

REVOLUTIONARY CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

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Revolutionary. Christian. Citizenship. John Howard Yoder treats these words with attentiveness and care. With this study guide, you will have the opportunity to tackle these words head-on, in groups or individually. The guide will give you an opportunity to create a working definition of revolutionary Christian citizenship. You do not need to come up with an expert's definition. Simply write down your feelings, thoughts, and current understanding of revolutionary Christian citizenship. At the end of each section, you will have the opportunity to edit your previous working definition. Do your best to keep the definition to no longer than three to five sentences.

If you are studying the book in a group, you may work at a definition together or individually and come back together to discuss each of your working definitions.

Introduction

1. According to the editors, what makes our “citizenship” revolutionary?

Part One: The Witness of Jesus

Chapter 1: Jesus and Politics

1. How would you define *politics*? Compare and contrast your answer with Yoder's definition on page 21.
2. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: “Maybe we divorce Jesus and politics because we have been more influenced by our culture than Jesus” (page 23)? What would it look like to “side with Jesus” on political matters?
3. Read Luke 1:51-53. What are the “political” implications of the text? How does this text speak to relationships and God's authority today?
4. On pages 31–32, Yoder provides examples for the manner in which the Jesus communities would conduct their business. Do church communities operate in this manner? Why or why not?
5. How does your context value the individual more highly than the community? What are the implications for relationships? Give examples that support your answer.

Chapter 2: Jesus and Peace

1. What are the implications of understanding peace as a *direction* rather than peace as something to be attained?
2. “Christian pacifism draws its sustenance from its roots not from its fruits” (page 37). How does this change or reinforce your understanding of that it means to be a pacifist?
3. What is the connection between viewing the world as a global community and peace? How can you break down ethnic barriers in your context?

Chapter 3: Jesus and Violence

1. In your context, what is the relationship between Jesus and violence?
2. Do you believe Jesus turning the tables in the temple was a “disorderly nonviolent demonstration” (page 40)? Why or why not?
3. Where do you see ritual religion being turned into a source of security and advantage? What are the implications?

Chapter 4: Jesus and Majesty

1. When you think of the word *majesty*, what are some of the images that come to mind? Write down your answers.
2. If Jesus was a mediator of God's will, and Jesus was highly political, what are the implications to those who follow? How does that help us understand the characteristics of a majestic God?
3. On page 47, Yoder claims that quietism is our "normal" preference. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Provide examples to support your response.
4. Name the people you have come across who are mediators between a majestic God and creation. What makes them mediators?

Chapter 5: Jesus and Old Testament Warfare

1. In your context, what is the usual approach to Jesus and warfare in the Old Testament? Is this conversation avoided or embraced? Why?
2. What are the positives and negatives to the various approaches that Yoder summarizes in terms of their understandings of Jesus and Old Testament warfare?
3. What are the positives and negatives of Yoder's contextual approach to warfare in the Old Testament? How is it helpful to you? Where is it lacking?
4. On page 59, Yoder offers five principles of application from his reading of the story of Abraham and his son as it pertains to war. In what ways do these principles help in your reading of warfare in the Old Testament?
5. What is the significance of the notion of God's people being limited to the Israelites in Yoder's "The Case for the Historical View" section? How would this impact your viewpoint on violence in the Old Testament?
6. How would you describe the witness of Jesus to the world of first-century Palestine?
7. Based on your reflections up to the end of Part One, review your working definition of revolutionary Christian citizenship. How has it changed? How is it the same?

Part Two: The Witness of the Church

Chapter 6: The Church and World History

1. What is the difference between engaging social ethics at an individual level and a communal level? What are the implications? Why is the distinction important?
2. Abraham leaves his Chaldean culture completely behind to begin a new story. What does it look like for our alternative communities to live a new history, separate from our Western-focused cultures?
3. Compare and contrast the approaches of the Sadducees, Zealots, Essenes, and Pharisees. Which one comes closest to how the church engages its context today? Explain your answer. Try to give concrete examples.
4. How do you use the phrase "Jesus is Lord?" What is a healthy understanding of this term according to Yoder? Why is it significant to the church and its engagement in history?
5. What does it look like for a church to be visible in its current context? What are some practical steps to move in that direction?

Chapter 7: God's People and the State

1. Where have you seen Christians influence, or attempt to influence, the state? Give concrete examples.
2. What do you think Yoder means when he says on page 79, "It is not up to us to crown him, but only to acknowledge his sovereignty"? Why is this significant to the church and its engagement with the state?
3. "All humans, even the morally unworthy ones, have a real value before God. They possess this value not by their own merits but by virtue of Christ" (page 84). Who in your context is not given human dignity? What are the implications? What is the impulse of the alternative community?
4. Give some examples of the state abusing its power. What, if any, has been the Christian response? Why do you think the response of the alternative community was silent? Or vocal?
5. Review the understanding of lordship that Yoder discusses in this chapter. What are the implications for the church's involvement with the state?

Chapter 8: God's People and War

1. Where have you come across the term *just war*? How was it defined? How does that compare with how Yoder defines just war?
2. Do a quick Internet search of the term war. Do some research on one current war that catches your eye. Based on your research, does this war fit the criteria put forth by just war theorists? In what ways?
3. Review the history of just war theory. What surprises you? What are the points of tension or agreement that you have with just war theory?
4. In what ways has total war affected the manner in which just war theory is practiced?
5. What are peaceable alternatives to just war that God's people can be a witness to?
6. Based on your reading until this point, identify the characteristics of an alternative community choosing to follow Jesus.
7. Based on your reflections up to the end of Part One and Part Two, revisit your working definition of revolutionary Christian citizenship. How has it changed? How is it the same? Where are you finding more depth in your current sense of what the term means.

Part Three: Witness in Action

Chapter 9: Self-Defense

1. Watch **this video** (<http://youtu.be/N271jTnnsks>) in which Greg Boyd reflects on the question, "What if violence is necessary to protect a loved one?" What are your first impressions? In what ways do you agree with Boyd? In what ways do you disagree?
2. "If Jesus demonstrated in his death such an attitude toward self-defense, and if his Father did nothing to interfere, then my attitude toward defending myself and my loved ones can be no different. Whatever I would do, it is clear from the example of God's own actions that I should do nothing that would be untrue to God's nature, to God's will for me, and to God's love working in me" (page 114). To what extent do you agree with this statement?
3. How can love both solve and prevent problems of violence? Give concrete examples.
4. How does the picture of peacemaking change when we keep our focus on the future rather than on the immediate present?

Chapter 10: Voting

1. How would you define democracy? How does Yoder describe democracy?
2. Why does Yoder suggest we lower our expectations on the impact of our vote? (See pages 127–29.)
3. Do you vote? Why or why not? After reading this chapter, are you affirmed or challenged in your approach to voting?

Chapter 11: Veteran's Day

1. Yoder describes Veteran's Day in the beginning of this chapter. If you are from the United States, how do you approach this day? If you are outside the United States, do you have a similar day? If so, how do you approach the day?
2. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-8. What are your initial impressions? What jumps out at you? Would you pray this for your leaders? Why or why not?
3. "Government exists in order to permit the church and the apostle to demonstrate and to proclaim the gospel" (page 132). Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
4. Give concrete examples of what "prayerful subjection to the kings of this world and unlimited loyalty to the cause of a different kingdom" (page 134) could look like in your context.

Chapter 12: Conscientious Objection

1. In your context, are traditions founded on past actions of a faith community or Scripture?
2. What is a healthy understanding of the image of God? What are the implications of this understanding for how we model ourselves?
3. According to Yoder, what are the implications of Ephesians 6:12 and 2 Corinthians 10:4? In what ways is conscientious objection fit this mandate of Scripture? In what ways does it not?
4. How would you define *solidarity*? Where have you seen solidarity in your context? What are the consequences of standing in solidarity with someone?

Chapter 13: The Arms Race

1. Do you think the nuclear arms race is be a significant point of contention in our culture today? How has the church engaged this issue?
2. In your context, which people group—socioeconomic, racial, or otherwise—are dehumanized? What are the reasons they are dehumanized? What are the effects of dehumanizing people?
3. How does your culture today worship Mars, the god of war? What other gods does your society worship? What are the implications of this idolatry?

Chapter 14: Income Tax

1. In what ways can nonresistance be a witness to the alternative community of Jesus?
2. How do you resonate with Yoder's story of seeking income tax alternatives?
3. Do some research in order to find out where your tax dollars are spent. Would you ever consider delegating your income tax to nonviolent initiatives? What alternatives are available to you?

Chapter 15: Civil Religion

1. “The contrast between God the all-powerful, all-competent parent and God the embattled partisan runs all through our culture” (page 161). Where do you see this happening in our culture? What images of God are prominent? What is the consequence of that type of thinking?
2. What is your response to the hymn Yoder offers on page 163?
3. North America is entering a time of post-Christendom. How do the three ways we have learned to think (see page 164) change in light of this?
4. How do you relate to the battle imagery used at the end of page 168? What are the implications of “the battle is already won” mentality? What does it say for the “here and now”?
5. Having reached the end of this book, how would you define revolutionary Christian citizenship? What are the essential elements of Christian citizenship? In what ways does it inspire you to action?
6. Do a final “edit” of your working definition of revolutionary Christian citizenship. After you work through it, pay attention to where it has grown over the previous definitions, noting what you have added and subtracted. And note that even though you have finished working through this book, your understanding will continue to change as you follow in the footsteps of Christ.