

# Preface

This book joins what by now is a growing cottage industry of books on the work and the legacy of John Howard Yoder. As the Introduction explains in more detail, the book was stimulated by my growing uneasiness that the portrayal of Yoder's theology in the books and many articles that appeared in recent years did not reflect the understanding of his theology that I have had for more than a quarter century. My uneasiness grew to the point where I could not avoid acting on it. I developed a draft of the introduction, along with a suggested outline of chapters and contributors, and showed it to colleagues that I knew shared my uneasiness. The product, in approximately the form in hand, quickly gelled. Authors present in this volume all rapidly accepted an invitation to contribute to a book that put on display Yoder's understanding of Christology and the way that from there he could address any theological or ethical issue.

Although the authors of this volume have been profoundly influenced by Yoder's theology, they are not simply clones of Yoder. Several essays go farther than Yoder did, drawing out implications of his thought, or going through doors that he only opened.

The majority of writers in this volume had at least nodding acquaintance with John Howard Yoder in person. A few knew him rather well. Experiences with Yoder in person varied from warm affirmation to, at times, seeming indifference. Whatever those memories, all authors in this volume are profoundly grateful for Yoder's theological influence and welcomed the opportunity to contribute to this volume on his theology and its legacy.

The authors of this volume are also aware of Yoder's hurtful sexual conduct with numerous women. The final two chapters of the book deal specifically with that painful dimension of Yoder's story, which reminds us that Yoder was a fallible human being, even as this book acknowledges our great appreciation for his theological influence on our thinking, an influence already significant before we learned of his hurtful conduct.

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I have done significant editing and shaping of each essay in this volume. Although multiple authors were involved, my goal was to edit all contributions into a parallel format and to shape them into a developing argument that would build throughout the book. The intent was to produce a book that was not just another collection of essays on John Howard Yoder but would be a unified and integrated book that was more than the sum of its parts. Readers will judge the success of this endeavor.

Given the way that this book was put together, I owe a great deal to the other authors who participated in this project. Thank you Ted Grimsrud, Gerald Mast, Glen Stassen, Zachary Walton, and Earl Zimmerman for our many email exchanges and for allowing me the privilege of editing and massaging your materials so that they contributed to a developing picture of John Howard Yoder's theological outlook. I am also grateful to Earl and Gerald for their wise council when I solicited advice during the conceptual stage of the project. I was well aware of Earl's book *Practicing the Politics of Jesus*, and he was interim pastor at my congregation of Madison Mennonite Church when I first raised the idea for this book over one of our frequent lunches. Gerald has been my frequent collaborator on many projects during our years as colleagues at Bluffton University and continuing unabated since my retirement from teaching. I am grateful to others who read parts of the manuscript and/or offered comments and encouragement—to Ron Adams for his helpful and supportive comments as well as his editing of the Introduction and chapter 1, to Fulco van Hulst for his continued interest and encouragement in my work on John Howard Yoder, to David W. Shenk for his insightful comments and contribution to chapter 10. I have had conversations too numerous to mention with people who asked what I was working on. When I have described the perspective that drives this book to colleagues, I was often greeted with responses of "it's about time," and "that's what I always thought." In other words, my interpretation of Yoder's theology vouchsafed their own reading of his work, and they are eager to see this book in print. I cannot adequately express my gratitude for the affirmation that comes from such conversations, as well as from other pieces of very useful advice that I have received. But theology is always in process. Thus I am grateful to Lisa Schirch for the Afterword, which introduces the next stage of developing peace theology in the wake of John Howard Yoder. As always I am eternally grateful to my wife Mary, who put up with a lot to allow me to focus on this manuscript.

Those who have written for this book have been or are professors, and some have pastoral experience as well. Through the years, our students and parishioners have often expressed thanks for being introduced to the work of John Howard Yoder. The book is dedicated to these students and to all others who, in spite of his acknowledged failures, have in many ways been profoundly shaped and reoriented by John Howard Yoder's radical, Jesus-centered theology and social ethics. May their numbers increase. May this legacy continue.

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