

A. James Reimer, *Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology: Law, Order, and Civil Society*. Edited by Paul G. Doerksen. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014.

*Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology* collects the working papers for a monograph that Mennonite theologian A. James Reimer was writing before his passing in 2010. Reimer entrusted these papers to Paul Doerksen with the intention that they be published together posthumously. In the foreword P. Travis Kroeker briefly describes the significance of Reimer's work and provides a synopsis of some major themes of Reimer's political theology. The introduction by Doerksen narrates the circumstances of Reimer's request and describes the non-invasive approach taken in editing the volume.

Reimer's theological project sought to re-emphasize the importance of the creeds and Trinitarian orthodoxy for Mennonite theology. His dissertation was focused on political theology, later published as *The Emanuel Hirsch and Paul Tillich Debate*, and his wide-ranging writings on systematic theology, Anabaptist Mennonite theology, and inter-faith dialogue were published in the retrospective collection *Mennonites and Classical Theology*.

Other landmarks of Reimer's scholarly career include an edited collection, *The Influence of the Frankfurt School on Contemporary Theology*; a collection of catechism-like essays, *The Dogmatic Imagination*; and a festschrift, *Creed and Conscience*. In the final decade of his life Reimer published an essay collection, *Paul Tillich: Theologian of Nature, Culture, and Politics*, and a textbook, *Christians and War*. However, preparatory materials for the political theology monograph remained unfinished, and were scattered throughout scholarly journals and edited collections.

*Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology* is the fruit of Reimer's final scholarly project, arguing that all theology is political and must engage civil society, and that the basis for interfaith dialogue is dialogue and forbearance, especially given that modern pluralism is not neutral but comprises value systems steeped in tradition. Like John Howard Yoder, Reimer understands the gospels to be fundamentally political, but unlike Yoder, he does not draw hard lines between church and society, preferring instead to remind readers that they are already involved with the culture surrounding them.

The chapters, in order, are as follows. "An Anabaptist-Mennonite Political Theology: Theological Presuppositions," describes the main

contours of Reimer's political theology, proceeding from the conviction that readers are already involved in the political life of the state. Pure separation from the state is not an option for Reimer, and engagement with civil institutions is thus unavoidable. Reimer grounds both his argumentation and his hermeneutic in the doctrine of the Trinity. His political realism and his commitment to Christian doctrine come together in his claim that "*Logos* (Word, grace, love) is the basis and reason for *Nomos* (Law, form, structure)" (7).

"I came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it: A Positive Theology of Law and Civil Institutions," begins with a detailed critique of Mennonite theologians including John Howard Yoder, John W. Miller, and Waldemar Janzen, and then examines the work of Richard B. Hays and Robert C. Tannehill on Jesus' fulfillment of the law. This chapter strengthens the link between *logos* and *nomos* by detailing how Christ comes to fulfill both civil law and the law of the Torah.

"Trinitarian Foundations for Law and Public Order," highlights Menno Simons's commitment to Christian discipleship, and furthers the ontological connection between *logos* and *nomos* by drawing on Karl Barth's account of creation. Through Barth, Reimer contrasts the fixity of order and structure with the ongoing work of "the ordering and structuring of the world (*Nomos*) in the face of chaos . . ." (54). "Constantine: From Religious Pluralism to Christian Hegemony" questions polarized interpretations of the Constantinian legacy through an examination of Lactantius, the third-century Christian apologist.

The fifth chapter, "Revelation, Law, and Individual Conscience," suggests that the strong critique of the Western liberal tradition is common to both Mennonites and Shi'ite Muslims, furthering Reimer's effort to dialogue with other faith traditions. "Law, Freedom of Conscience, and Civil Responsibility: Marpeck, Mennonites, and Contemporary Social Ethics," seeks to ground Reimer's political theology in Pilgram Marpeck, particularly Marpeck's negotiation between the religious and political spheres.

"An Anabaptist-Mennonite Political Theology, Part II: Historical Manifestations and Observations," the seventh chapter, continues Reimer's engagement with the Constantinian legacy through a further examination of Yoder and a description of the relationship between eternal, natural, human,

and divine law. It concludes with the role of the Christian conscience in developing civil law in the context of religious pluralism. “Public Orthodoxy and Civic Forbearance: The Challenges of Modern Law for Religious Minority Groups,” extends Reimer’s examination of this concern by grounding forbearance (patient tolerance) in *orthodoxy* rather than *neutrality* (169).

The final chapter, “Anabaptist-Mennonite Political Theology: Conceptualizing Universal Ethics in Post-Christendom” offers a summary and a demonstration of the grounding of forbearance in orthodoxy. Exploring the work of Max Stackhouse and Jeffrey Stout, and critically appropriating Yoder’s concept of “middle axioms,” Reimer conceives of a universal religious ethic that would not diminish the quality of dialogue between religious groups.

The essays in *Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology* have a striking underlying unity in their collective focus on the intertwining of the Word (*Logos*), the Law (*Nomos*), and the importance of both political and interfaith engagement. This book will contribute to ongoing conversations about the nature and possibility of an Anabaptist-Mennonite informed political theology.

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Paul Born. *Deepening Community: Finding Joy Together in Chaotic Times*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2014.

In *Deepening Community: Finding Joy Together in Chaotic Times*, Paul Born lays out a basic framework that helps readers understand the movement from lack of community, shallow or fear-based community to deep community. Insight for his fourth book comes from his own innovative approaches in community development that have received honors from organizations including the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. Born promotes deeper community, using the example of Canadian Mennonites