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Killing Enmity: Violence and the New Testament. By Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011, xii + 178 pp., \$22.99 paper.

In *Killing Enmity*, Thomas Yoder Neufeld, a NT professor at Conrad Grebel University College at the University of Waterloo, has provided a series of “studies of specific topics and texts” related to the theme of violence in the NT (p. 15). The book’s title is drawn from Eph 2:16, which speaks of the reconciliation God has effected through Christ on the cross, thus “killing enmity.” The phrase aptly summarizes the quandary proponents of non-violence face in reading the NT: even in those passages that seem most amenable to a non-violent reading, one cannot escape the language of violence—even “enmity” is “killed.” This raises difficult questions that haunt the pages of this book: To what extent does “non-violence” actually represent the outlook of Jesus and the apostles? And even if “non-violence” is a suitable description of a central concern of the NT, does the language and imagery used to describe this emphasis actually undermine non-violence, or even unintentionally condone violence?

An opening chapter first defines “violence,” noting both narrower (i.e. physical violence) and wider (e.g. social domination) definitions in the relevant literature. Yoder Neufeld concludes that “the meaning of ‘violence’ is not possible to delineate carefully” (p. 8), so we must remain open to both narrower and wider notions of violence in engaging the NT. The chapter then offers a survey of general issues related to reading the NT with an eye to violence. One theme emerges from this

chapter that is repeated throughout the book: the extent to which one sees the NT as condoning violence or condemning it is determined in large part by the reader's own historical, cultural, and social location.

In the remaining chapters, Yoder Neufeld turns to some "representative" NT texts that especially reflect the quandary and questions noted above. The first of these chapters concentrates on the traditional "peace teachings" of Jesus in the Sermons on the Mount (Matt 5) and on the Plain (Luke 6), especially focused on his commands to "turn the other cheek" and to "love your enemies." Yoder Neufeld concludes that Jesus calls his disciples not to passive submission but to creative non-violence, even active love, subverting violence through confident vulnerability and always leaving open the door to reconciliation with one's enemy.

The next chapter examines Jesus' teaching on forgiveness through the lens of the parable of the unforgiving slave within its context in Matthew 18. This parable is a particularly difficult example of the quandary noted above, in that the king exhibits both violent severity and merciful magnanimity in extremes. In the end Yoder Neufeld determines that the parable does not set out either a "theory of judgement" or a "theory of forgiveness" (p. 54), but it highlights the biblical reality of both divine judgment and divine forgiveness even as it mandates that Jesus' followers exercise "measureless forgiveness" while leaving judgment in the hands of God (p. 56).

Next, Yoder Neufeld turns to Jesus' "cleansing" of the temple, the most problematic episode from Jesus' life for proponents of non-violence. After surveying the Gospel accounts of this episode and determining exactly what these accounts claim Jesus did and did not do, Yoder Neufeld walks through some of the major proposals for the meaning of this symbolic "prophetic demonstration" (p. 62) and its relation to the question of violence. He concludes that, while Jesus' action is a unique

prophetic act and thus is not to be considered normative, following Jesus will mean “confrontation with the structures of power” (p. 71) in the same spirit of creative and confident vulnerability that Jesus advocates in the Sermon on the Mount.

A chapter on the atonement follows in which Yoder Neufeld surveys both the major historic atonement theories and the NT witness to the saving significance of Jesus’ death. He determines that:

the New Testament does not contain *a* theory of atonement, let alone theories of atonement. We find, rather, metaphors and scriptural connections and allusions that point, *after the fact*, to how it could possibly be that the scene of humanity’s worst crime could also be the moment of God’s reconciling embrace of precisely that hostile humanity. The various metaphors are a way of naming the surprise of grace. (p. 85)

In exploring the question of violence and the atonement, Yoder Neufeld proposes that better than asking the abstract question “What *does* it take?”—how much violence does it or does it not take to effect atonement—is asking the question “What *did* it take?” (p. 91). In approaching the issue in this way, Yoder Neufeld suggests, we are left with a “surprise” and not a “necessity”: the surprise of grace that a crime of such violence should become the means of reconciliation, and not a detailed theory that establishes the necessity of violence in order to effect reconciliation.

The next chapter turns to the question of “subordination” and violence, examining both the NT household codes (especially 1 Peter 2–3, Colossians 3–4, and Ephesians 5–6) and Romans 13 related to the domestic and civic spheres respectively. For Yoder Neufeld, while the household codes reflect the patriarchal world of the first century, they each have features that would have encouraged the first readers to hear these codes “against the grain” of their world, and they offer no justification for readers today either to engage in domination or abuse or to stoically accept one’s oppression as part of the divinely willed order. As for Rom 13:1–7, in its context it is best seen as a “supportive illustration drawn from Jewish wisdom, intended to

reinforce Paul's teaching *against* participation in violence and *for* aggressive overcoming evil with good, with the 'weapons of light,' with the 'Lord Jesus Christ'" (p. 119).

"Divine warfare" is the final topic Yoder Neufeld investigates, looking especially to Revelation, 1 Thessalonians 5, and Ephesians 6. For the author, Revelation is intended to speak "the disturbing, angry but also intensely hopeful word of judgement and salvation, summoning the community of the Lamb's followers to defiant and vulnerable witness in imitation of and in participation with the Lamb" (p. 135). In both 1 Thessalonians and Ephesians, Paul uses the divine warrior imagery to call his readers to take up the divine task of overcoming the evil "powers" of this world—following Walter Wink and others, the oppressive religious, intellectual, moral, and political structures of our world, with their underlying spiritual dimensions—through active faith, hope, love, truth, justice, and peace.

A brief concluding chapter rounds out the book, followed by a useful bibliography of key resources related to the topic of violence in the NT, and indexes of biblical references, authors, and subjects.

Evangelicals will be pleased to know that Yoder Neufeld's work reflects a clear concern to be faithful to the biblical text as we have it, regardless of questions regarding authorship, editorial redaction, scribal interpolations, and so on. As he notes himself, he approaches the NT "as Scripture, and thus as revelatory and normative" (p. 14). Nevertheless, some may be put off by his frequent evasion of a simple answer to the question, "Does the New Testament condone violence?" with his repeated refrain that "[i]t depends on who is reading the text." However, this is unquestionably true: it is a fact of history that the NT has been used to condone violence in support of the status quo by those in power, just as it has been used to condemn the same violence

by those outside these circles of power. Indeed, one of the strengths of the book is Yoder Neufeld's recognition that the matter of "violence and the New Testament" is more complicated than anyone might wish.

There is a somewhat "unfinished" quality to several of the studies in the book, as if the author has left some of the most crucial questions open for further investigation. Yet this sense of incompleteness or lack of conclusiveness is not particularly troubling, at least for this reviewer, for Yoder Neufeld's exegetical studies and theological reflections are deep and rich as they stand, inviting the reader to engage his work with thought and care. The book is, in a way, like the beginning to a stimulating conversation. As such, *Killing Enmity* would make an excellent text for an upper-level undergraduate or graduate seminar—or just a terrific book to read in any setting for anyone willing to be prodded to hear afresh the NT call to peace and non-violence.

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