need for a higher moral law, call for the joining of theology and social theory. Nation building, social transformation and development are fundamental to the church's reflection on its theologically envisioned mission projects. Thus, the study observed that describing the SCS as one of the fastest growing Synods speaks of a theology of grace.

However, a critical evaluation of the life and mission of the SCS also reveals that its impact as a transformative agent in society is inadequate. The church tends to demonstrate ambivalent and ambiguous political ethics in its proclamation of Jesus Christ. These *pseudo*-ethics are evident in its Constantinian-Docetic faced ecclesial identity and practices. They do not reflect the mission ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ in the theological mission projects of the SCS. For example, the embodied witness of the church is seldom explicit on the need for its adherents to offer indigenous worldviews a responsible attention in their daily livings. In addition, the SCS tends to present the tension on the burning issue of the church-world relationship in Christian life as *living in two different worlds at the same time* (cf. Udoh 1988: 263). These issues coupled with a seeming growing ignorance of the Christian vocation and, its critical engagement of society in contemporary Nigeria; bedevil the theological missionary projects of the church. As this study revealed, they combine to make the SCS appear insensitive to the increasing spate of economic

exploitation, confusing political situation and unbridled ecological degradation in Nigerian societies.

We retraced this problem to some distressing ethical bequests from the theological error of the Enlightenment-based Scottish mission work in Nigerian. This error also bequeaths and reduces most of its translators to the status of consumerists in a consumer-oriented political economy. Given these inductions, we remarked that as a *Reformed church*, the SCS does not fulfil its public roles in adequate ways. Thus, the inadequacy may only be remedied through theology. The SCS tends to compromise the centrality of the figure of Jesus Christ in its social witness. Consequently, we opined that Yoder's Christocentric social ethics could provide the SCS with a plausible and feasible restorative vision to ameliorate its dilemmas in contemporary Nigeria.

In the second chapter, we explored the historical context of the SCS. The quest began with a survey of the political history of Nigeria. Nigeria is a country that was born and bred under some distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based ethics. With the British amalgamation project of 1914, the Colonies of Lagos, the Northern, and Southern protectorates became one country. The Colonial Masters christened it Nigeria without nullifying, or restating their previous agreement with the former bearers of the name (northern Nigerians). From the amalgamation, the name began to refer to all (at present, about 140 million) *religio*-cultural peoples from about 350 heterogeneous ethnic groups and languages. Altogether, these *religio*-centric nations occupy a geographical land mass of approximately one million sq km. Nigeria gained political independence from Britain on 1 October 1960. She also became a Federal Republic in 1963. Until today, most of her British bequests constitute most of the socio-cultural problems. These problems are most evident in the highly politicized polity and political economy of Nigeria. Even successive indigenous administrations of the country have not given sufficient attention to the real source of such social ills, which arise from this bequest.

In addition, the study associates with the views of Yoder and Bediako, among many theologians, that is, that historiography is a vital ministry for renewal. Knowledge of the past is indispensable for a theological reconstruction of the history of Nigeria. Some distressing legacies of these Enlightenment-based visionary projects constitute themselves as dilemmas to the country's growing Christian (theological) mission and developments. The mission projects and programs of The PCN in particular, is one of their victims. The theological mission ethics of the Church in

Nigeria tends to compromise the figure of Jesus Christ in its social witnesses. From the perspective of this study, such *pseudo*-theological mission ethics is most evident in the (Constantinian-Docetic) truistic *kerygma* of Jesus Christ with which The PCN gave birth to the SCS.

For instance, this *pseudo*-confession of (Reformed) Christian faith throws an average member of the SCS into a crisis. The adherent is often confused on how to integrate her/his past identity with the identity of the *newfound love*. As earlier observed, its Constantinian-faced Christianity does not guide church adherents towards a responsible cultural inclusivity (not inclusivism). The embodied witnesses of the SCS tend to emphasize ecclesiocentric church traditions. Jesus Christ is inadequately embodied as the centre and model of the church's political ethics. On the other hand, its Docetic-faced Christianity does not often permit its devotees to participate actively and substantively in the affairs of the society. Consequently, the mission projects of the SCS do not *emphasize social ethics as the Gospel, which the blind man can see; which the deaf can hear; or that which the lame can appropriate the leap of faith to approach*. The witness of the SCS does not often appropriate significant resources from its hosts' *religio*-cultures in order to demonstrate interculturality as responsible interface of cultures.

In its reaction, this study remarked that the problem of the SCS is less ideological than it is theological. It is a tradition enshrined on the tablets of the heart, i.e., a transiting bequest of the Enlightenment *imperial cultural transfer and theologically deficient mission enterprise*. It also affirms the saying that *the predictions and predilections of one generation can become the tradition of the next*. Given this view, the chapter observed that this problem of the SCS points to the very centre of the Reformed position on the central calling of humanity, i.e., to glorify God in Jesus Christ rather than in competing ideologies. The problem also repeats a rhetorical question which many (if not all) peoples of the developing world, particularly Nigerians ask, i.e. *who is God to Nigerian people, and what does his salvation agenda mean to them?* As a result, this dissertation opines that a substantive response to this question should begin with a renewed vision for a trans-community theological witness of Jesus Christ in Nigeria. Such a renewed theological vision is crucial for the SCS. Its approach to nation building, social transformation and development, will embody and translate the culture of orthodox theology as, *God is love*. The study holds that the analysis of all the challenges in Nigeria societies, the negative impact of

some aspects of mission theology, and the inadequate public involvement of the SCS, all plead for a fresh discussion on the public role of the SCS.

The study also reiterates its proposition that an analysis of Yoder's theology particularly his Christocentric social vision, can help in this regard. *The problem of faith in the SCS is fundamentally theological and its solution must be re-visioned and sought after, theologically.* The dissertation associates with Smit's view that Reformed theology is an enormous liberating tradition with a potential that yearns for continuing liberation from its failures and idolatries. Its vision for *semper reformanda* can assist the SCS to make sustainable and more meaningful progress in its public ministry. Karl Barth reminds believers that Christian theology stands or falls on its conceptualization, interpretation, and disposition towards Jesus Christ, the touchstone of theology, i.e. Christology. With this awareness and hope that Yoder's theological views can assist the SCS immensely, we turned to consider the Yoder's Christology as a Diaspora pursuit of the Barthian stance in the third chapter.

From Chapter 3, we learn that with Yoder's Christological vision, the life and ministry of the SCS can become public in more substantive ways. It is orthodox and it is a Scripture-based Christocentric project. Yoder's Christocentric prophetic witness engages society just as God in Jesus Christ engages humanity. It exists as a Diaspora realization of the Barthian Christological vision. Yoder's Christological vision adopts a vulnerable identity, which also challenges all creaturely sovereignties to continuing dialogues. It appeals to the Church to be public in its embodied political witness of the lordship and servanthood of Jesus Christ among the nations. Yoder's Christological vision is grounded in hope. It is characterized by vulnerability, relationality, and dependence. Reconciliation is central to its Christocentric message of hope for the restoration of catholicity in society. Yoder's Christological vision bequeaths the subordinate Church with a scandalous identity and spirituality that is envisioned from the embodied *kerygma* of the lordship of Jesus Christ as servanthood. Yoder's Christological project is a restorative vision, which seeks to retrieve and return biblical Christology to a central position in the Church's theological engagements. In other words, Yoder's Christological project is an historic Christocentric vision.

It has been noted, in addition, that Yoder's historical vision for Christology can promote and commend a *glocalized* (trans-community) *ministerium* (rather than 'universalistic' *magisterium*)

ethics of the SCS to all humanity. Yoder's vision re-interprets and appropriates the merits of the gracious Christ-event with an ethics, which can share space with useful resources in its host cultures. Thus, his Christological vision can project the vision of African hospitable and modifiable *religio*-cultural practices as an indispensable approach in the contemporary quest for responsible ecumenical theology. It seeks an ecclesial theology, which is focused on the biblical Jesus Christ as its source and paradigm. Yoder's Christological vision, as we have shown, is a community-forming-and-sustaining vision. Consequently, its ecclesial identity and spirituality can also provide the SCS with a Christological warrant to re-invigorate the Barthian *biblical realism* in Yoder's articulation and embodiment of ecclesiology. Barth regards and proclaims ecclesiology as the Church's affirmation of the lordship of Jesus Christ, in all its polity and politics. Given this position, we examined Yoder's ecclesiology with a view to determine its faithfulness to the catholicity of the subordinate pre-Constantinian *ekklesia*, in the fourth chapter of this study.

Reflections from Chapter 4 reveals a Scripture-based Christology as the warrant for Yoder's affirmation that ecclesiology is ethics. Yoder's incarnated (or historical, or lived) Christology is the source and result of his ecclesial vision and practices. We reason that Yoder's vision for ecclesiology can assist the SCS to *re-vision* its ecclesiocentric ecclesiological vision and practices. Contemporary ecclesiologies of the SCS promote and sustain the truistic and magisterial ethical witnesses of the Enlightenment-based visions. Yoder's vision for ecclesiology is also a restorative approach. Thus, it can persuade the church to adopt a practice-based approach to (Christocentric) Kingdom realization within history. Yoder's vision for ecclesiology can inspire the SCS to retrieve meaningful resources from its rich theology of grace in order to *re-vision* and re-appropriate its ecclesiology from a Christocentric biblical perspective. Yoder's Christocentric vision for ecclesiology is suggestive of a Kingdom oriented ecclesiology; it is altruistic in its foundation and orientations.

Moreover, Yoder's altruistic vision for ecclesiology is also an evolving project which proclaims corporate witness as Christ-believers' meaningful identity and spirituality. A Yoderian ecclesiology envisions the kingdom of God as a 'socially realizable' task of the empirical Church. Its origin and goal are firmly rooted in Yoder's *incarnated* Christology. Yoder's restorative vision for ecclesiology also seeks to re-present corporate witness as a true ecumenical ministry of the subordinate Church in contexts.

Yoder's ecclesiological vision also re-assesses the ecumenical ministry of the Church as a Christological imperative. As we have shown, Yoder loops back to pre-Constantinian interpretation and appropriation of the merits of the Christ-event to retrieve meaningful resources for his vision. This exercise enables him to re-interpret and appropriate the Reformed slogan, *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* to mean a continuing process of recovering ecclesiastical traditions from past 'failures and idolatries' especially, 'false ecclesiological visions of the past'. Such a renewed understanding and embodiment of John Calvin's vision is also crucial for the SCS. It can inspire the church to assist the entire PCN to recover its ecclesiology from the captivity of its present DNA of, to use the words of Onwunta and Hendriks (2006), 'the distorted ecclesiological identity' of The PCN. It can also challenge the SCS to assist Reformed churches in Nigeria to seek a meaningful release from provincial *preoccupation with inculturalization in Africa*; as well as *the view that to be Reformed is to be set apart* (Akper 2006a). The biblical Jesus Christ is the paradigm of Yoder's (Diaspora) visionary ecclesiology. The *other* is a partner in progress with right/freedom of choice and conscience, in its Christocentric vision for the Church's pursuit of the *missio Dei*. Yoder's *jesuological* reconciliatory message of hope also seeks to restore broken relationship without exonerating the offender from the responsibility of righting the wrong. His vision for ecclesiology, as we have shown, also mirrors the (indigenous) *African palaver* (cf. Bujo 2003: 66-77).

Yoder's vision for social witness or interculturality is challenging. It combines a plethora of believers' gifts to re-present a reconciling dialogue as the substance of the Church's moral discernment and the authority of divine empowerment to 'bind and loose'. Yoder does not reduce his claim or proclaim his approach to biblical realism as an abstract and decontextual universal practice of 'the rule of Christ' in the *Servant-ekklesia*. Yoder's vision, as we observed, is a voluntary Diaspora project. This shift marks a distinctive watershed between his approach to biblical realism as a movement from political theology to theological politics, and Stanley Hauerwas' methodology. Yoder's ecclesiology strives to retain its vision of early catholicity in its contention that ecclesiology should demonstrate and express the Church's faithful witness to the lordship of Jesus Christ in contexts.

These issues heighten our fundamental conviction that Yoder's social ethics can offer the SCS a more feasible and plausible framework to *re-vision* its unstable and confusing ecclesiological

identity. We also learn from Smit that the Reformed tradition does not have a timeless, a historical ecclesiology. Within a typology of ecclesiologies, it is certainly possible to situate the Reformed ecclesiology somewhere. This claim is one of the obvious implications of the Reformed emphasis on and understanding of the *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* conviction. The Reformed tradition is a faith and tradition with enormous liberating potential, which must continuously be liberated from its own failures and idolatries (cf. Smit 2004d; 2005c; 2006b). Yoder's vision for biblical realism is a nonviolent ecumenical project, which is envisioned from the political witness of the biblical Jesus Christ.

It can be noted that in his earlier works, Yoder's biblical realism is also rhetorical in reminding believers that Christian social witness is for Christians. However, Yoder's latter projects modified his position to restate that Christian practices can apply to non-Christians particularly, through the process of *moral osmosis*. Yoder would not give Christians the monopoly of the status of Christ-believers. For instance, in *For the Nation,s* Christ-believers embrace 'all that do the will of my Father' irrespective of their varied confession of Christ's sovereign lordship (cf. Yoder 1997b). Yoder's vision for Christ-believers' social witness re-presents the embodied revolutionary Good News of Jesus Christ as a Christocentric social welfare for all. As we earlier pointed out, Yoder vision for (Christocentric) ecclesial biblical realism seeks to restore and assign personal moral responsibility to those who had no *locus standi* in their cultures. It also transforms them into decision-makers. Yoder's ecclesial project, as shown in Chapter 5, is much concerned with the burning issue of human dignity - it is about the body politics of Jesus. For Yoder, the Church's social witness is not different from its social practices (cf. Carter 2005). Yoder also argues that ecclesiology is ethics.

Thus, one can reason that Yoder's reflexive (suggestive) approach to epistemological privilege of the underdog is a scandalous embodiment of the living and active word of God, which is sharper than any double-edged sword. The Word of God penetrates even to the most secret aspects of human-life to judge the thoughts and attitudes of humankind (cf. Heb. 4: 12). In Yoder's Christocentric approach to biblical realism, even 'the poorest of the poor' (Sachs 2005) are constitutive in Christ's human agency for social transformation and development. The welfare of the neighbour is their concern. Such believers engage in social witness from an unpopular side (cf. Yoder 1997a: 28-41; 1994d: 172). Yoder's visionary project is also a

Diaspora vision. With this reflection, we examined Yoder's Christocentric vision for social ethics as an embodied Gospel proclamation in the fifth chapter.

The findings from Chapter 5 are summed up in the introductory paragraph of the present chapter. From it, we learn that Yoder's social ethics is tied to his scandalous Christology. His Christocentric (Diaspora) social ethics provides the litmus test for Yoder's conviction that the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ provides the normative paradigm for believers' political engagement in every culture and age. According to Yoder:

The first level of the church's faithfulness, and in a sense the test of the validity of everything else she shall say later, will be her own obedience to the standards of discipleship. If it is clear to the church as it was in the New Testament times, that the central meaning of history is borne by....the church herself, then her first duty to the society will be the same as her first duty to her Lord.'
(Yoder 1997a: 16-17)

We discussed that Yoder's Christocentric vision for social ethics is simply about body politics. In Yoder's vision for social ethics, the very existence of the Church is Good News to society. Believers' fraternal relations particularly, as it relates to their approach towards conflict resolution must seek to demonstrate the true meaning of love in Christocentric social actions. When truly embodied, the *kerygma* of Christian ethics reflects the social Gospel, which Jesus and his early believers confessed within concrete human societies during the biblical periods. Yoder's vision for an embodied politics of Jesus also speaks of a Christocentric trans-community embodiment of the Gospel among the nations.

Thus, we can learn from the above-mentioned observations that Yoder's social vision can spur the SCS and its admirers to engage in a more faithful and sacrificial proclamation of the lordship of Christ in Nigeria. Yoder's social ethics can inspire them to accept innocent suffering. Yoderian believers in Christ will not compromise their faith in Jesus Christ. Yoder's Christocentric ethical vision seeks to retrace the sameness of Jesus across all generations. It is a Scripture-based Christological vision, ecclesial witness and ethical praxis. It also reminds the Church of a normative revelation of God in the concrete historical reality of the life, death and rising of Jesus. The truth about Christ's normativeness for social ethics does not change; neither will the subordinate Church. Yoder reminds us that all that orthodoxy can do is to reflect on the shape of this immutable truth (cf. Yoder 1997c). As far as Yoder's ethical vision is concerned, sacrificial, doxological, conscientious and conscious subordination to the political ethics of the

biblical Jesus is an indispensable identity and spirituality for believers' ecumenical witness to the social order. Yoder's social vision re-presents Christ-believers' embodied politics of Jesus as the meaning and implication of Christian discipleship as political responsibility (Yoder 1992a; cf. 2003a). It envisions a Christocentric trans-community embodiment of the Gospel in which believers will seek to realize the biblical practice of 'the fulness of Christ' as *ministerium* ethics in concrete contexts.

We have also observed that Yoder's Christocentric ethics is multidimensional, exploratory, episodic, experimental and *ad hoc* in shape (cf. Nation 2006; Huebner 2006). It binds here and unbinds there in its varied quest to realize the biblical practice of the rule of Christ within historical contexts. Thus, it is possible to describe Yoder's multidimensional and experimental social ethics as a *Bible-based-Christocentric approach to ecclesial realism*. Yoder's ethical vision is also a restorative project, which expects believers to engage in active but responsible ecumenical participation in nation building, social transformation and development. We underscored this as *the evangelist's social ethics* in the previous chapter. Rooted in the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ, the life and praxis of this evangelist's social ethics is inherently, faith-particularistic, culturally pluralistic, and ecclesialogically inclusivistic. It also binds here and unbinds there in order to evangelize its hosts for the Lord Jesus Christ. Yoder's social ethics is multifaceted in outlook: it is often *ad hoc* and spontaneous in its altruistic and reforming approach. His social vision also seeks to restore the centrality of human dignity back to anthropological theological engagements of the Church. Yoder would love to see active Christocentric participation of all humankind in restoring *Ezi Ndu* back to the society. *To be is to belong, and to belong involves active albeit, responsible participation in social affairs*. Yoder's Christocentric vision for social ethics is also restorative in its foundation and orientations. It suggests an evangelical approach to realize a Christocentric catholic practice among the nations.

Consequently, we concluded Chapter 5 with these questions: given the aforementioned insights, may we not proclaim Yoder's social ethics as an original revolution in Nigeria? Will such a *kerygma* not assist the SCS as well as other churches to promote and substantiate their proclamation of Jesus Christ in the highly politicized polity and to revamp the political economy of contemporary Nigeria? Inductions from this current chapter also act as response to these questions in concrete ways.

Yoder's vision for social ethics reflects a Christocentric trans-community vision for an embodied politics of Jesus Christ. Believers can contemplate and practice it in every culture and age. It suggests a Diaspora realism of the Barthian ecclesial vision for social practice. In other words, it is an embodied proclamation of Christocentric social ethics as the original revolutionary Gospel of Jesus Christ among the nations. Consequently, it will expect the SCS to engage in theological reconstruction, re-orientation and re-appropriation. Yoder's Christocentric project for renewal envisions a reforming church in a reforming society, which envisions and works for a reforming (growing) economy. Yoder's vision also seeks to transform some distressing legacies of the Enlightenment-based ethics by looping back to the practice of social witness in the New Testament. Such a Scripture-based practice enables his Christocentric project to retrieve useful resources for its prophetic witness to the social order. Yoder also reasons that the New Testament has its own ground for social witness, which is differently shaped from the Enlightenment-based visions. The original Christian confession of faith is rooted in the work of Christ; it constitutes an integral definition of the meaning of the cross. In his view, such an approach to social critique is not merely a derivative from or an implication of the Christian's change of heart or mind; it is visible in the concrete bodily form of people who changed their embodiment of interculturality so that they could eat with each other (cf. Yoder 1992a: 40). Yoder's altruistic and evolving identity and spirituality, as this study shows, de-emphasizes the controversies of the Reformation era.

Despite the unquestionable influence of Mennonite-Anabaptism in its multidimensional theological enterprises, Yoder asks this rhetorical-transformational question: have the contemporary challenges of the Christian faith not relativized most issues, which led to the varied controversies of the Reformation era. His Christocentric vision also summons its adherent to demonstrate unity from below as a Christological mandate to the empirical Church. Yoder's project suggests a visionary practice of believers' embodiment of Christocentric interculturality from a Diaspora trans-community perspective. Yoder's approach to catholicity esteems a *glocalized* vision for a faithful ecumenical ministry of the subordinate *ekklesia*. It respects faithful ecumenism as a more meaningful geographical expression of believers' corporate and contextual witness of Christ's universal lordship over the Powers. Yoder's ecumenical vision does not emphasize one holy Catholic Church as a universal ecumenism. Rather, Yoder is suspicious that that the Free Church ecclesiology might relapse into established church structure. However, as we have remarked, Yoder can also accept an established ecclesiology whose

practice of hierarchical structure respects the reality and ministry of the Holy Spirit. His vision has great respect for local contexts in its *kerygma* of Christ's universal lordship (cf. Yoder 2000; 1991a; 1991c; 1990). Yoder's vision for social ethics calls for a reforming church in a reforming society, which seeks for a reforming economy. In this way, Yoder's ethical project is also a restorative vision.

To sum up this discussion, this study reiterates that the root of the inadequate social witness of the SCS is traceable to some pervasive *pseudo*-influence of the Enlightenment-based ethics in Nigeria. These *pseudo*-legacies exist as abstract conquerors' ethics, which often shows negligible respect to indigenous *religio*-cultures and the religiosities of its hosts. Their truistic visions and varied ethics for theological transformational development hardly share meaningful space with useful local resources in *religio*-cultural Nigeria. This state of affairs constitutes a fundamental dilemma of many theological missionary projects of churches in contemporary Nigeria. Their *pseudo*-ethical visions breed and espouse a crisis of Christian identity in many *religio*-cultural hosts of the Nigerian Church. As a way forward, this dissertation argues in favour of Yoder's reflections on an embodied Christocentric vision for a Kingdom-oriented ethics. It can transform and restore these *pseudo*-bequests to serve the purpose of Jesus Christ in contemporary Nigeria. Yoder's ethical vision for Diaspora Christological ecclesiology can pave the way for the integration of useful local *religio*-cultural resources into the theologies of the Church especially, the SCS of The PCN in Nigeria. Such useful *religio*-cultural resources will *inter alia*, include the African vision for extended family practice, and the African *palaver* as we have described them in this study.

In Yoder's reflexive Diaspora pursuit of the Barthian practice, humanity can celebrate a more faithful ecumenical ministry of the whole people of God with others in contexts. The uniqueness of the biblical Jesus Christ as the Lord of all creation will be celebrated in more substantive ways. Peoplehood (or extended family) describes the penultimate vision of a Yoderian visionary engagement in theological transformational development. This induction can also go a long way to spur the FGN, the churches, the academia, NGO's and other faces of the Nigerian public to co-operate responsibly in order to reflect and pursue a renewed vision of the Nigerian project. The Church in Nigeria faces *inter alia*, the contemporary challenge of how to facilitate a continuing conference with other publics (Akper 2006a). Such conferences will respect necessary and embodied interculturality as a significant approach to initiate more feasible and

plausible ways to address many perennial vices in Nigeria. These vices include *inter alia*, the way many Nigerians relate to money as well as other economic matters. They will also embrace the Niger Delta crises. These vices often becloud many progressive achievements, which the FGN makes through its homegrown-economic policies. Such evils also constitute themselves as affronts to the visions of NAPEP and NEEDS. As we have shown in this study, these vices berate Nigeria's polity and politics nationally and internationally. Thus, Yoder's view of the Powers, particularly, his concept of demonic or deceptive structures will assist the SCS as well as other Nigerian churches much in this instance. In Yoder's nonviolent-resistant practice, the term *demonic* embraces all that constitutes themselves as disobedient manifestation of Powers against the servanthood-lordship ethics of Jesus Christ (cf. Yoder 1996a: 47). In other words, a Yoderian ecumenical (prophetic) witness to such social ills is necessary here. Yoder's vision for the Church's ecumenical (social) witness and practices are not separated. His vision for social ethics suggests a nonviolent-resistant (Diaspora) pursuit of the Barthian ecumenical vision for social practices in concrete contexts. Like Barth, Yoder views ecclesiology as ethics.

Consequently, the study also holds that Yoder nonviolent-resistant vision for the practice of the rule of Christ can restore Christocentric *shalom* back to 'the shark infested waters' of contemporary Nigeria's polity and politics. Yoder's social vision holds the promise of a Christologically re-oriented, renewed, and restored royal priests for Nigerians. Its Christocentric priests can occupy more spaces within the public and private sectors of the highly politicized and slowly recovering political economy. A Yoderian embodied witness is fundamentally ecumenical in its orientations and practices. Yoder's social vision entails a Christocentric social ethics of the evangelist. Therefore, it can revive and restore a substantive hope within the growing Nigerian economy. An embodied social witness of its renewed Christ-confessing royal priesthood will play significant roles in the process. To confess also means to embody in ethos, in structures, in practices and policies, in every sphere of life - *Ezi Ndu* (cf. Koopman 2006a). Thus, an embodied Christocentric ethics of such restored (royal) priesthood will not compromise Yoder's rhetorical poem, *But we do see Jesus revealing the grace of God tasting death for every one* (Heb. 2: 8-9). A Christocentric socio-political, economic and religious order is imminent where Yoder's practice of the rule of Christ is expressed as a *Kingdom ethics* among the nations. Christology would be the source and result of its priestly-kingdom-oriented prophetic witness. In a Yoderian visionary praxis, the Christ-event provides the fulcrum on which all the nexus of missional and developmental projects connect and revolve.

With these observations, we hold that some useful resources from Yoder's Christocentric vision for believers' socio-ethical engagements can promote and commend the social witness of the SCS to contemporary Nigerians. Yoder's vision for social ethics will strive to transform and integrate some meaningful indigenous *religio*-cultural resources into the ecclesial reflections and practices of the church. It is a nonviolent-resistant Diaspora vision in which religion and culture are as inseparable as they are tied to Christology. Given this submission, we ask the following questions, namely: can we not say that this study has tried to promote and substantiate Yoder's socio-ethical vision to the SCS? May we not also reason that Yoder's social ethics can offer a more effective anti-biotic as well as nourishing vitamin to counter the *pseudo*-influence of the Enlightenment-based ethics and restore *Ezi Ndu* back to the unhealthy ecclesiological identity of this Nigerian church?

Nevertheless, this study does not claim to offer a comprehensive redress to all the ambiguous terms it appropriated in its quest to promote and substantiate Yoder's socio-ethical vision to the SCS. The research only provides a portal to more substantive discussions on what the SCS can learn from Yoder's Christocentric social ethics. The study expects the SCS to appropriate useful resources from its rich theology of grace in order to reflect its social witness as a Christocentric trans-community visionary practice. Such an exercise can assist the church to engage in a more adequate social witness of Jesus Christ within Nigeria and beyond. Thus, we reflect on what such terms as *nonviolent-resistance*, *Diaspora identity and spirituality*, and *ecumenical patience*, among other things would mean for the SCS, as an aspect of our academic contribution in the next section.

5 Epilogue: Contributions to Academics

From its first chapter, this study made it clear that it seeks to contribute a voice to an ongoing discourse in Nigeria. We referred to the works of some Nigerian-born theologians such as Enyi Ben Udoh, Nleanya Onwu, E M Uka, Benebo-Fubara Fubara-Manuel, Godwin Akper, Cyril Okorochoa, Teresa Okure, Justin Ukpong, Mba Idika, Rogers Uwadi, and Uma Agwu Onwunta. We also drew resources from non-theological disciplines such as the works of Ogbu Kalu, Chinua Achebe, Fabian Agudosy, Felix Ekechi, Omo Omoruyi, Toyin Falola, Elizabeth Isichei, Ejindu Ukuku, The Presidency, etc. Even the few oral interviews Olo conducted all point to the

fact that (in the Yoderian spirit) we became involved in this ongoing discussion as learners hoping to contribute our voices. In the African religiosity, *to be is to be long and to belong involve active and responsible participation in social affairs. Only a corpse may not respond to perplexing issues in the society.*

Consequently, we embarked on this academic pilgrimage from the perspective of a sociology of knowledge whose interdisciplinary approach holds on to (Christian) ‘theological and faith values’ (Hendriks 2007). To realize this vision, we also mirrored the Yoderian non-methodological narrative approach to Systematic theology. Consequently, Olo has upheld his (Reformed) Presbyterian heritage from a Nigerian perspective. He is an heir to this theological tradition, which is also progressive and out-looking. The SCS of The PCN exists for all the nations within Nigeria and beyond.

We have noted that Nigeria is a force to reckon with in global religion, sports, economics, demography, and the arts, etc. The name also represents a conglomerate of nations, and a geographical expression. It represents many heterogeneous, multilingual and religious nations, which Britain amalgamated into one nation in 1914 without some necessary criticisms. We reflected on these issues in the second and current chapters of this research project. Until date, the power rivalry between its major religious devotees (Christians and Muslims) constitutes a fundamental threat to the sustained unity of the country as one nation. The threat of the Islamization project in particular, exists as a catalyst to most spontaneous religious reprisals and counter reprisals.³³³

Most contemporary Christians in Nigeria read and embody it as infidelity for a believer to be massacred (sometimes burnt within the church building) by Islamic militants, with or without provocation. At least the catalyst of the Kaduna riot of February 2000 in which an EYN Pastor

³³³ For those who may wish to contest this issue, we re-echo Scott Holland’s remark in his critique of *unqualified pacifism* after visiting Kaduna for them: ‘We will not quarrel with them. We will only ask them to join us in Kaduna to visit the widow of Pastor Taru and his seven fatherless children. We will walk by the terrible rubble from the destruction of churches, mosques, schools, homes, and businesses. We will drive to the sight of the site of the largest Christian theological library in northern Nigeria, burned to the ground by Muslims during the crisis with only the charred spines of books remaining. We will ask them to lean into their feelings, not only into their properly tutored thoughts of pacifism, but into the inescapable feelings of shock, sorrow, anger, outrage, judgment, and perhaps even vengeance. These are feelings that come from souls conflicted by the paradoxical desire for love and justice, and emerge naturally from psyches throbbing from the bodily chemicals and emotions of human aggression, judgment, and justice’ (Holland 2004: 142[Our italics]).

Iyasco Taru was assassinated in his parsonage is a case in point (cf. Holland 2004: 133-142). We observed this issue in the earlier part of this chapter. The ‘Moderatorial’ exclamation of Rev S.K.Okocha to the 10th Annual Synod of the SCS, which we also quoted above, says it all. Given such a *status quo*, one is inspired to ask as follows: would nonviolence-resistance mean to accept innocent killing of unarmed and defenceless Christians worshipping God at the time they met their death? Can such a practice be a true interpretation and appropriation of nonviolent-resistance as ‘a witness reminding those in power of the continuing injustices of their regime’ (Yoder 1997a: 41)?

Again, the biblical witness teaches believers to seek the peace of the nation as well as the neighbour’s welfare. The Yoderian visionary practice also accepts such teaching, while the Nigerian Constitution reflects on such views as ‘the duty of every citizen’ (Constitution 1999: 36-37). Given these symbiotic inductions, the following questions become necessary: Can an affirmative response to the above-mentioned questions on nonviolent-resistance be what Yoder actually means by *God will fight for us* or is it a *revolutionary subordination* to the political ethics of the biblical Jesus Christ? On the other hand, would a reprisal not signify a human attempt to control history? How then can Yoder’s teaching on nonviolent- resistance, Diaspora identity and spirituality as well as ecumenical patience towards the adversary help the SCS to proclaim Gospel of Jesus Christ as original revolutionary Good News to Nigerians who are victims of these mayhems? According to section 38 (1) of the national Constitution:

Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his *or her* religion or belief and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or private) to manifest and propagate *her/his* religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

(Constitution 1999: 47 [Our paraphrase])

This extract from the national Constitution makes it clear that the Islamization project, as this study argues, is a threat to social harmony in Nigeria. Many Muslim fundamentalists even insist on ruling and judging non-Muslim Nigerian residents in some Northern States of the country using Sharia laws (cf. Sanneh 2004).

To conclude, this dissertation holds that these and many other issues present the SCS as well as other churches in Nigeria with the challenge of ecumenical hermeneutics. The study does not expect such a corporate witness to be restricted to theologians and sages again. Christian

churches within the environment of the SCS need to take such trans-community projects as the PROCUMRA among others, more seriously. In addition, the scope of PROCUMRA requires wider out-stretched arms to embrace non-Christian-Muslim religious practitioners. Nigeria is said to rank among the largest number of people estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS in the world (after South Africa, and India). Although this rating is low when compared with some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria stands at a critical point in this epidemic. Increased prevention and treatment efforts today can go a long way to stem the tide of much more epidemic in the future. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa as well as one of the most populous nations in the world (cf. Park 2005).

In addition, the *pseudo*-ethical relationship of many Nigerians with money and other economic matters as well as the phenomena, which often lead to and sustain contemporary crises in the Niger Delta region, all call for corporate discernment and deliberations. Niger-Delta has gained international notoriety. Above all, theology without footnotes begs for urgent and ecumenical hermeneutics. There is a crucial need to appraise its usefulness as a significant legacy, which the contemporary Nigerian Church can bequeath global Christianities. In the light of these observations, this study pleads with scholars from various academic disciplines to invite the differently *other* to join in a collegiate interpretation of the meaningful bequests of Yoder's socio-ethical vision. The vision would include particularly, his concept of nonviolent-resistance, Diaspora identity and spirituality in ecumenical witness as well as ecumenical spirituality in the *glocalized* social witness of the SCS, among other things. Yoder's theological project holds great potential for the SCS.

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