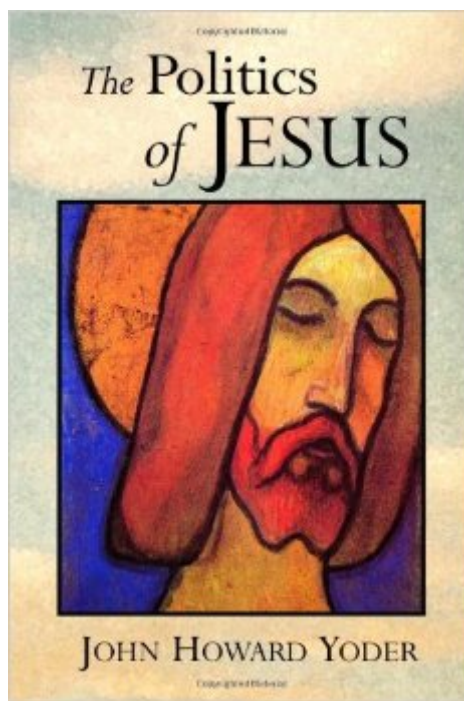


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# The Politics Of Jesus



## Synopsis

Tradition has painted a portrait of a Savior aloof from governmental concerns and whose teachings point to an apolitical life for his disciples. How, then, are we to respond today to a world so thoroughly entrenched in national and international affairs? But such a picture of Jesus is far from accurate, argues John Howard Yoder. Using the texts of the New Testament, Yoder critically examines the traditional portrait of Jesus as an apolitical figure and attempts to clarify the true impact of Jesus' life, work, and teachings on his disciples' social behavior. The book first surveys the multiple ways the image of an apolitical Jesus has been propagated, then canvasses the Gospel narrative to reveal how Jesus is rightly portrayed as a thinker and leader immediately concerned with the agenda of politics and the related issues of power, status, and right relations. Selected passages from the epistles corroborate a Savior deeply concerned with social, political, and moral issues. In this thorough revision of his acclaimed 1972 text, Yoder provides updated interaction with publications touching on this subject. Following most of the chapters are new "epilogues" that summarize research conducted during the last two decades -- research that continues to support the insights set forth in Yoder's original work. Currently a standard in many college and seminary ethics courses, *The Politics of Jesus* is also an excellent resource for the general reader desiring to understand Christ's response to the world of politics and his will for those who would follow him.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If I had only one work of twentieth-century theology to read, this would be it (with apologies to

everyone from Barth to Brueggemann to Bonhoeffer). In the aftermath of September 11, pacifism has been reviled in the public secular discourse like never before. Most Christian leaders from across the theological spectrum have endorsed one form or another of the "Just War Theory" of Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin. No one makes the case for the radical, total non-violence of the Christian message better than John Howard Yoder. Though he wrote many books after this one, this is by far the best place to start. Yoder's familiarity with Scripture is magisterial, and the gentle yet firm way he responds to his Catholic and Reformed critics is convincing and exciting. Most timely of all, he devotes an entire chapter to deconstructing traditional Christian interpretations of Romans 13:1-7, the passages most often cited by just war theorists to defend the use of violence by the state. Anyone who believes it is possible for a Christian to bear arms and follow Christ must respond to Yoder's analysis. Though Yoder was a Mennonite (and though I am an Episcopalian by affiliation, I am an anabaptist in my heart), his work is catholic, orthodox, and accessible to all Christians. Yoder's death in 1997 marked the passing of the man whom I believe may well be regarded as the most important theologian of our time. As even good Christians "rally round the flag" and join in the cries for "just war" and "retributive justice", Yoder's work has never been more important as a vital theological corrective.

In an age where the Western Christian church is struggling for a relevant witness to our rapidly changing culture, John Howard Yoder makes a solid and challenging claim that Jesus is not only relevant, but normative for social Christian ethics. Yoder convincingly illustrates that Jesus was in fact confrontive socially and politically to the powers that be in that age. Throughout the text he demonstrates that the Gospel of Luke bears witness not to just a divine Jesus, who redeemed humanity, but also a human Jesus who incarnated the nature of God through the way of the cross. By focusing his study on the cross of Christ, he develops a challenging ethic that exemplifies the love of neighbor and witness that the faithful church and disciple is called to be. I recommend this text to anyone interested in a new, fresh and challenging look to the Jesus as known in 1st century Jewish culture. This book is a must read that should be on the shelf of anyone interested in honest, Christian scholarship.

I am borrowing a term from my youth and the Viet Nam conflict when people were labeled Hawks or Doves by their reaction to war. Yoder makes a case that Jesus was VERY political. He was not uninterested in world events around him. He was involved, but not in the way that much of the religious right is today. More likely, he made the footsteps that Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and

Mother Theresa later walked in. This is a book on politics, power, and pacifism. At least that is the way that Yoder sees it. Many Christians do not agree with Yoder, but he is not easily dismissed. This book is well written and each chapter of this revised edition contains an epilogue that helps to update it with new information since the days of the first edition.

The Politics of Jesus is John Howard Yoder's treatise on Jesus' political inclinations, based on and in response to twentieth century biblical scholarship. Yoder was a Mennonite biblical scholar, theologian, and professor of theology. The 1994 version of this book is a revision and expansion of his original version, published in 1972. Yoder points out early that this book is an ethical methodology, not an exegesis. Indeed, he spends the majority of the work building on and responding to the thought of innumerable other twentieth century scholars. His primary target is twentieth century Christian systematic theology that argues for various reasons that Jesus is not a valid source of personal ethics. Yoder does a thorough job of demonstrating that Jesus was indeed politically-minded, and one of the consequences of this is the discovery that Jesus has intended us to follow his pacifist lifestyle. Contrary to what at least one reviewer has complained, Yoder does address the Old Testament as it relates to a modern Christian pacifism, albeit briefly. Yoder's treatment of Romans 13, however, is thorough. Most of the criticism of this book seems to be from people who are inherently opposed to Christian pacifism as many arguments are from that ground rather than on anything Yoder has done incorrectly. That is, people tend to reject his arguments based on their personal beliefs and traditions. Many arguments say "Yoder didn't address such and such"; but a book can only be so long. The book does contain a lot of the vocabulary and jargon of Christian scholarship, and people unfamiliar with such may have a little trouble with it. The Politics of Jesus is the finest book on Christianity I have read in a long time. Yoder does an excellent job highlighting parallels and themes running through Jesus' life, and of making the case for Christian pacifism. I recommend this book to everyone. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**

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