

John A. Hostetler spent a lifetime wrestling with the meaning of community and the individual's place in it. If the scholarly community is to be a community, it must attend to the questions this book explores.

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Mark Thiessen Nation. *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Mark Nation's exposition of the theology of John Howard Yoder is a clear and nuanced introduction to the thought of this provocative, "patient Mennonite who provided an evangelical witness" to the church catholic (202). Not so much a critical evaluation as a valuable overview of Yoder's work, the book will benefit both church and academic communities, Mennonite and beyond.

The main chapters interpret Yoder's writings on Anabaptism and neo-Anabaptism, ecumenism, peace theology and just war, and Christian social responsibility in light of the cross of Jesus, and the book concludes with a brief chapter summarizing and commenting on Yoder's contributions to the church and academy. The book also includes the only available biographical essay, slightly revised from Nation's previously published essay in the Festschrift for Yoder, *Wisdom of the Cross*. Nation is currently gathering material for a full biography.

Chapter 4, focusing on "The Politics of Jesus, the Politics of John Howard Yoder" explains why Yoder's *Politics of Jesus* had such a profound impact when published in 1972 and why the politics of Jesus remain particularly challenging to U.S. Christians today. Nation quotes Stanley Hauerwas, who said that "prior to Yoder the subject of Christian ethics in America was always America." Nation underlines that for Yoder the confession that Jesus is Christ—and the Trinitarian God this confession assumes—must be kept in sharp focus in thinking and living ethically. Loyalty to this God directs humans toward a transnational community in Christ. And it is the politics of Jesus and the gospel of Christ that are the

basis for “the pacifism of the messianic community” that Yoder passionately defended throughout his life.

Nation’s chapter on “‘Social Irresponsibility’ or the Offense of the Cross: Yoder on Christian Responsibility” emphasizes that the ecumenical contexts in which Yoder wrote about Christian social responsibility are key to interpreting his statements accurately. Yoder argued that Christians can be pacifist, faithful, and socially responsible in an ecumenical context where many assumed with Reinhold Niebuhr that to be faithful to the nonviolent teaching and cross of Jesus and also “responsible” for one’s neighbors was impossible. In response Yoder made the occasional and ambiguous claim that being “irresponsible” [in the eyes of political realism] was truly being “responsible” [in the eyes of God].

Key to Yoder’s understanding of social responsibility was a strong ecclesiology. Nation argues that Yoder’s central theme regarding Jesus’ relevance for social ethics, and the call to the church to be a new social creation in Christ that is actively and peacefully engaged in the social world, remained quite consistent throughout his life with only minor changes in nuance.

While Yoder is readily identified with peace theology, his work on church unity as an expression of the gospel of peace is less well known, even among Mennonites. Nation notes that Yoder’s lifelong commitment to building interchurch relationships stemmed from his involvement in ecumenical conversations in Europe in the 1950s and was undergirded by his doctoral work on sixteenth-century Anabaptist disputations with the Reformers. The Swiss Anabaptists, Yoder held, remained open to conversation with fellow Christians at points of difference; it was the others who withdrew from and eventually persecuted them. This heritage and the New Testament call for unity in Christ, the inadequate witness of a divided church, the responsibility to testify to one’s faith, and the potential for learning from Christian brothers and sisters motivated Yoder’s significant engagement with both mainstream and evangelical Christians in many countries. Coming from a minority peace church tradition, Yoder brought particular sensitivities to issues of leadership, agenda formation, power, and process in discussions hosted by ecumenical organizations.

Nation’s familiarity with Yoder’s unpublished work, a number of his

personal papers, and his published writings, give his articulation of Yoder's intentions scholarly depth. The text is rich with footnotes that help readers navigate the maze of Yoder's essays, some of which were published, revised, and republished in various collections later in his life. The main drawback of this book is its lack of a full bibliography, something that makes it awkward to recover sources cited in short footnote form.

Nation's concern to correct common misunderstandings of Yoder's work, while a significant contribution, has led him to bend over backward to give as empathetic a reading of Yoder as possible. Nation barely mentions the church discipline process Yoder faithfully but unfortunately faced and its possible implications for some aspects of his thought. In his concluding chapter Nation notes that Yoder "covered the various angles of most of the subjects he cared about" and did "such a thorough job in this regard" that Nation gave "no substantial criticisms" of his work (197). He rather offers a gentle, thoughtful defense of this frequently misunderstood, gifted theologian and witness to Christ.

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