

David W. Peters. *Post-Traumatic Jesus: A Healing Gospel for the Wounded*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2023. 151 pages. \$19.00.

In *Post-Traumatic Jesus: A Healing Gospel for the Wounded*, David W. Peters—an Episcopal priest, former Army chaplain, and author of *Post-Traumatic God: How the Church Cares for People Who Have Been to Hell and Back*¹—offers a pastoral and theologically sensitive reading of the Gospels through a post-traumatic lens. The book is written for those whose lives bear wounds of violence, moral injury, or abandonment, as well as for the pastors, chaplains, and caregivers who companion them. This purpose is evident in the discussion guide, which advises that “individuals with PTSD, C-PTSD, or other extreme trauma experiences should study this book in a group with other traumatized people” (145), clarifying that trauma requires communities of shared understanding.

Across thirty concise chapters, Peters reframes familiar Gospel narratives by attending to fear, betrayal, hypervigilance, and embodied memory. Early in the book, he interprets the nativity not as a sentimental origin story but as a narrative unfolding under imperial pressure—Mary’s vulnerability, Joseph’s anxiety, and the Holy Family’s flight becoming markers of a world already shaped by violence. A later chapter reads the Beatitudes as “a trauma manifesto” (41), dignifying those whose lives have been unraveled by grief or oppression. These chapters establish the interpretive posture that governs the whole work: scripture becomes newly intelligible when approached from the underside of human experience. This reality resonates in communities where trauma is increasingly shared, whether through war, pandemic loss, or ordinary forms of human fracture.

Several chapters demonstrate Peters’s interdisciplinary method with particular clarity. In “Healing the Traumatized Daughter,” he weaves trauma theory, Roman political violence, and the Syrophoenician woman’s persistence to illuminate trauma-born agency. Jesus’s affirmation, “great is your faith” (Matt 15:28), becomes, for Peters, an invitation to recognize the fierce forms of trust that emerge in the aftermath of injury. In “Hypervigilance,” he distinguishes the vigilance Jesus commands (“keep awake”) from the debilitating hypervigilance associated with PTSD. Drawing on Elaine Hilberman’s clinical descriptions and his own pastoral encounters, Peters shows how numbing, avoidance, and exaggerated fear responses shape the disciples’ lives after the resurrection.

One of the book’s most theologically demanding chapters is “Post-Traumatic Judas.” Peters rejects reducing Judas’s betrayal to psychological dysfunction. “Judas is not ill,” he argues. “If he were, Jesus would have healed him” (108). The starkness of the claim underscores that not all trauma arises from misfortune; some wounds are inflicted through deliberate betrayal by those we trusted. However, Peters’s imagination remains pastoral: he envisions Christ descending into hell on Holy Saturday to seek his friend, illuminating the book’s central christological insight—that no depth of despair lies outside the reach of the crucified and risen Jesus.

The most arresting material appears in “Post-Traumatic Witness,” where Peters admits that he identifies not with the disciples but with the soldiers who crucified Jesus. By locating himself within the very structures of violence he once served rather than alongside the faithful followers of Christ, Peters models the moral clarity and vulnerability he hopes readers will cultivate. The soldiers’ confession at the cross becomes the paradigm of Christian witness: seeing

¹ David W. Peters, *Post-Traumatic God: How the Church Cares for People Who Have Been to Hell and Back* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2016).

truthfully what has been done and whom it has harmed. This recognition becomes the ground for forgiveness, community, and renewed life.

The book concludes with “Post-Traumatic Resurrection,” a chapter of considerable theological elegance. Peters describes the risen Christ as one who inhabits transformed life with wounds still visible—“his calling card is his wounds, his trauma” (144). Resurrection does not erase trauma; it reframes it within a horizon of presence, recognition, and hope. The risen Jesus meets his disciples gradually, gently, and bodily, offering safety in proportion to their capacity to receive it.

The seventeen discussion questions at the end of the book are among its strengths. Several draw from DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition) categories, inviting readers to name triggers, patterns of avoidance, or moral injury; others ask them to locate themselves within Gospel narratives. These questions confirm that the book is designed not merely for reflection but for guided communal healing.

Taken together with *Post-Traumatic God*, this volume reads as the second movement in an emerging theological project attentive to trauma across the life of the Triune God. While Peters does not announce a trilogy, his sustained focus on consolation and communal healing gestures toward a pneumatological horizon that invites further exploration.

Peters ultimately succeeds in offering a healing gospel for wounded readers. Though contemporary clinical language sometimes overshadows historical nuance, the book’s pastoral sensitivity, interdisciplinary imagination, and deep honesty make it a valuable resource for preachers, chaplains, and scholars interpreting the Gospels in a world where trauma shapes both personal and collective life.

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