



Book Review

***Liberating the Politics of Jesus: Renewing Peace Theology Through the Wisdom of Women.* Elizabeth Soto Albrecht and Darryl W. Stephens (eds) T&T Clark (T&T Clark Studies in Anabaptist and Ethics), London and New York, 2020.**

For newcomers to the topic or those seeking a comprehensive theological response to the troubled legacy of Mennonite pacifist theologian and sexual abuser John Howard Yoder, *Liberating the Politics of Jesus* is an essential read.

The book begins by critically reinterpreting Yoder's influential work, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, 1972), framing it as a potential act of resistance and liberation (p. xiv). Following the fragmented responses to Yoder published in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* in 2015 (pp. 140, 170, 200), this book offers a more comprehensive response, significantly contributing to constructive peace theology and ethics. It integrates perspectives from women, non-White scholars, and survivors of sexual violence, offering practical insights into peacemaking while addressing critical issues like racism, sexism, and subordination.

The foundation for the text comes through a connection between Darryl W. Stephens, national leader of the United Methodist Church in America, and Mennonite feminist theologian Elizabeth Soto Albrecht. The two found a connection in their responses to sexual misconduct by ministerial leaders, and their shared concerns resulted in the creation of a compelling book which was the outcome of an ecumenical consultation involving Mennonite, Methodist, and Jesuit traditions. As the only male contributor and an outsider from the Methodist tradition, Stephens embraces the term 'midwife' to signify his commitment to liberating Jesus' radical political ethic (p. 13). By extension, this book, born of the pain of labour, represents a joyful and ecumenical collaborative effort to develop a peace theology that honours feminist, non-White, and survivor scholarship, infusing new energy into the renewal of a field often dominated by male voices.

The book draws on the wisdom of women from various Latin American traditions, including *mujerista* (Latina feminist perspectives), *la lucha* (the everyday struggle or fight), and *en conjunto* (working together, as a group, or as a whole). It brings together feminist scholars worldwide, whose diverse insights enrich its twelve chapters.

Nine of the twelve chapters directly or indirectly respond to Yoder, while three explore similar concerns in different contexts. For the general reader seeking a theological response to Yoder, Chapters Three and Four are particularly crucial. In Chapter Three, Soto Albrecht critiques Yoder's notion of 'politics of suffering' (p. 56). She challenges that, 'If we refuse to suffer, does that mean we are less of a Christian?' Reflecting on the Hebrew words *Mishpat* and *Tzadeqah*, she instead explores the relationship between suffering and the practice of justice, using 'Just Praxis' to explore the relationship between suffering and the practice of justice. Ultimately, the argument is made that the Politics of Jesus must be lived out in concrete, justice-oriented actions rather than remaining abstract (pp. 62-66). In Chapter Four, Karen Sunderman critiques Yoder's notion of 'revolutionary subordination' (p. 71). She argues that the idea of voluntary servanthood under domination is problematic, instead reframing the concept as 'revolutionary in-subordination' (p. 73). In doing so, she urges a reimagined role for the faith - that we are to be revolutionary in our subordination, thus coining a critical expression that acknowledges the power structures and orders that define society (p. 74). These sections are essential for readers interested in examining Yoder's theological interpretation of where peace has stopped on the Suffering Cross for an extended period.

The book encourages contextual theological reflection, and Chapters One, Four, Five, and Six offer audiences interested in particular non-White peace theological reflections. The book also includes the voices of victims.

Chapters Eight and Nine feature their bold testimonies and surviving stories. Those accountable for sexual violence victims should not overlook Chapters Nine and Ten, which provide theological reflections and practical actions to navigate the challenges of believing victims of abuse within ministry and institutions.

Chapter Ten is compelling as Sara Wenger Shenk explores repairing the moral fabric after an institution has betrayed its community. Drawing from her experience as the former president of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), she explains how Jesus' teachings empowered the seminary to genuinely engage with victims of violence through deep listening, transparency, truth-telling, and openly confessing the institution's role in perpetuating harm. Shenk highlights that while victims can heal through their own emotional and spiritual efforts, it is crucial for perpetrators to undergo healing within a community that is both informed and supportive (p. 183). She also stresses that for communities to begin their healing process, they must acquire factual knowledge and honestly acknowledge past wrongs. The dual focus here on individual and communal healing is particularly captivating and is vital for restoring trust and integrity within an institution. This chapter effectively captures the crisis and credibility of institutions in the theology of peace during a critical time.

Liberating the Politics of Jesus critically addresses the fundamental theological errors that have left both victims and victimisers trapped in the cycles of unchecked violence and its bitter consequences. The heartbroken and grievous public apologies from various leaders underscore the urgent need to restore trust in the moral authority of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which has tragically failed in these instances (p. 179). The authors engage in critical discourse, acknowledging the potential of reinterpreting Yoder's work to heal the perpetrators, their protectors and the entire community implicated in conspiracy and complicity. This, for me, is the 'so what' of the book—an essential attempt to bridge a gap that cannot be ignored, making it significant to the pursuit of justice and peace.

Ministerial leaders and theologians grappling with sexism, racism, subordination, suffering, and peacemaking, especially those interested in the Yoder interpretation, will find this an engaging and transformative read. As Soto Albrecht emphasises, the journey out of oppression is transformative, reminding us that God does not desire suffering in our lives: '*Dios no desea sufrimiento para sus vidas*' (p. 66).

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