

Joni Sancken. *All Our Grievs to Bear: Responding with Resilience After Collective Trauma*. Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2022. 212 pages. \$16.65.

Living in a post-COVID world, where people continue to grapple with shared traumatic experiences stemming from the coronavirus pandemic, racial injustices, climate change, and global conflicts (15), how can communities heal from the invisible wounds of such collective trauma? Joni Sancken, a professor of homiletics with a focus on theological and interdisciplinary approaches, offers her insights to this critical question in *All Our Grievs to Bear: Responding with Resilience After Collective Trauma*. Aiming to “help nurture hope and resilience in congregations and Christian groups” (16), Sancken provides a trauma-informed liturgical blueprint for churches confronting these crises. This book is designed for a broad audience, including clergy, pastoral counselors, laypersons involved in ministry or community leadership, and scholars at the intersection of theology and trauma study.

In chapter 1, Sancken sets the stage by exploring the multifaceted and lingering nature of the impact of collective trauma, detailing how it can unravel a group’s “self-understanding, relationships, worldview, and sense of future possibilities” (52). Building on this framework, Sancken centers her subsequent discussions around three pivotal church practices: lament, storytelling, and blessing—each chosen for its profound potential to facilitate communal healing.

Chapter 2 examines the practice of lament and posits it as “a deep prayer practice” rooted in the Bible and “a primal expression of human anguish and protest” (55, 58). Lament not only addresses spiritual needs but also promotes bodily and social healing by allowing communities to openly confront and mourn their losses (80-1), fostering reconnection to God and others (59, 61). Chapter 3 explores storytelling “as a means to process collective trauma” (107), with Sancken arguing that it can restore survivors’ agency by enabling them to *remember*, *retell*, and *reshare* their traumatic memories within the community’s ongoing narrative (109). This practice is deeply connected to the “identity, priorities, mission, and behaviors” of the church (141). The final chapter engages with the practice of blessings. Typically, as one of the last liturgies in a worship service (right before sending out the community), the practice of blessings manifests God’s love and goodness, acting as a spoken testimony to God’s presence in the world (143). Sancken overviews the practice from both biblical and theological perspectives and shows how giving blessings can comfort and support communities “in times of transition and struggle” (174), suggesting that it allows us to “experience God’s blessings hidden in the cross” (146).

Sancken’s interdisciplinary approach, which merges biblical and theological insights with collective trauma studies in worship settings, stands out as one of the book’s main strengths. Her ability to make complex concepts approachable through scholarly analysis and various lived examples is notably effective. Her nuanced understanding of how collective trauma disrupts community life is both academically rigorous and practically applicable. She provides practical suggestions for readers to employ different forms of lament, storytelling, and blessings in worship spaces. These suggestions are adaptable for both in-person and online worship and fellowship formats. By reflecting on the usage of these elements in liturgy, ministers could

formulate a trauma-informed worship service that effectively responds to the needs of the wounded community.

Although Sancken points out that this book is primarily designed to address community trauma within the Christian context, the practices of lament, storytelling, and blessings are powerful and resonate across various faith communities. As Sancken rightly points out the danger of using a single story by referencing Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's speech (117), the book could be further enhanced by expanding its scope to include diverse stories and practical examples beyond Eurocentric settings. This expansion would align with the global impact of COVID-19, emphasizing all humans are connected by this shared trauma. Such an approach would enrich the discussion with a spectrum of cultural insights and reinforce the universality of these healing practices in addressing trauma. Additionally, including a complete and coherent worship liturgy that integrates these three elements at the end of the book would make it even more substantial and practical for readers to implement.

In an era where trauma seems increasingly pervasive, *All Our Grievs to Bear* is a vital and timely resource for understanding and healing collective trauma through a spiritually enriching and church-grounded lens. Sancken offers not merely strategies for recovery but a vision for transformation, urging a move beyond mere survival to a revitalized communal life filled with hope. Although trauma can "[steal] love, physical well-being, hope, and the ability to express, process, or share about one's experience" (16), this book demonstrates how worship can transform stealing into sharing, and ultimately leading to an experience of God's unconditional love amid shared suffering. This work is recommended for anyone involved in guiding faith communities through times of disruption and suffering, and for those seeking to foster resilience and renewal in the aftermath of trauma.

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