

*Post-Traumatic Jesus: A Healing Gospel for the Wounded.* By David W. Peters, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2023, 151 pps.

How might we return to our holy texts after traumatic moments? Or, perhaps said differently: how might our traumatic experiences become a hermeneutical lens to re-imagine sacred texts—and the hope within? These are the questions that Episcopal Priest and former army chaplain, David W. Peters unpacks in his masterful *Post-Traumatic Jesus: A Healing Gospel for the Wounded*. As a spiritual care provider drawing from his personal experiences deployed to Iraq and his parish ministry, Peters knows the restorative potential of seeing “your traumatic experiences as having spiritual significance” (2).

In some ways, *Post-Traumatic Jesus* is a follow up to Peters’ 2016 *Post-Traumatic God: How the Church Cares for People Who Have Been to Hell and Back*. In that text, Peters exegetes scripture through the lens of moral injury, those decisions made that betray an individual’s personal understanding of right and wrong, and advocates for a God—and therefore church—who can bear the weight of this expectation. Paul Tillich is that text’s primary interlocutor, tracing how Tillich came home from war and the post-traumatic divine he needed.

*Post-Traumatic Jesus* is a more complete text. The text is an invitation to read the entire canon of scripture differently. Peters extends this invitation through his masterful weaving of the entire scripture narratives through the post-traumatic lens. Crucially, Peters elucidates that these sacred texts are the lens with which healing emerges. From offering empathy for the brutal Roman Soldiers (135-139) or a compassionate re-reading of Judas’ narrative (107-109), Peters suggests a normalization that can only come through understanding one’s own trauma. Peters writes, “As much as I think of myself as someone who has suffered, I also caused suffering—immense suffering—and I cannot lie about this” (137) and the realization and acceptance of his own trauma enables him to note, “I want to announce to a suffering world that there is a consolation in God when you suffer, that you are not alone on this planet, that you are not alone in your sufferings, that you are greatly loved—greatly loved” (138).

This text is not only about the traumatic experiences of combat; rather, Peters beautifully connects the feelings of betrayal (itself a key component of moral injury) to our collective experience of betrayal through the COVID-19 pandemic(s). Readers of this text, regardless of their ministry context can emphasize with Peters when he compares Jesus’ crucifixion with our own reckoning with deaths through the pandemic. Peters states, “his [Jesus’] lonely but public death also stands in solidarity with the victims of COVID-19 who say good-bye on FaceTime as a nurse holds the iPad with a trembling hand” (3). This was reality for healthcare workers. The isolating, grief-inducing, suffering-swelling pain of watching someone die and wondering if anyone notices. Peters pleads with the reader to recognize that Jesus is in solidarity with each person in that hospital room. That is profoundly normalizing.

I want to conclude this review how Peters concludes his text. Peters quotes the famous line from Mister Rogers that amid horrific events, “look for the helpers,” and that is precisely the role Peters occupies for his readers (142). Peters is the helper that assists me in coming to terms with my own grief. Peters’ pastoral identity enables readers to trust his guidance; follow his path; and trust in the God he trusts. This text is a must read for parish pastors, seminarians trying to “understand” trauma (and its care), chaplains making sense of suffering and death, and believers who are not sure they can trust Christianity anymore. This text is truly for everyone.

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