

Introduction

Christianity has an image problem. Prominent examples of Christians failing to follow Jesus are easy to come by and popular media has done much to exploit them. *Saturday Night Live* graphically illustrates this trend in a spoof of *VeggieTales*, a popular Christian cartoon series. We will spare you the details, but imagine Bob the Tomato, Larry the Cucumber, and company—now called the *Religetables*—reading pornographic material, killing infidels during the crusades, hanging innocent witches in Salem, damning people to hell, molesting young children, and brutalizing the masses during Armageddon, all while singing pious religious songs with their cute veggie voices. With our poor track record and even worse media exposure, it is no wonder that we Christians are often considered hypocritical, judgmental, self-centered, too political, and more focused on making converts than genuinely ministering to people.¹ This picture is not pretty.

Is the church nothing more than a self-righteous, self-enclosed lobbying group? Do we combine legalistic judgment with hypocritical lack of self-awareness? Is this why

1. See David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007).

so many people put up emotional and intellectual barriers to Christianity? Some Christians might dismiss such questions by pointing to Jesus' warning that the world will hate his followers (John 15:18). It is certainly true that the cross of Christ is scandalous to the world (1 Corinthians 1:18-25), but it is equally true that Jesus brought good news. Clearly, not all who hear the gospel as bad news do so simply because they are hard-hearted sinners. The problem goes much deeper. Those whom Christ has called to radical Christian discipleship are acting unchristianly. That is not just a problem of image. It is also a deeper problem of substance.

This is why John Howard Yoder's challenge to the church continues to be relevant today. Yoder's writings, which span from 1949 to his death in 1997, speak directly to the world's negative assessment of today's churches. Where churches have become self-focused and sheltered, Yoder calls us to be creative and mission-minded. He also challenges us to witness to Christ in every aspect of our lives. Where churches have become judgmental, Yoder calls us to be truly evangelistic, proclaiming the *good* news of God's offer of abundant life. Where churches have become conversion-focused, Yoder calls us to be disciple-focused, being and making followers of the way of Jesus. Where churches have become too political, Yoder calls for a new kind of politics in the body of Christ, embracing forgiveness instead of finger pointing, conflict resolution instead of polarized partisanship, and unity in Christ instead of competing special interest groups. Finally, where churches have become hypocritical, Yoder calls us to radical Christian discipleship, shunning legalism and self-righteousness and relying on the power of the Holy Spirit as we take up our cross and follow Jesus. Yoder's challenge to the church not only addresses surface issues of image, but tackles core issues of substance. He helps us ask again, Who is Jesus? And who are we called to be as his followers?

Who is John Howard Yoder?

At this point, you may be wondering, "Who exactly is John Howard Yoder?" A household name among some circles, Yoder is virtually unknown in others. For example, his most famous book, *The Politics of Jesus*, was named among the

top ten books of the twentieth century by *Christianity Today*. Yet, if you were to poll the average Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox congregation, Yoder would be far lesser known than other names in the top ten, including C. S. Lewis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, J. R. R. Tolkien, Richard Foster, and Dorothy Day. Although the more academically inclined contributors to *Christianity Today* hold Yoder in high esteem, the average person in the pew has no idea who he is. We can begin to understand Yoder if we look at core commitments that characterized his life and work.² These core commitments can help explain why Yoder resonates with Christians of all traditions.

In his writing, Yoder is committed to reading and studying Scripture as the foundation of Christian life. Though he often uses historical and linguistic tools to illuminate specific texts and their context, Yoder never forgets that engaging Scripture is not merely an intellectual exercise but an activity that demands our obedience. Practical questions—not just theoretical or intellectual ones—run as an undercurrent in Yoder’s work. Rather than argue about how to characterize the authority of Scripture or whether certain events really happened, he simply assumes that Scripture is authoritative and that the accounts we have are the ones God calls us to live by. Yoder stands out among theologians and ethicists of his time and ours for his commitment to basing his claims upon the entirety of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation.³

Yoder is equally committed to the centrality of Jesus. The written Word ultimately points to the living Word by whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together.

2. For those interested in further biographical information, see Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), and Earl Zimmerman, *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder’s Social Ethics* (Telford, PA: Cascadia / Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2007). For a helpful summary of key themes in Yoder’s work, see Craig A. Carter, *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2001).

3. For an introduction to Yoder’s interpretation of Scripture, see John C. Nugent, *The Politics of Yahweh: John Howard Yoder, the Old Testament, and the People of God* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011).

As truly divine and truly human, Jesus reveals both who God is and who we are called to be. For Yoder, Jesus is unique, but this uniqueness does not hinder our ability to follow him. It enables us to do so by giving us a concrete example to follow. When Jesus comes as a servant, he calls us to take up the basin and towel and serve others. When Jesus comes to bear his cross, he calls us to take up our cross and follow him. When Jesus comes to show God's love to those who were enemies of God, he calls us to love our enemies as well. For Yoder, Jesus is not only central to Scripture, doctrine, and ethics, but also to world history. He challenges all who share that conviction to integrate it more consistently into all their thoughts and actions.⁴

Yoder was committed to his own Mennonite heritage. Born in 1927 and raised in the Mennonite church, he graduated from Goshen College in 1947. From 1949 to 1957, Yoder spent time in France, where he supervised two homes for children, engaged in numerous church unity meetings, oversaw the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities relief program in Algeria, and pursued graduate education. When he returned to North America, Yoder served in numerous official capacities in Mennonite institutions. He served as a liaison between Mennonites and other denominational institutions such as the World Council of Churches. He also taught at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries—recently renamed Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, the name we use in this book—and in 1977 began teaching full time at the University of Notre Dame where he contributed to the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies until his death in 1997. Though Yoder stood within the Mennonite tradition, he also creatively reworked it in various ways. This made him a compelling figure well beyond his own tradition.⁵ For example, he linked moral purity and mission in ways that were not so common; he emphasized strong continuity between the Old and New Testaments for understanding the nature and mission of the

4. Branson Parler unpacks Yoder's view of how all things hold together in Christ in *Things Hold Together: John Howard Yoder's Trinitarian Theology of Culture* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2012).

5. Nation, *John Howard Yoder*, 29.

church; he challenged believers not to be different from the world for the sake of difference but to be more like Christ; and he emphasized the sacramental dimensions of church practices in ways that bridge the gap between high church and low church views of them.

Yoder was also committed to church unity, which included helping others more faithfully live out their own heritage.⁶ He intentionally met people on their own turf in order to call all Christians to be more faithful to Jesus. He did not call Calvinists, Catholics, or Campbellites to simply become Mennonite. He pointed to resources within those traditions that would make them more faithful to Scripture and to Christ. A prime example is Yoder's interaction with proponents of the just war tradition. While at Notre Dame, Yoder taught a graduate course on this subject to those who were training to become officers in the armed forces. As a pacifist, Yoder could have ignored or denounced adherents to just war theory, but he didn't. Through detailed and careful interaction, he took their heritage seriously and called them to do so as well. Yoder engaged evangelicals with the same rigor. As a result, when *The Christian Century* published an article on "The Year of the Evangelicals" in 1989, Yoder was pictured on the front cover along with figures as prominent as Billy Graham and Francis Schaeffer. Yoder's impact beyond Mennonite circles is evident in that three of the four editors involved in this series, *Yoder's Challenge to the Church*, come from beyond Mennonite circles.⁷

Finally, Yoder was deeply committed to mission. He even claimed that a church that is not missional is no church at all.⁸ Yoder lived this out in his own life. He not only taught

6. For detailed treatment of Yoder's approach to church unity, see John C. Nugent, ed., *Radical Ecumenicity: Pursuing Unity and Continuity after John Howard Yoder* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2010). This collection contains an essay by Yoder on unity and a wonderful essay by Gayle Gerber Koontz about how Yoder lived out his pursuit of unity.

7. Influenced by Yoder's thought, Andy Alexis-Baker first joined a Mennonite church in 2000, but Branson Parler is Reformed, and John Nugent and Kate A. Kissling-Blakely (who will be involved in volume 3) are both part of the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ.

8. See John Howard Yoder, *Theology of Missions*, edited by Gayle

missions courses, but was deeply influential in shaping North American Mennonite mission in places like West Africa. An example might illustrate his viewpoint. Most missionary agencies in West Africa during the 1960s were trying to convert Africans involved in a movement called African-Initiated Churches (AICs). Yoder, by contrast, argued that converting people to the Mennonite church would stifle a genuine West African movement and would perpetuate European divisions in new places. In a brilliant stroke of guidance, he noted a strand of AICs that had begun as pacifist churches and urged missionaries to offer peace workshops to help strengthen that position, instead of convincing them to become Mennonites. In this way, Mennonites could participate in an organic discipleship process alongside other Christians without being anxious about their own denominational numbers.⁹ Thus discipleship has a particular missional character, as Yoder expresses in chapter 17 of this volume. Far from remaining inwardly focused, the church is pushed out beyond itself through the Holy Spirit.

Challenge to the Church series

Although Yoder's voice continues to resonate across the landscape of academic Christianity, his challenge to the church seldom falls within earshot of today's average Christian. This is partly because most of his published works were directed toward scholars. Yet on many occasions Yoder addressed ordinary Christians, whether in local congregations, college chapels, or retreat centers. Unfortunately most of this material has not been published or was published in magazines that were not read widely beyond Mennonites. As editors of this series, we have collected, transcribed, and published this material because we believe Yoder's challenge to follow Jesus in all things still needs to be heard outside of academia.

Gerber Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), forthcoming.

9. For a more detailed picture of Yoder's work in West African missions see David Shenk, "John Howard Yoder, Strategist for Mission with African-Initiated Churches," in *Missions from the Margins*, edited by James R. Krabill (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2012).

This project began as one book that focuses on the topic of nonconformity (now volume 1). We then discovered a wealth of unpublished popular-level material scattered about in church audio collections, college libraries, and Yoder's personal archives. As we surveyed this material, it became clear that it fell into three thematic clusters that were ideally suited for a three-volume series. This first volume, *Radical Christian Discipleship*, concentrates on how individual Christians are called to follow Jesus completely in every aspect of our lives. This volume is introduced in greater detail below.

Volume 2, *Revolutionary Christian Citizenship*, will be published in 2013. It focuses on how Christians should relate to the nations in which they live. Yoder challenges churches to think about how they can be collective witnesses to the state and how individual believers can be witnesses in their everyday lives and practices. Building off the political nature of Jesus' ministry, this volume addresses how Christians should think about broad concepts such as power, enemy love, and Christian witness to the state. It also delves into specific issues such as voting, taxation, and peace.

Volume 3, *Real Christian Fellowship*, will be published in 2014. It focuses on how members of Christ's body ought to relate to one another as a community. It deals with core Christian practices including baptism, communion, making decisions, admonishing one another, serving the poor, singing songs, and curtailing practices that deny women full dignity in Christ. This volume is of particular value because Yoder recovers important biblical dimensions of these practices that have been lost over time. Whether one is part of a small rural congregation or a large city church, this collection will breathe fresh air into the everyday life of the body of Christ.

Radical Christian discipleship

This present volume focuses on discipleship. It is divided into three sections. The first section includes five lectures that Yoder gave at Goshen College in 1963. These lectures were part of an annual series that concentrated on nonconformity to the world. In typical fashion, Yoder reframes this issue by pointing out that the key to Christian obedience is not *nonconformity*, but *conformity to Jesus*. Our mission is not to be different

from the world, but to be similar to Christ. At the time of these lectures, Yoder was working full time as an administrative assistant for overseas mission with the Mennonite Board of Missions while also serving as a part-time instructor at the Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana.¹⁰

Section 2 includes twelve articles, one which appeared in the *Gospel Herald* in 1954 and eleven which appeared in *Christian Living* magazine from 1955 to 1956.¹¹ The readers of *Christian Living* would have been members of the Mennonite Church, the branch of Mennonite faith from which Yoder came.¹² Congregations often subscribed to *Christian Living* and placed a copy in the church mailbox of each member. In these essays, Yoder deals with a variety of topics, including the Christian's relationship to money, time, truth, self-assertion, freedom, enemies, suffering, and history. Those who have been led to think of Mennonites as "against culture" will be surprised that Yoder asks not how we can avoid the world, but how Christ has freed us for service to the world.

The historical context of section 2 is especially important. Yoder is writing from Europe less than a decade after World War II and while the French-Algerian War was still being waged. As Yoder continued his studies and work in Europe, he wrote to North American Mennonites to call them to a vision of Christianity that was more radical and self-critical than what they were used to.¹³ This meant asking hard questions not just about war and peace, but also about everything from middle-class economic stability to individualism, work, vacation, and rest. To those tempted to settle

10. Nation, *John Howard Yoder*, 21–22. Mennonite Biblical Seminary later merged with Goshen Biblical Seminary to form Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, now renamed Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

11. Though these essays were written earlier than section 1, we place them second because they go into greater detail on some of the issues that are introduced in the first section.

12. For those unfamiliar with the Mennonite tradition, the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church have since merged to form Mennonite Church USA.

13. Yoder, "1980 Autobiography," quoted in Nation, *John Howard Yoder*, 20.

into comfortable accommodation to the emerging post-war North American culture, Yoder issues a powerful challenge to radical Christian discipleship.

The final section includes three sermons ranging from 1968 to 1978, a commencement address from 1963, and an article originally published in *Christian Ministry* magazine in 1955. Of particular historical interest is a sermon he delivered on the day after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. These essays round out this collection by answering specific questions about discipleship that are raised in parts 1 and 2. What exactly is the cross that disciples have been called to take up? What does it mean to count the costs before following Jesus? Is it appropriate to soften the hard edges of the gospel for the sake of evangelism? What might radical Christian discipleship look like in the life of a specific community? What is God's role in our efforts to follow him in all things? The emphasis on peace, community, and mission in this final section anticipate, in many ways, the themes Yoder develops more fully in volumes 2 and 3 of this series.

Finally, we should say a word about our choice of the term *radical* in the title of this book. By "radical" we do not mean that what Yoder sets forth in these pages is only for a few far-left or far-right Christians who want to make disciples of themselves. Nor by "radical" do we mean that only a minority of Christians are called to this kind of discipleship. It is true that Yoder doesn't give us a flashy program by which to usher ever greater numbers into our ranks. Yet he preached and taught to anybody who would listen, and the vision set forth here is meant to propel Christians of all stripes into a deeper commitment to Christ and their neighbors (even enemy neighbors). Radicalness is thus for every Christian. One meaning of the term *radical* is "root" in the sense of origins. At the root of Christianity is Christ and at the root of what we proclaim about Christ is the cross and resurrection. What readers will find here is a root vision of what the cross and resurrection mean for Christian life.

Editorial concerns

Because all of these essays are historically situated, readers should not be surprised to see Yoder engage communism, the

USSR, the civil rights movement, France and Algeria, events from World War II, Fidel Castro, Nikita Khrushchev, and other headlines at the time he was writing. Sometimes the editors have furnished a footnote or worked a brief explanation into the text to situate the reference. Still, readers are encouraged to exercise their imaginations and to draw parallels from earlier decades to the issues facing Christians today. These essays are striking because, rather than being time-bound, they transcend the times and places in which they were written. As Christians face the perennial issues and questions of discipleship, Yoder's challenge to the church is just as relevant today as it was over fifty years ago.

Since our goal is to make Yoder's work available in an accessible format, we have edited his writings as necessary to help them read easier. We have not made changes that would compromise the substance of the original sermons or essays. Yoder himself acknowledged his limitations as a writer. In an unpublished letter he notes, "Clarity not being, by the way, the most evident virtue of my writing." A grammarian might observe that even this quote could benefit from revision for the sake of readability. Whether it was the effect of having such a rigorous and logical mind or the result of writing his dissertation in German, Yoder often constructed sentences in less-than-ideal ways. So we have sometimes changed word order, condensed a sentence where Yoder had been unduly wordy, adjusted punctuation, or added a word that helps improve the flow of a sentence. We have also conformed Yoder's language to contemporary gender-inclusive standards as was his own practice later in life. Scripture quotations have been converted to the NRSV, except where the original version makes a difference, in which case we identify the other translations in parentheses. Given the nature of these writings, there were few footnotes in the originals. All footnotes were therefore inserted by the editors, except when indicated otherwise.

In this three-volume series, we point to Yoder not as an end in himself, but as a herald. Yoder's challenge to the church reminds one of the voice that once cried in the Judean wilderness. In his call for Christians to follow Jesus, Yoder follows in the steps of John the Baptist who "was not the light," but who "came only as a witness to the light" (John

1:8). As we seek a life of radical Christian discipleship, may God's grace enable us to be witnesses to this same light.

—*John C. Nugent*
Andy Alexis-Baker
Branson L. Parler

Part One

Beyond Conformity

A Choice of Slaveries¹

You are doomed to conformity. To be human is to be destined to conform to some pattern, some example. The apostle Paul says of Christians, “those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family” (Romans 8:29). The apostle had no better definition of what it means to be a Christian than to speak of himself as a man who no longer lives, but in whom Christ dwells. It is therefore not new information, not a statement we did not know before, when in 1 John we read, “As he is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). It could be said even more briefly: “We are he in the world.”

The goal of this sermon series is to remind ourselves how Christians are called to be different from those things in the world that are different from Christ. We must also remember that the key to Christian obedience is not *nonconformity* but conformity. These themes lead us to the beginning of Romans 12. Here Paul pleads with his readers not to be conformed. This theme of differentness is touched upon only in passing. It is the prelude to a chapter that otherwise focuses on what

1. This is the first of five lectures that Yoder gave at Goshen College in 1963. For more information see the introduction.

it means to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Paul is more interested in helping us faithfully discern what it means not to be different from the world, but to be like Christ.

The ways of conformity

Our society tells us that our first priority should be to grow up by settling down and fitting in. In the late 1950s, a young person in France was supposed to grow up and be a patriotic Frenchman and, if necessary, to participate in efforts to violently suppress the Algerian rebellion. A young person growing up in Algeria during that time and for the same reason was supposed to come out on the opposite side of that war. In a religious and culturally conservative rural community, you should grow up to fit in there. This means defending that community's values, prejudices, and commitments against all kinds of outside threats. For those who grow up in mainstream North American society, "fitting in" means living up to North America's vision of life. This means installing high-fidelity audio and video in every room, cooking on a barbecue pit in the backyard, and faithfully attending "the church of your choice." As different as these patterns are, they share the fundamental assumption that to grow up is to fit in wherever you find yourself.

The most popular alternative to trying to fit in is to try to be different. Let us seek to affirm what the surrounding society denies and to deny what it affirms. Let us be different as a matter of principle. Every society, every church or college, has some people trying to do this. Some deviate to the right and some to the left of what they consider to be the middle. Some try to be different by being "higher" and others by being "lower" on the scale of the priorities of that society. What these rebels often do not see is that their rebellion is usually just as much a kind of conformity as that of blatant conformists. In fact, it is doubly so. The rebel is first a prisoner of the system that he or she rejects. Every time it says "yes," the rebel must say "no." Every time it says "no," the rebel must say "yes." Where it says "don't," rebels must do. Where it says "do," rebels don't. The rebel is also a prisoner of whatever group of rebels he or she has chosen to follow.

There is nothing more compulsive, not to mention boring, than the nonconformity of any one generation's set of rebels.

A choice of slaveries: wealth, war, and self

In light of these options, the apostle Paul is simply being realistic when he tells us that we have before us not a choice between freedom and slavery but only a choice of slaveries:

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:20-23)

Let us not be misled by the word *sin*. We have brushed this word aside in such a way that it seems only to apply to the distasteful, unworthy, corrupt, sensual, or crude. We tend to assume that adultery is sin in a sense that gossip is not. We regard murder or alcoholism as sin, but not greed. Nor do we consider patriotism, dilettantism, or ambition to be sinful. When the word *sin* has been redefined to apply only to the indecent, it is obvious that not every cause to which a person commits is “sin.” But Paul is right in telling us that everything to which a person commits is a slavery.

Slavery is the oldest and most descriptive word for a value system—a pattern of responding to the world around us, a pattern to which we commit and which determines how we behave. Until recently, the phrase *to be committed* was used most often to refer to one's being placed in prison or under psychiatric care. Commitment is the loss of one's self-determination—the loss of control over all of one's activities.

The most popular slavery today is devotion to Mammon, the god of wealth. When we want to argue that time is important, we say, “time is money.” When we want to convince others that education is desirable, we explain that if they go to college their total earnings will be hundreds of thousands more over the course of their career. People who argue that democracy is better than other systems of government

are convincing only to the extent that they prove that free enterprise is more productive. In our society, all values are reduced to how much they pay or how they “work.”

In the time of Jesus, this reduction of values to monetary standards was not as far-reaching. Job choices were not all made on the basis of income, and society’s estimation of who is important was not made primarily on the basis of wealth. Even so, Jesus had to deal with people for whom the service of Mammon was truly a slavery. Such people could be freed for faith and discipleship only by being freed from their money. Let us not assume that students or others with little money are exempt from this temptation. The choices they make about gaining an education, spending their spare time, or waking up on Sunday mornings all reflect a commitment to one slavery or another. They all involve a choice about Mammon.

A close competitor of Mammon is Mars, the god of war. In reality, however, the two do not really compete. For instance, over half the American federal budget is devoted to preparation for aggressive military activity. It matters little whether we say here that Mars is helping Mammon or Mammon is helping Mars. In any case, militarism has nothing to do with the protective and orderly functions of the cop on the corner. People attempt to tell us that government, including war, is a kind of rational self-defense by which a society protects its tranquility and order against outside menaces through intelligent and appropriate means. Such an understanding will never grasp the reality of service to Mars. Militarism is a religious, nonrational commitment to self-glorification and to the assumption that things will never go right in God’s world unless I am at once prosecutor, judge, jury, and hangman in the other person’s case. What is wrong with militarism is not that, if ultimately war is declared, some people will be killed. What is most wrong with militarism is the idolatry of thinking that I or we or our government alone shall determine what things are worth killing others for.

But perhaps, you will say, my examples are inappropriate. Mars and Mammon are not immediately the gods of any educational or Christian institution. Does not the choice of such extreme and unwholesome kinds of slavery leave open the question of whether slavery can be avoided? Do we not have a vision of being able to rise above such crude choices?

Can we not be objective and open minded? Can we not suspend judgment, weigh one commitment against another, and limit our involvement?

This vision, I submit, is the greatest idol of all. For above and beneath, before and behind Mammon and Mars, the greatest idol is “me.” To think that I am rising above the claims of society upon me—that I am deciding, and sometimes even deciding to make no decisions—is one of the most deeply entrenched ways to serve something other than God. To make no decisions, to keep one’s mind completely open, to maintain a “balanced” and noncommittal attitude, is no less binding than any other way to live. It will inevitably take you down one rather than another of the tracks you might possibly choose. Years later, you will see that your decisions, investments, and energy were just as clearly committed to yourself and your independence as others have committed to causes outside themselves.

Slavery to righteousness

What the apostle Paul offers as an alternative is not liberation—seen negatively as freedom from a particular kind of bondage. He claims that there is no such thing. What he offers instead, as a gift of God’s grace, is a new kind and a new degree of bondage. It is a new kind of bondage because it is the slavery for which we are made. It is a new degree of bondage because only this kind of commitment, which Paul calls “slavery to righteousness,” can apply to every dimension of your life.

You can commit yourself religiously to open-mindedness or to opium, to automobile racing or to pacifism, to the American way of life or to your family. Each of these commitments can be made total, as far as you are humanly able. Yet each of these commitments will fail to address certain dimensions of your life, to meet certain needs, or to help with certain decisions. A passion for auto racing will not tell you how to retire. A passion for the English language’s purity will not tell you when to marry. “Slavery to righteousness” is an alternative that belongs in a different category. Slavery to righteousness (or justice) is true freedom precisely because no part of my life needs to be distorted when I commit myself totally to what God wants me to be.