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The Healer Messiah: Turning Enemies Into Trustworthy Opponents



Synopsis

From the Introduction-- This book is about how to live well with people who deny our core beliefs, or whose actions we consider immoral, or who have traumatized us. Such people may be our spouses or kin, or international enemies. Our societies are polarized in the United States around issues such as abortion, sexuality, race, red-blue, and Christianity-Islam. Our polarization is fed by media which play on our fears to gain our attention. Political leaders rouse their base instead of speaking effectively to people on the other side, indeed they are chosen for their ability to denigrate. We have a political dynamic that says "I win only if my opponents lose." This book is about how to depolarize but still get what we need. Without violence. Many of us have a deep faith that, when all is said and done, our deep needs for freedom and justice can only be won by violence—that the sole effective rejoinder to oppression is violence, that those who won't kill to defend their rights don't deserve them, and certainly won't obtain them. This book offers a new nonviolent weapon, and tries to sort out when one should run, when one should use violence, and when one should use the new weapon. This book presents a theology that doesn't talk about the hereafter. Rather, the issue is how to heal this world. The great religions have a common shortcoming. They've been around for millenia and have shaped whole civilizations, and yet violence still ravages this earth. Arguably, the spread of violence would be far worse without the great religions, and equally arguably, religion has been a root cause of much of the world's warfare. For me, a touchstone which validates or invalidates religious thought is whether or not it decreases oppression, rape and slaughter. To my secular, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, atheist and other non-Christian brothers and sisters: This book is written to Christians in Christian parlance. For me, the Bible is rich with language that speaks about what living is like, and that frames how I understand myself. Though this language is not yours, if you have the grace to look over my shoulder, I trust you'll find much of value. I speak to Christians, using biblical language, because that is what I am and know. I'm not competent to speak using the language, the framework of your traditions. I have standing to confront my own culture, not yours. I am looking for partners from other traditions to voice the message of this book in their language, to their culture. Those who argue that we should ditch God language because of its association with toxic concepts and abuses that can't be shaken from it, have a solid point. But I choose to study, develop and use God language because it is my mother tongue, and because of the richness and sophistication of the thought of previous generations that it taps into, and in particular because it enables me to identify a certain quality of character—God's spirit. Non-Christian friends, I think you may also value that

quality, described in the second chapter. Note well how I disparage propositional belief, in the sixth chapter. And don't miss the eighth chapter, where I both welcome and challenge you to join me in a place owned by none of us.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

John Fairfield is a Research Fellow at Eastern Mennonite University's Center for Interfaith Engagement. He's lived in Canada, Germany, Belgium, France, and the United States, and served under Mennonite Central Committee in Congo (Kinshasa) in the early 70's, and in Nepal in the late '90's. His Ph.D. in Computer Science is from Duke University, 1981. He was professor of Computer Science at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, teaching there for nearly twenty years. In 1992 he cofounded Rosetta Stone (rosettastone.com) with his brothers-in-law Allen and Eugene Stoltzfus, and was VP of Research and Development there until his retirement in 2006. His wife Kathryn is a retired attorney, mediator and trainer of mediators. They raised four sons in Bridgewater, Virginia, where they now enjoy ten grandchildren. They are members of Park View Mennonite Church. If you enjoy this book, consider visiting rruuaacchh.org to join the conversation.

This is a uniquely deep dive into the spiritual and social-psychological realm of rivalry between people with adamant mutually exclusive world views or religious convictions. We usually, under threat, move to fight or flight. But a third way, IGNITE, is possible. Fairfield shows how co-ignition is the way to live in peace tension with trustworthy opponents. Nothing I have seen comes so close to naming a feasible strategy for living with rivals in our divided societies.

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