
John Howard Yoder. *A Pacifist Way of Knowing: John Howard Yoder's Nonviolent Epistemology*. Edited by Christian E. Early and Ted G. Grimsrud. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010.

Recent years have witnessed the posthumous publication of a plethora of works written by Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder. Included among them is *A Pacifist Way of Knowing: John Howard Yoder's Nonviolent Epistemology*. The main body of this book consists of six essays written by Yoder that were originally published in various journals and books between 1984 and 1999. These essays could be profitably read not only for their epistemological insights but also for their contribution to the fields of ecclesiology, ethics, missiology, and cross-cultural communication.

The book's title is somewhat misleading in that Yoder's personal investment was not in pacifism per se. Rather, his commitment was to a particular Christologically-informed vision of pacifism, which for him was synonymous with discipleship. In the prologue, the editors do, however, acknowledge the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ to Yoder's distinctive stance. The themes of particularity and contingency sound forth like a recurring drumbeat at regular intervals throughout the collection of essays. Emphasis is placed upon the particularity of the Jewish Messiah Jesus, the contingent character of the Gospel as "news," and the community-dependent status of all moral meaning.

Yoder's acute analytical skills are clearly on display when he turns his attention toward deconstructing the wisdom of "the wider world," in which appeals to universalism simply serve to disguise the fact that the wider world is always just another province. Yoder's insights in this area may prove particularly helpful to those ministering to students who have left home to enter into the wider world of the university. Unfortunately, the essays suffer from an unusual number of typographical errors which, although they do not obscure the course of the arguments, do threaten to become distracting.

Yoder's essays are bookended by a prologue and epilogue written by the editors. The prologue aims to correct several misconceptions surrounding Christian pacifism and seeks to introduce readers to its biblical and theological foundations. The epilogue helpfully draws together themes from the essays and insights from Yoder's broader corpus to provide a sketch

of “a pacifist way of knowing.” Christian Early and Ted Grimsrud maintain that in a world of convictional diversity it is Yoder’s holding together of epistemology and eschatology that allows him to think “through and beyond relativism” (136).

“Epistemology and eschatology,” say the editors, “infuse and support each other such that [what] makes the coming world real is the way in which human communities discover truth by resolving their differences” (134). This is embodied within Christian communities in the practices of the open meeting and witness. The open meeting or “Rule of Paul,” which grants everyone a voice as the community seeks to discern the Spirit’s leading in the meeting, recognizes the importance of the other to truth-finding. Witness is dependent upon an “evangelical” form of communication which recognizes that members of the Messianic community must vulnerably enter into the culture of the other. The disciple cannot enter into the new context armed with a “knock-down, drag ‘em out” argument, for that would be a denial of the vulnerability of their Master who in humility went to the cross. The Christian community must therefore reject coercive foundationalist and imperialist ways of knowing, which, whether motivated by pride or fear, nonetheless refuse to make themselves vulnerable to the other. Instead, generous patience and radical humility will characterize the epistemological outlook of those captured by a vision of the slain lamb who sits upon the throne.

True to their intentions, Early and Grimsrud have assembled a collection of essays that should assist Christian pacifists as they attempt to think through the epistemological implications of their convictions. The diversity of topics treated in this volume also makes it a leading candidate for those interested in finding a single source to stand as a companion piece to *The Politics of Jesus* in introducing the main contours of Yoder’s thought. Beyond both of these uses, *A Pacifist Way of Knowing* will, I hope, also stimulate Christian readers of other backgrounds and traditions to consider more thoughtfully what it means to be faithful disciples of the Prince of Peace.

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