

Foreword

What a tremendous gift J. Denny Weaver and his friends have given the Christian community with this book! Though John Howard Yoder's many diverse interests and writings cannot be classified or forced into a unified whole, Weaver and colleagues have observed the fountainhead and central core of all Yoder's labor, a perception that is not found in any other study of Yoder's work. Weaver knew from his early participation in a class with Yoder and from his later analysis that the methodology of the latter's calling as an Anabaptist scholar was to take the narrative of Jesus into every new or different context and to use the language of that context to express or expand the narrative of Jesus.

Because of that fundamental insight, the authors of this book can more deeply understand in Part Two the sources of Yoder's theological growth in his formative, college, and graduate school years. Of special interest to me were the chapters in this section on Oscar Cullmann and Karl Barth because the authors of these analyses show how Yoder was able to learn from those European professors while going beyond them in many important ways. Accordingly, the story was frequently told, when I was a doctoral student under Yoder at Notre Dame, that Barth had said that John Yoder was the smartest man he had ever met. That was no surprise to us graduate apprentices because we were frequently overwhelmed by Yoder's brilliance.

Part Three of this book is equally intriguing because its authors demonstrate how Yoder could amplify his central focus on the narrative of Jesus to address many other topics of present theological, political, or social interest. Most importantly, not only was Yoder able to make this extension easily, but his clear methodology enabled him to teach many others to do the same kinds of expansion.

As Yoder's graduate assistant, I was able to see this ability readily because he taught the R.O.T.C. students a course titled "The Legality and Morality of War." Just as with his book *When War Is Unjust*, Yoder, a committed pacifist, was able to assist those who did not share his passion to refrain as much as possible from unnecessary violence.

The importance of this third section of the book is illustrated by the fact that I disagree with Yoder's replacement of Trinitarian language for the sake of dialogue with Jews, Muslims, and Hindus. However, Yoder's imperative for discussion is so powerful that, if I want to maintain my use of the vocabulary, this chapter makes clear I must also fulfill the responsibility to find other means to make conversation with "the other" possible.

Finally, a word must be said about the necessity of dealing with John Howard Yoder's personal failures. Perhaps because I am physically handicapped, I did not have to deal with Yoder's "experiments" with friendship intimacy, except for one typically-Yoderian-clumsy attempt to console me once when I was deeply discouraged. I have three things to say in anticipation of these chapters. First of all, I write "clumsy" because Yoder was too brilliant to know how to relate to us "normal folk." Since I regularly welcomed members of the theology department at Notre Dame to my apartment for dinner, occasionally John would (falteringly) ask me to invite him and Annie over for dinner along with a new professor or a guest in town so that they could get to know each other. My point, first, is that part of John's problems was that he was, by personal deficiency, awkward.

Second, John abided by my firm "No" when he tried sympathetically to console me, even as I have been led to believe that he obeyed (a typical Yoderian response) when the Mennonite correction committee took him through the long process of dealing with his conviction on sexual charges. I know that this is no comfort to those who were hurt by his previous behavior, but at least it gives us a more positive basis not to let his sexual misconduct interfere with our appreciation of his theological contributions.

Third, I do have enormous compassion for those who were harmed by his "experiments" with intimacy. John was too respected a professor and theologian to reconcile his sinful behavior with his teaching

and writing. I do pray that the chapters in this book will help to bring healing and forgiveness for John to those who were afflicted and some understanding to those puzzled by the depth of human sin in such a non-violent advocate as John Howard Yoder.

Marva J. Dawn
The day before “Reign of Christ” Sunday

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