



*Liberating the Politics of Jesus: Renewing Peace Theology Through the Wisdom of Women*

EDITED BY ELIZABETH SOTO ALBRECHT AND DARRYL W. STEPHENS  
New York: T&T Clark, 2020. 264 pp. \$27.86

How can peace theology move beyond Yoder? In doing so, theologians must risk either erasing the traumas he inflicted (by erasing his memory) or reaffirming his apparent indispensability (by returning to him again and again—even if critically). This new edited volume deftly weaves between these twin perils. It begins from wounds and moves toward healing by centering the agency of the wounded.

Most essays in the volume begin with some specific trauma. Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, former moderator of Mennonite Church USA and organizer of the volume, writes that the project began out of “the need to heal myself through writing” (xv). For many of the essays, this trauma becomes a key to new understanding. For Hilary Jerome Scarsella for example, reflection on contemporary sexual trauma reveals insights into elements of sexual violence in the crucifixion, compelling the conclusion that “when Christians worship the resurrected Jesus, they are worshipping a victim of sexual abuse” (157). In other essays, the traumas of abuse mingle with wounds in texts—Yoder’s texts in particular. Karen Suderman, for example, takes as her point of departure Yoder’s account of “revolutionary subordination” in the New Testament household codes. Through her experience as a missionary in South Africa, she reimagines acting with revolutionary agency in a subordinate position. In the process she offers a critical re-reading of the *haustafeln* as well as Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus*.

If each essay begins at the site of some wound, none end there. In “Jesus and the Story of Our Lives” Carol Penner uses a story of witnessing domestic abuse to diagnose the limits of war-focused and male-dominated peace theology. “No one had prepared me in any way to deal with violence in the living room” (34). She then turns to a case study in the development of women’s agency through an account of the *Mennonite Central Committee Women’s Concerns Report* from 1973–2004. Similarly, Erin Dufault-Hunter argues in “Never Merely Victims” that liberation and healing for victims of abuse includes their capacity to transcend the relation of domination that their abuser created. Even if it is glimpsed only fitfully before the eschaton, victims can “love enemies by perceiving them truthfully” (134). The ability to speak truthfully—rather than an obligation to forgive—is the telos of healing. The contributors to this volume place the agency of victims of sexism and sexual violence at the center of their moral analysis.

This account of the agency of the wounded reaches a peak in Sara Wenger Shenk's "Repairing the Moral Canopy after Institutional Betrayal." Wenger Shenk, the president of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, chronicles her experience leading that institution's process of accountability and lament concerning its past role in John Howard Yoder's abuse. She argues that the keys to their successful process were transparency about the record of abuse, victim leadership in the process, and meaningful steps to acknowledge institutional responsibility for harm. Her lucid reflections should guide anyone leading a process of institutional accountability. Set in the context of this volume, however, these reflections serve as a fitting performance of the book's theme. More than men, Mennonite women now gather and reassemble the broken shards Yoder left behind.

Though each essay in this collection has relevance beyond Anabaptist contexts, the volume as a whole speaks primarily to and from a history of Mennonite abuse. However, rather than limiting the relevance of this collection, this focus allows it to model collective responses to trauma. In addition to contributing to Anabaptist theology and pacifist feminist reflection more broadly, this volume is a compelling case study in tending the wounds left behind by abuse.

Nathan Hershberger  
Duke University