

Anabaptism 101: The Politics of Jesus

“Jesus was not just a moralist whose teachings had some political implications; he was not primarily a teacher of spirituality whose public ministry unfortunately was seen in a political light; he was not just a sacrificial lamb preparing for his immolation, or a God-Man whose divine status calls us to disregard his humanity. Jesus was, in his divinely mandated prophethood, priesthood, and kingship, the bearer of a new possibility of human, social, and therefore political relationships. His baptism is the inauguration and his cross is the culmination of that new regime in which his disciples are called to share.”

John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (p.52).

The Gospel & Empire

Imperial/political language applied to Jesus:

- gospel (euangellion) “good news”
- savior (soter) “salvation”
- faith (pistis/fides) “faith” in Caesar/Christ
- as “lord” (kurios)
- to be honored & celebrated in the assemblies (ekklesias) “churches”
- as good citizens of the empire/heaven (Phil 3:20)
- we await his coming (parousia) “return” victorious

Richard Horsley, *Jesus & Empire* (pgs.133-134).

Upside-Down Kingdom

- **Matthew 4:1-11**

What kind of Messiah/King will Jesus be?

What kind of Kingdom will he establish?

- The temptations define Christ & his Kingdom:
political (mountain); religious (temple);
economic (bread)

- **John 18:28-37**

“My kingdom is *not* of this world.”

The Two Kingdoms

- **Kingdoms of the World**

Ruler: Satan is “ruler (*arche*) of this world” (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11); “god of this age” and “prince of the power of the air” (2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2) -- “deceives the nations” (Rev 13:14).

Methods: exercises *power-over* people (law), wields “the power of the sword” (war & violence), operates by intimidation and force, seeks to control behavior.

Purpose: originated because of sin and rebellion; in spite of its corruption, God uses it to keep law and order in a fallen world where sin reigns in human beings (Rom 13:1-5).

“God is not said to *create* or ... *ordain* the powers that be, but only to **order** them, to put them in order, sovereignly to tell them where they belong, what is their place. It is not as if there was a time when there was no government and then God made government through a creative intervention; there has been hierarchy and authority and power since human society existed. Its exercise has involved domination, disrespect for human dignity, and real or potential violence ever since sin existed. Nor is it that by ordering this realm God specifically, morally approves of what a government does. The sergeant does not produce the soldiers he drills; the librarian does not create nor approve of the book she or he catalogs and shelves. Likewise God does not take the responsibility for the existence of the rebellious “powers that be” or for their shape or identity; they already are. What the text says is that **God orders them**, brings them into line, providentially and permissively lines them up with divine purpose.”

John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (pgs 201-202).

The Two Kingdoms, cont.

- **Kingdom of God**

Ruler: Jesus Christ is “king” of kings (1 Tim 6:15; Rev 19:16) and “lord” of all (Acts 10:36); maker of heaven and earth (Col 1:16); “judge” over all creation (Rom 2:16; 2 Tim 4:1); he is the embodiment of the Kingdom of God.

Methods: exercises *power-under* people (love), wields the sword of the Spirit, operates in gentleness and grace, seeks to transform hearts by the Spirit; always looks like Jesus.

Purpose: that God would reign and rule the cosmos through Jesus, his Son, the exact representation of his being; he invites all of creation to share in the mysterious Kingdom that is already/but not yet (Matt 4:17; 6:10; 12:28; 1 Cor 15:24).

“The crucial distinction between the two kingdoms is how they provide antithetical answers to the questions of what power one should trust to change ourselves and others: Do you trust “power over” or “power under”? Do you trust the power of the sword, the power of external force, or do you trust the influential but noncoercive power of Calvary-like love?”

Greg Boyd, ***The Myth of a Christian Nation*** (p.33)

Jesus on Non-Resistance

““You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth. But I tell you, **do not resist** an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.”

Matthew 5:38-39 NIV

do not resist—retaliate, physical (violent) force, evil for evil, “tit-for-tat”, etc.

Apostles on War & Violence

“He (Jesus) did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly.”

Peter, 1 Peter 2:23 NLT

“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.”

Paul, 2 Cor 10:3-4 NIV

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Paul, Eph 6:12 NIV

“Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.”

Paul, Rom 12:18-19 NIV

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay our lives for our brothers.”

John, 1 John 3:16 NIV

Church Fathers on War & Violence

“We who formerly murdered one another now refrain from making war even upon our enemies.” Justin Martyr, 160 AD.

“It is not in war, but in peace, that we are trained.” Clement, 195 AD.

“Our religion commands us to love even our enemies, and to pray for those who persecute us.” Tertullian, 212 AD.

“We have cut down our hostile, insolent, and wearisome swords into plowshares... For we no longer take up “sword against nation,” nor do we “learn war any more”... we have become children of peace for the sake of Jesus, who is our Leader.” Origen, 248 AD.

“Christians do not attack their assailants in return, for it is not lawful for the innocent to kill even the guilty.” Cyprian, 250 AD.

Anabaptists on War & Violence

“True Christian believers are sheep among wolves, sheep for the slaughter... Neither do they use worldly sword or war, since all killing has ceased with them.” Conrad Grebel, 1524

“No sword nor worldly force was used by the first Christians until the days of the emperor Constantine. Christians did not believe in using the sword and Christ had not given permission to anything more than the sword of the Word.” Augsburg booklet, 1530

“True Christians do not know vengeance. They are children of peace. Their hearts overflow with peace, their mouths speak peace, and they walk in the way of peace.” Menno Simons, 1552

“A lamb does not bite a wolf.” Adrian Henckel (c. 1530)

“Our wagon fortress is Christ, our weapon of defense is patience. Our sword is the Word of God and our victory is free, firm and undisguised faith in Christ Jesus. Iron, metal, spears and swords we leave to those who (alas) consider men's and pig's blood of about the same worth!” Menno Simons, 1539.

Jesus Casts Out Empire

- **Luke 8:26-39**

- Why Legion?
- Why pigs?
- Why the sea?
- Why were people *really* frightened?

“Come out of her, my people...” Revelation 18:2-5

“But if drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.” Jesus, Matt 12:28

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