

David C. Cramer and Myles Werntz. *A Field Guide to Christian Nonviolence: Key Thinkers, Activists, and Movements for the Gospel of Peace*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022.

In this book, Cramer and Werntz describe eight different approaches to Christian nonviolence, highlighting the important figures that correspond to each. The argument of the book is not polemical and does not advocate for any particular understanding. Rather, each type is described sympathetically, on its own terms.

The first half of the book includes streams of Christian nonviolence that can be roughly characterized as emphasizing faithfulness. This includes nonviolence as discipleship, virtue, mysticism, or apocalyptic uncovering.

As Christian discipleship, nonviolence is understood primarily as an act of obedience. Following Niebuhr's distinction between "faithfulness vs. effectiveness," this stream emphasizes the teachings of Christ rather than a concern to control outcomes. A challenging question in this stream is how closely to link nonviolence to discipleship: is a disciple who does not commit to nonviolence unfaithful, or simply mistaken? How do we account for nonviolence that is not specifically Christian?

Virtue arguments supply an answer to some of the challenges discipleship poses. "Natural virtues" (like courage in war) exist outside the church, but nonviolence is understood as the supernatural perfection of those natural virtues. The role of the church is to form the virtue of nonviolence in both the politics and the ordinary lives of its members.

Christian mysticism understands the individual's distorted vision of themselves and of God to be a source of political violence. In this stream, spiritual practice (especially of mystical prayer) involves an encounter with the God of peace, heals the spiritual disease of violence, and produces an ethic of nonviolence.

In an apocalyptic mode, nonviolent words and actions uncover hidden violence and the power of Death. The suffering of the innocent, especially Jesus's crucifixion, reveals the violence that is normally hidden from sight. Typically, more combative and symbolic, apocalyptic nonviolence attempts to expose violence and injustice in order to dethrone Death and point toward the conditions for a new kind of life.

In the second half of the book, Cramer and Werntz turn to streams of Christian nonviolence that tend to emphasize effectiveness. Here they discuss realist, political, and liberationist nonviolence, as well as antiviolence.

Niebuhr's Christian realism rejects idealism, accepting violence as a

means to justice in the real world. Similarly, a realist approach seeks practical results, but it promotes the empirical benefits of nonviolence for the real world even as it partners with those who are not ideologically committed to pacifism. This approach works more broadly with all levels of society and government for “relative justice” or “just peacemaking.”

Nonviolence as political practice is similar to realism in its aim to produce real world results, except that a commitment to nonviolence is non-negotiable. This stream uses public, nonsectarian forms of action to transform political realities. Though the church may participate in the larger movement, it is not the primary driver of societal transformation. Examples of this approach include the creation of Pennsylvania and Japan’s post-war constitution.

Liberationist nonviolence identifies the “ordinary violence” that exists apart from overt acts of violence. Fiscal policy, soaring taxes, and other oppressive economic systems are not simply injustices leading to violence but are themselves violent. Because structural violence entangles everyone, liberationist nonviolence does not merely respond to overt violence but digs out the roots of violence, breaking what Câmara called the “Spiral of Violence.”

Finally, antiviolence highlights the ways sexual and gender-based violence is both structural and personal. Christian antiviolence requires self-critique to root out theologies and practices that contribute to sexual and gender-based violence. It begins by listening to and naming the experiences of “Victim-Survivors,” and it develops positive practices and theological resources to teach resistance to oppression.

Cramer and Werntz’ “field guide” is helpful in several ways.

- 1) It acknowledges various objections to nonviolence, while also clarifying the limited application of those objections. The valid criticisms of one stream are not minimized, but they do not necessarily indict the others.
- 2) It articulates a relationship between various streams of nonviolence.
- 3) It offers conceptual scaffolding to support what might otherwise appear as undisciplined, antithetical, or merely sentimental responses to violence.
- 4) It prompts exploration of further streams of Christian nonviolence.
- 5) It encourages the discovery of new forms of nonviolent praxis, as a living tradition.

For the church and the academy, the effect is profound.

A note about John Howard Yoder. In their preface, the authors acknowledge the challenge that Yoder's legacy presents for talking about nonviolence. This work is partly motivated by a desire to rescue nonviolence from the blanket charge of being Yoderian (ix). So, Cramer and Werntz honestly acknowledge the influence of Yoder's thought without centering it, and the remainder of the book demonstrates a much larger and more complex territory of Christian nonviolence—each stream of which contains its own challenges. The final chapter on anti-violence then brings the conversation full-circle to offer a way to respond to the history of sexual and gender-based violence in Yoder's thought and actions, as well as in Christian history and theology more broadly.

This book would be useful as an introduction to the range of approaches to nonviolence for students who are already familiar with some basic theological concepts and 20<sup>th</sup> century world history. It could also be used for adult education or facilitated small group study in a congregational context where there is interest in discerning ways for the church to engage the world for peace.

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Jonathan Dyck. *Shelterbelts*. Wolfville, NS: Conundrum Press, 2022.

When reading Jonathan Dyck's *Shelterbelts*, I was reminded of the miles of trees planted on our family farm and other farms across the prairie. I remember the wall of spruce trees that surrounded our farmyard, offering shelter from wind, framing our space in the parklands of Saskatchewan. I remember the toil, summer after summer, of planting rows of trees, Siberian and American elms and Manitoba maples provided by the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Association, designed to prevent the soil drift of the Depression, outlining quarter sections of farmland, being weeded and watered until they rooted and became part of the landscape. And they did offer protection, shelter from winds, capturing snow, shading homes and gardens; but they were also constraints, obscuring farmyards, enclosing spaces with trees meant for other topographies.

Dyck's graphic novel captures those two sides of shelterbelts—protection and constraint—for the inhabitants of Hespeler, a rural Mennonite community on the Canadian prairie. The physical form of the graphic novel can also be viewed as the prairie landscape, each frame a field, its borders a