Yoder suggests that Christians, especially in the context of war, face a series of challenges. First, they often fail to speak prophetically and hold their political leaders accountable for decisions to wage war. Second, Christians too easily adopt a sense of nationalism that can obscure deep Christian convictions. Yoder calls for a shift in priorities, emphasizing peacemaking over war. He argues that Christian thinkers should join those who advocate for peaceful resolutions to conflict, recognizing that war is too often used to defend whatever nation happens to be waging it. This perspective resonates with just war theory, which places the burden of proof on those who seek to justify war, rather than seeing pacifists simply as enemies. Yoder's work is a reminder of the importance of ethical considerations when it comes to war and peace, and his insights are valuable for all who seek to navigate these complex issues.

The third section of Yoder's book, focusing on nonviolent direct action, draws attention to the need for careful thinking and greater effort on peacemaking initiatives. However, the author notes that this section is not strong in terms of concrete strategies of nonviolence. Stassen's work on Just Peacemaking offers a more concrete extension of Yoder's arguments, with a stronger focus on the specifics that ought to be discussed and evaluated.

I do have significant differences with Yoder, but space does not allow for a detailed defense of Just War doctrine here. I will simply mention a few points of contention. Yoder seeks to summarize Just War thinking fairly, but he does not engage significantly with particular advocates and arguments. Furthermore, while Yoder differentiates between Just War doctrine and other views on war, he tends to conflate all positions that allow for the use of lethal force, presenting all war as utilitarian and a Constantianian compromise with worldly authority. Just War doctrine can be defended against such charges. Just War thinking at its best is principled, driven by a mandate for justice against tyranny and oppression. It lays claim to one of Yoder's themes, that Jesus is Lord over all. Yoder argues that God can defend justice without our help, but what does that mean? It could be argued that God can feed the poor or defend the oppressed without our help, but God has chosen to use people, through appointed "offices," to serve His purposes. Similarly, Just War advocates argue that God defends justice through His appointment of human agents, and that may include the just use of force. Yoder and others rightly insist on reading Romans 13, with its description of government and its power to punish wrongdoing, in light of Romans 12, with its insistence on not repaying evil for evil but leaving vengeance to the Lord. However, government is often depicted merely as a secular power that makes use of ungodly means that cannot be affirmed by Christians. For Christians to advocate using the sword for a just cause is understood to be a Constantinian compromise. In response, Just War advocates agree that Romans 12 teaches that Christians are not to repay evil for evil but are to leave vengeance to God. But it is precisely in that context that Romans 13 teaches that in this age God has made provision to restrain evil in part by appointing government to avenge wrongdoers. To be sure, the power of the sword is easily abused, and it is right to challenge abuses, to seek to restrain the power of government and direct its efforts in the service of justice, and to remind magistrates that they do not possess power for their own interests, for they too will be judged for wrongdoing.

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Dan G. McCartney, professor of New Testament interpretation at Redeemer Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas, was previously professor of New
Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary for over 25 years. The thesis of this latest addition to the BECNT series is that the book of James is “about true faith as opposed to a false one” (2; cf. xi, 1, 56–57, 63, 267–71). Contra Peter H. Davids, the book’s controlling theme is not the problem of suffering (56–57). “James is interested primarily in practical Christianity. He assumes the content and saving power of the Christian gospel ... but his interest is on how that is worked out in life, and he denounces a kind of faith that does not act accordingly” (3).

James focuses on works, argues McCartney, because faith is so important. The most well known section of the letter, James 2:14–26 (esp. v. 24), superficially appears to contradict Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith alone in passages like Rom 3:28 (154–75; 272–79). But Paul and James use “justification” in different ways because they have “different concerns, different backgrounds, and different audiences with different problems” (154). Paul means “to declare righteous” in a forensic sense, and James refers “either to the eschatological confirmation of righteousness at the last judgment (as in Matt 12:37; Rom 2:13) or to the effectual proving of righteousness.” Douglas J. Moo argues that James means the former, while McCartney argues for the latter, though noting, “It also may be that James implicitly includes both meanings.” For James, to justify means to vindicate in the same way that Jesus uses the verb in Luke 7:35: “wisdom is justified by all her children” (276–77). Nevertheless, the main point of James 2:14–26 is clear: “that which distinguishes living faith from dead faith is works of faith” (172).

McCartney’s main conversation partners include commentators Joseph B. Mayor (1897 commentary), James Hardy Ropes (1916, ICC), Martin Dibelius (1975, Hermeneia), Peter H. Davids (1982, NICNT), Luke Timothy Johnson (1995, Anchor Bible), Richard Bauckham (1999), Douglas J. Moo (2000, Pillar NT Commentary), and Patrick J. Hartin (2003, Sacra Pagina). The format is like other BECNT volumes. James is not conducive to a linear outline, but since it has many logically organized units, the shaded-box-feature—my favorite distinctive of the BECNT series—at the beginning of each passage of Scripture could be extraordinarily useful. The shaded boxes in this volume, however, are disappointing because they do not trace the argument logically and grammatically with the care that other BECNT volumes do (e.g., Thomas R. Schreiner on Romans). McCartney concludes the book with four valuable excurses: “Faith as the Central Concern of James”; “Faith, Works, and Justification in James and Paul”; “James and Wisdom”; and “James and Suffering” (267–300).

McCartney evidences a firm handling of the text as well as the secondary literature, and he writes clearly and thoughtfully. His book joins Moo, Bauckham, George H. Guthrie (2006, revised EBC), and Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell (2008, ZECNT) as one of the volumes that preachers, teachers, and students will consult first and with most profit when studying the book of James.

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