

*Diaspora as Mission. John Howard Yoder, Jeremiah 29 and the Shape and Mission of the Church.*

What does it mean to be church in the twenty first century? To answer this question I engaged the work of American Mennonite scholar John Howard Yoder. He developed a thesis, working from Jeremiah 29, that the people of God, both Israel and the church, are called to an existence in diaspora. According to Yoder, this diaspora lifestyle is the social shape that God uses to reach the nations with His mission. He calls this perspective ‘diaspora as mission.’ Yoder’s proposal led to the main question of this study:

*to what extent is John Howard Yoder’s ‘diaspora as mission’ ecclesiology coherent and helpful for engaging contemporary (post-Christendom Western) ecclesiological questions?*

This question is answered by placing Yoder’s proposal within the twenty first century context and is subsequently given a theoretical (theological and historical) and a practical critique. The latter is done by engaging three communities that are inspired by Yoder’s ‘diaspora as mission’ ecclesiology. These communities are Urban Expression Nederland, Shane Claiborne’s Simple Way Community and Mark Kinzer’s Messianic Jewish Congregation Zera Avraham.

Recently Yoder has been under severe criticism because of his longtime abuse of women and his theological justification of it as an eschatological ‘experiment.’ Knowing this, can we still use his work? This research develops a critical hermeneutic to his behavior and work, and the idealistic tendencies it suffers from. This critical hermeneutic is subsequently used to engage ecclesiological questions of the twenty first century.