

the comfort and peace found in a holy life in Christ. Although I do not think Sider wishes to say a holy life is *only* difficult, his definition of holiness does not fully express other adequate conceptions of holiness. In opposition to Sider (and Yoder), it could be said that the unholy life is difficult while the holy life is, in a sense, easier. Such a conception is common in Proverbs, where it says, “The one whose walk is blameless is kept safe, but the one whose ways are perverse will fall into the pit” (Prov. 28:18). While Sider admits that his conception of holiness is debatable, a wider engagement with other perspectives might have strengthened his argument.

Sider’s work offers an important comparative study of Yoder’s ecclesiology that issues an important challenge. While the content of the book is accessible to the general educated reader, the in-depth study it provides would best commend itself to those who are passionate about Yoder’s theology or the theologies covered in this book.

*Ben White*, Master of Christian Studies student, Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia

Shelly Rambo. *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010.

In *Spirit and Trauma*, Shelly Rambo describes trauma as a place where “death haunts life and life bears death within it” (155). Trauma disrupts our sense of time, body, and word. Yet God’s Spirit is present as witness to both the pull of death and the movement of life in the space of suffering, and love remains with us in body, time, and word even in the unspeakable places of trauma and violence.

For Rambo, salvation is not a linear victorious jump over the abyss of death into life. She sees such a view as problematic from a trauma perspective because it bypasses, or “elides,” suffering, oppression, and violence. Instead, salvation as seen from the middle is found in the presence of love in the Spirit, who remains with us: “The middle story is not a story of rising out of

the depths, but a transformation of the depths themselves” (172).

In the first chapter, Rambo sets the stage in post-Katrina New Orleans. She highlights the term *witness* as resonating in both trauma and theological terms. After giving a brief introduction to trauma theory, she frames the concept of trauma as an experience of “uncontainable suffering” (35) beyond expression. She then outlines the language of death and life in theology. In the next two chapters, she enters into theological analysis. She first explores Hans Urs von Balthasar’s concept of Holy Saturday and restates his poetic description of a disciple at the foot of the cross, watching a “weary trickle of love making its way out of death” (60). She returns to this image frequently to talk about the movement of the Spirit in the space of trauma. The author then carefully examines the witness of Mary Magdalene and of the Beloved Disciple according to the Gospel of John. She questions the emphasis on the content of witnessing and focuses on the act of witnessing itself in a time of suffering.

Based on these two explorations, Rambo frames the Spirit of God as a “middle Spirit” that witnesses even in the abyss of death and hell. Echoing the temporal disruptions of trauma survivors, this middle Spirit moves in a nonlinear fashion through time and aligns with concepts of breath and love. Finally, Rambo ties her theological explorations to trauma and returns to stories from New Orleans. She contrasts prevalent narratives of redemption as victory with redemption as seen from the middle, which relates to “the capacity to witness to what exceeds death but cannot be clearly identified as life” (144).

The author’s interdisciplinary approach weaves together not only the language of trauma and theology but also threads in literature, sciences, political studies, sociology, and music. By integrating multiple narratives and disciplines, she adds to the complexity of theological discussions in light of trauma rather than seeking an overriding truth. She also resists dominant cultural patterns of Euro-American theology such as an emphasis on linearism and victory narratives, challenges the dichotomies that often appear in Euro-American thought patterns, and hints at more holistic ways of thinking.

Although her wide-ranging sources embrace views that are not part of mainstream discourse, Rambo draws mainly from the body of North

American and European literature. She uses examples of trauma in different cultural groups in New Orleans, but these descriptions are periphery; exploring more culturally diverse literature on theology and trauma would have strengthened the development of her theology.

Rambo's writing style tightly links her thoughts, and a beautiful unfolding of ideas flows through her analysis without surprises. She relies heavily, though, on several expressions whose meaning becomes clearer by the end but are not adequately defined with her nuances at the outset. The depth of content, combined with her academic style, make the book challenging to grasp fully on the first reading.

Nevertheless, *Spirit and Trauma* is a significant text for anyone working with trauma survivors, especially from a Christian perspective in a Euro-American context. Rambo articulately links Christian theology and trauma studies, providing a useful theological lens for responding to trauma. Her emphasis on remaining and witness in places of suffering is an encouragement for pastors, teachers, care-givers, peacebuilding practitioners, counselors, and others engaged in the "work of making love visible at the point where it is most invisible" (171).

Rambo's work also provides a nuanced theology for everyone seeking meaning in times of suffering who are uncomfortable with a redemptive narrative that "smoothes over" the inexpressible experiences between death and life.

*Cheryl Woelk*, Short Term Ministry Coordinator, Mennonite Church Canada, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan