This volume includes twenty-five essays (twelve on the Hebrew Bible and cognate writings and thirteen on New Testament writings) on the theme of shalom, written in honor of the life work of Perry B. Yoder and Willard M. Swartley, two biblical scholars who have a great impact on peace studies and activities within the North American Mennonite community. Perry Yoder, Professor Emeritus of Hebrew Bible at the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS, Elkhart, Indiana), developed a biblical theology focusing on shalom. William Swartley is Emeritus Professor of New Testament at AMBS, and the volume opens with an anecdote about him. He led the foundations for preconference conversations at the AAR/SBL Annual Meetings by handing out $20 bills to Mennonite scholars as a stipend for attending the preconference meeting. This ultimately resulted in the book series Studies in Peace and Scripture in which the current volume has been published. Yoder and Swartley contribute an essay to the book, and several scholars honor them by building explicitly on their work.

In the opening essay Perry Yoder argues that Mennonite scholarship on peace has switched from a canonical approach, which acknowledges that God is sometimes violent, to a biblical approach, which basically implies that we find in Jesus what God intended from the beginning. Ben C. Ollenburger’s contribution focuses on the God of peace,
whose peace is expressed in his activities as a “creative gift-giver” and opponent of the “power of nothing.” Andrea Dalton Saner analyzes the formula “God is a warrior” deriving from Exod 15:3, interacting with Millard Lind’s book Yahweh is a Warrior (1980) and arguing from a canonical perspective that this is not the primary understanding of God’s name in Exodus (as Exod 3:13–15 and 34:5–7 imply). Wilma Ann Bailey discusses various English translations of the Hebrew Bible (including Geneva Bible, KJV 1611, and JPS), which are sometimes more violent than the original text. Paul Keim’s essay deals with idolatry in the Bible, arguing that this concerns choosing the right allegiance and worshiping God faithfully. Safwat Marzouk writes about Ezekiel’s portrayal of Egypt as Israel’s negative double, pointing to the issue of boundary maintenance. Brad D. Schantz argues that the figures of Noah, Daniel, and Job in Ezek 14:12–23 experience divine deliverance but do not offer a prospect of intercession; restoration will only happen when God decides to initiate it. Douglas B. Miller focuses on the ambiguity in Eccl 3:1–8, arguing that humans can only partially understand the world as arranged by God and should stay away from materialism and individuality. Steven Schweitzer interprets 1 and 2 Chronicles as a writing that steers a course past traumas by employing images of shalom. Jackie Wyse-Rhodes discusses the topic of evil in the Book of Watchers and concludes that humans are assured of a happy future if they follow God’s ordained paths and live in line with the natural world. Dorothy M. Peters compares ambiguities in the Dead Sea Scrolls (which reflect yearnings for peace as well as for the participation in God’s vengeance) with sixteenth-century Anabaptist documents.

Willard Swartley’s discussion of definitions of peace in the New Testament is the first New Testament essay. He also expounds a theological-hermeneutical methodology involved in peace research based on the Bible. Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld argues that the New Testament promotes not only meekness and long-suffering but also a “super-righteousness” as reflected in God’s character and demonstrated by Jesus. Paul Yokota’s reading of the Matthean messianic passages implies that Jesus’s humility, compassion, and nonmilitary posture are presented from a messianic perspective. The contributions by David Rensberger and Mary H. Schertz deal with New Testament passages that contradict a “shalom-centered view of Jesus,” according to the opinion of several scholars. Rensberger argues that Jesus’s so-called cleansing of the temple is not a violent but a prophetic and symbolic action. Schertz deals with Jesus’s statement about buying a sword in Luke 22:35–38, which she reads in the context of 22:31–62, arguing that Jesus dies on the cross as God’s ultimate holy warrior, who is paradoxically not violent. Jo-Ann A. Brant argues that the early Christian belief in peace as forgiveness builds on Greek and Roman notions of friendship. Joshua Yoder reads Anabaptist-Mennonite interpretations of Acts as a source of inspiration for the establishment of proper relations between church and society. Gordon Zerbe analyzes whether the Pauline corpus is inherently
violent, taking Phil 3:2 as point of departure. He contends that Paul’s letters have a directionality for peace and justice. Reta Halteman Finger deals with 1 Corinthians, which promotes fictive kinship relations and calls for unity among the believers after they have realized a social reform. Christopher Marshall studies Eph 4:1–6 and argues that the practice of living within the unity of Christ’s body is a foretaste of universal salvation. Jacob W. Elias elaborates that 2 Thessalonians reflects a theology of peace in spite of its violent language. Michael J. Gorman counters the reading of Revelation as a violent writing and claims that it contributes to establishing the church as a community of shalom in anticipation of the new creation. Jesus Christ, the witnesses, and John all embody a “peaceful, missional, prophetic paradigm” (284). Nancy R. Heisey, finally, calls attention for the work of non-Western Mennonite scholars (in particular Crispin Muhenya Guwamba, Pascal Kulungu, and Yorifumi Yaguchi) who elevate the themes of peace, reconciliation, and love of enemies.

All these essays are relevant to the topic and fruitful to read. It is impossible to highlight all contributions here, so I select a few issues that I found particularly interesting or useful. The differentiation between positive and negative peace is an important insight that Laura Brenneman elaborates in the introduction (1–3; see also 103, 280). This distinction obviously builds on the work of Yoder and Swartley, the two dedicatees of this book. Negative peace is what most people have in mind: the absence of violence. Positive peace is “an environment where resources for health, personal and community development, and happiness are commonly available” (2). Swartley gives in his essay a short but very useful survey of definitions (concerning peace and violence) and methodological approaches, which engages with the work of many scholars and also pays attention to what he calls “contemporary cultural sensitivities” (141–54). He concludes that it is impossible “to hold that the NT promotes violence” if the right methodology is applied (151) and that it is problematic to “regard identity boundaries as ‘violence’” (153). Schweitzer deals with a prominent topic in this volume, shalom, also highlighted in the book’s title. He elaborates in a careful discussion how multifaceted this theme is in 1 and 2 Chronicles (103–13).

Going over this volume makes one wonder who its intended readers are and whether they go beyond the members of the North American Mennonite communities. Some of the essays reflect an internal dialogue among Mennonite scholars. At other occasions the question arises whether the argument will persuade readers who belong to other circles. The canonical reading of Exod 15:3 by Andrea Dalton Saner (above), for example, that the phrase “YHWH is a warrior” does not reflect the primary meaning of God’s name (44), may be true. But for some readers, at least, questions remain, because the phrase and the images connected with it trigger violent associations for them (see, e.g., the work of J. Howard Ellens in The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity,
and Islam, ed. J. Howard Ellens, condensed and updated version [Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007]). Whether Gordon Zerbe’s repeated qualification of the article by John Gager and E. Leigh Gibson about violence in Paul (in S. Matthews and E. L. Gibson, eds, Violence in the New Testament [New York: T & T Clark, 2005], 13–21) as “amateurish” (239–40) is justified or not, his criticism does not explain why Paul focused so much in his letters on crucifixion language, although he must have known that crucifixion was one of the most violent symbols in the ancient Mediterranean world. All in all this collection of essays must be welcomed as a fresh and most useful contribution to the study of peace and violence in the Bible, which honors the two dedicatees appropriately by its focus on “positive peace.”