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Mark G. Brett, *Political Trauma and Healing: Biblical Ethics for a Postcolonial World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), pp. viii + 248. $28.00/£18.99.

In a wide-ranging yet refreshingly particularistic study, Brett explores how exegesis of the Hebrew scriptures can contribute to postcolonial Christian theologies and practices of reconciliation in formerly colonial settler nations such as Australia, New Zealand, the USA and Canada. His goal is to show that because theology is inseparable from politics, it can be advanced in secular societies through public discourse, and specifically through 'a thickening of dialogue between religious and non-religious traditions' (p. 35), including First Nations traditions.

The book comprises three sections, of which the first seeks to establish the ethics of conversation in colonial settler societies, with a particular view to the church's involvement. He begins with a critique of Jürgen Habermas' notion of civic universality as the basis of ideal political community. Over against that conception, which favours general and abstract legal norms of justice, Brett finds greater promise for restorative justice in ecclesial forms of sociality, actual practices of building relationships that reflect the postcolonial church's 'thoroughly political' commitments (p. 32). He envisions more 'generous' societies, deliberately polycentric and polyphonic in their structure and interactions, where weaker groups share power and engage politically with stronger groups in 'kenotic communion' (p. 33).

In the second section, Brett turns to biblical exegesis, treating portions of the Priestly Tradition in Torah, the later chapters of Isaiah (40–66) and Job. One of the strengths of this study is that Brett sets aside the reductionistic and imprecise notion of an overarching metanarrative in the Bible, focusing instead on these several tradition complexes, with their internal conversations and interactions with other parts of scripture. He reconceives these complexes as distinctive social imaginaries, socially embodied and historically extended conversations that help communities to identify the common good. He reads them as paradigmatic minority voices in Israel's lengthy post-national period, new imaginaries that emerge in the wake of trauma. (That posited historical situation is of course most certain for Isaiah; Brett does not discuss the complicated debate about dating the Priestly Tradition, with its multiple compositional layers.) His focus is on how each complex develops a vision for Israel's religious life in the absence of political sovereignty, and particularly for relations with non-Israelites or other marginalised persons. In contrast to Deuteronomy and Ezra-Nehemiah, Brett argues, the imaginary represented in these three minority traditions 'pointed more towards the possibilities for reconciliation than towards confrontational postures or

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theocratic states' (p. 127). The inclusive priestly covenant 'with all flesh', divine and human speeches in Job that point to divine wisdom revealed in creation rather than in covenant, Isaiah's vision of foreigners and Israelites alike honouring YHWH's exclusive sovereignty – all these are indicators of 'a counter-imperial imaginary that contests the authority of all other empires' (p. 126).

In the final section, Brett works by analogy to connect historically grounded biblical exegesis with four public issues addressed by postcolonial theology: ecological degradation, economic disparity, migration and human rights, and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples displaced from both land and sovereignty. In the hands of a less skilled interpreter, such an argument would surely become diffuse. However, Brett holds the ground he has gained through exegesis and thus shows that a scripturally based Christian social vision can be distinguished from secular political theory, even as the two perspectives enter into conversation with one another and also with non-Christian religious understandings and social imaginaries. Although he wisely does not project the future in detail, Brett scores important points about the history of social thought, such as the secularisation of the concept of divine sovereignty in the modern West, and with that, forgetfulness about the constructed nature of the nation state. He notes also that the rich tradition of Christian commitment to human rights has recently become thinner, in part due to a weaker grasp of a biblical theology of creation.

I might argue with Mark Brett on small points, including his reading of my work on how biblical agrarianism may, by analogy, inform a contemporary social imaginary, especially with respect to food production. However, to pursue that would obscure the important point here, which concerns his own use of exegesis and analogy. In a closely argued, coherent work, Brett has shown how careful biblical interpretation, informed by modern historical and political analysis, is not just relevant but essential if the church is to make its own *particular* contribution to some of the most important conversations of our time. Although he presents the argument with clarity, this is not a fast read; the book requires patient attention, because exegesis itself requires patience from both author and reader. For that very reason, I recommend this book to a wide audience of those who teach and preach in the contemporary church.

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